CHAPTER - VIII

THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The purpose of this section is to codify the findings of the previous section and classify these under various heads, to the extent possible and explain the findings broadly. To this effect we have made a modest amount of progress; the findings have been divided under broad heads as follows:

1  FASHION REPRESSION

2  FASHION LABELLING

3  FASHION'S TRICKLE DOWN EFFECT IN DELHI METROPOLIS

4  THE NEO TRICKLE DOWN THEORY OF McCRAKEN

5  IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT OF GOFFMAN

6  FASHION AND SEXUALITY

7  FASHION ATTITUDES AND INDUSTRY

8  FASHION AND FEMINISM
1. FASHION REPRESSION

Fashion repression is the denial of the urge to dress fashionably when such an urge exists. It is related to the fundamentally social nature of the human being and urges to fashion or otherwise are rooted in codes of social behaviour. One may therefore say that there is an unconscious desire to be fashionably dressed, though the desire may vary among individuals. This definition has an obvious analogy with sexual repression. Doing fashion is therefore intimately related to the sense of self and social identity. It should be noted that while sexual habits are by their nature private, the fashion ritual is by nature public. To a sociologist or psychologist, that itself should be enough reason to study fashion as it may provide a valuable means of obtaining a psychological profile of the individual. Fashion repression has obvious relations to sexual expression as well; however our intention is not to suggest causes for the phenomenon but only to provide a workable definition of it.

We have evidence of fashion repression from various sources. About 60% girls of LSR either did not state how much they spent on their appearance or said they hardly spent any money on their appearance or they gave figures like Rs. 30-40 per month or in any event less than Rs. 100 per month. These figures cannot be even remotely correct because even basic cosmetics which the girls we interviewed clearly used, do not
fall within this budget. By saying things like ‘can’t say; ‘hardly’, ‘no idea’ etc if is as it they are trying to put a distance between themselves and fashion.

In response to the question as to how fashion affects them 71.8% girls in LSR and 53.7% in Gargi said that they are unaffected by fashion. However when the girls were asked about their ideal (Ref Table 8.1) dress, a large proportion (more than 40% in LSR) said they liked wearing blazers and trousers which we know are the most fashionable thing to be worn this season. An additional 20% said they liked wearing ultrahep clothes like hiphuggers, hipsters, minis etc. This illustrates the workings of fashion repression as a clear example. On the one hand, the girls deny any interest in fashion, on the other hand they idealize the most fashionable clothing.

Almost 50% of the girls in both the college did not say that they liked wearing fashionable clothes i.e. they disliked being described as fashionable. As we have already observed LSR girls are in fact extremely fashionable in their actual attire, moreover their consciousness to fashion is extremely acute. For Gargi girls, even though half of them say they do not want to wear fashionable clothes, when asked whether they want to be a fashionable person about three fourth said that they did. For both LSR and Gargi therefore, this is additional evidence of fashion repression.
Further, for those girls who are so fashion conscious and fashionable that their ideal dress is minis and hipsters which are so demanding on their figures, one would think that the most important aspect of their appearance is their figure. However, they cite hair, eyes, and other more conventional features as the most important aspects of their appearance, again showing fashion repression.

Another example of the kind of hypocrisy characteristic of the phenomenon of fashion repression is that the self-avowed unfashionable people feel extremely comfortable wearing clothes that emphasize the body. 59.1% girls of LSR said they did not have any ideal in fashion. 43.3% of girls in Gargi likewise claimed not to have any ideal in fashion. At the age of the respondents, the likelihood of having ideals is very high. Hence we can construe this as evasion and attribute it to fashion repression.

On being asked about the benefits of being a fashionable girl 53.5% girls of LSR said that being fashionable either does not help or helps in making people think that they cannot deceive you. Thus while being fashionable they do not openly acknowledge the pleasures of doing fashion but cite other reasons, (a form of fashion repression which we will henceforth call Fashion Evasion.)

Despite claiming that fashion does not affect them 43.7% girls of LSR and 22.4% of Gargi girls said that they do not mind exposing their
back. 30.3% did not mind exposing their arms and back and 28.9% did not mind showing them midriff. This clearly points to their being extremely fashionable.

Yet we have already seen in many ways now how the girls have avoided claims to being fashionable.

2. FASHION LABELLING

The term ‘fashion labeling’ is inspired by the labelling theory of Becker which conceptualizes the way society labels certain acts as deviant. According to Becker deviance is society specific and culture specific. We however are using this term to describe the various negative connotations of the epithet ‘fashion’ or ‘fashionable’.

In India fashion is labeled in two ways; firstly, the traditional Indian mindset views the bodies, gestures, clothes and adornments as representative of the moral values of the community. In this mindset, any deviance from the norm is seen as immoral on two intertwined counts, the first being the representation of body as immoral, the second as deviance from group behavior.

Secondly, the westernized or modernized Indian mindset with regard to fashion, is caught in the classical double bind of patriarchal culture. This demands on the one hand that women look presentable and
take care of their appearance and on the other hand condemns doing fashion as a trivial preoccupation of silly girls.

To escape the label of being fashionable almost half of the girls of both LSR and Gargi said that they preferred to be other than fashionable. Almost 60% of the girls in LSR and more than 40% of girls in Gargi did not reveal their ideals in fashion thus denying their identity as self consciously fashionable.

The denial of doing anything to enhance the appearance can also be construed as the fear of being labeled.

For Gargi girls, great importance is attached to looking ‘decent’. This is to avoid the label of liking ‘indecent’ images as are created by exposure of flesh and emphasizing of the figure. As we have already see the traditional Indian mindset view clothes as an expression of morality; in particular western clothes are associated with western morality which is seen as immoral.

3. FASHION'S TRICKLE DOWN EFFECT IN DELHI METROPOLIS

To see an old and venerable theory still providing explanation for observed phenomena, a hundred years after its propagation is truly remarkable especially so when its explanatory power is discovered in regions completely removed from those in which the theory was first
formulated. Yet this is precisely what Trickle down theory does in late twentieth century India.

In order see the theory at work we need to look no further than at two of South Delhi colleges. We have observed the phenomenon of the relatively more affluent section of girls in both LSR and Gargi Changing their mode of attire from Jeans to Trousers and Blazer in response to the less affluent section of girls having adopted Jeans. This has been substantiated in the case of especially LSR and even Gargi, as detailed findings have shown in chapters six and seven.

4. THE NEO-TRICKLE DOWN THEORY OF GRANT McCracken

Grant McCracken in his paper provided a modified version of the Trickle down theory to be called the Neo-Trickle down theory. This version of theory is more general in that it allows for the classes of Simmel's theory to be redefined by any proximate social groups, who may be defined in terms of gender, ethnic, class or other identities. The Neo-Trickle down theory, has been discussed at length in chapter three and we will discuss its application.

It is indeed surprising that the very same example cited by McCracken for America holds true in Delhi metropolis. Here too, unconsciously in a bid to empower themselves, a number of modern and westernized girls of LSR have adopted what John T. Molloy has described
in his 'Dress for Success' manual as the efficient business woman's code of dress, namely clothing which is much closer to men's wear at work. Girls in LSR are in fact citing their ideal dress as Blazer and Trouser which is typical men's wear. Hence we may see young girls in LSR adopting the dress of their super-ordinate social group namely young men.

A prediction of this theory is that we may expect to see young men adopting new fashions to distinguish themselves from their immediately subordinate groups, namely young women.

5. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT OF GOFFMAN

Erving Goffman's study of the presentation of self places a great deal of emphasis on how people in social situations seek to control the impression of others by seeking to manipulate their opinions. In this endeavours codes of dress, inter alia play a fundamental role. Thus, for instance Gargi girls project themselves as traditional Indianized, Fashionable, modern etc, and LSR girls project themselves as independent, intellectual, Feminist, Fashion able or hep etc. There are multiple personas one may adopt by choice of clothing.

In order to create an image of capability, LSR girls wear trousers; Gargi girls to create an image of modesty wear Salwaar Kameez. Girls in both colleges project an image of being their own version of fashionable and hep in order to negotiate their way around the metropolis to better
avoid being taken advantage of. Thus ideas about impression management lead people to adopt many types of fashions.

6. FASHION AS AN EXPRESSION OF SEXUALITY

As pointed out in Chapter 2 while describing the nature of fashion, fashion is, inter alia, the language of the body. We have also noted in Chapter 3 the 'Seduction Principle' of Laver as a tool for understanding fashion for women and the theory of 'shifting erogenous zones' by Flugel. All of these are useful in understanding fashion attitudes as a reflection of sexual attitudes. By and large, liberal fashion attitudes reflect liberal sexual attitudes and traditional fashion attitudes reflect sexual repression.

When asked about the element of sex in fashionable clothes today, it was indeed revealing to observe that a large proportion of girls in LSR openly acknowledge that clothes today are worn to attract attention. Which tentatively shows a relatively liberal attitude towards sexuality. On the other hand, a lot of girls in Gargi felt these was excessive exposure in fashionable clothes at present.

Considerably more revealing are attitude towards wearing clothes that emphasize the body. In LSR two thirds of the girls said they felt completely comfortable wearing such clothes while in Gargi more than 60% said they felt very uncomfortable or cheap wearing such clothes.
Another such instance is seen in 90.8% girls in LSR do not think it was wrong for a woman to flaunt her sexuality; only 9.2% felt that it was actually morally wrong to flaunt her sexuality. In stark contrast, 47.8% of Gargi girls said that it was morally wrong for a woman to flaunt her sexuality.

Deal with the acceptability and norms of exposure of the respondents. LSR girls are much more comfortable wearing clothes that are more revealing; a sizeable number of girls in LSR said they did not mind exposing their midriffs, legs, shoulders and backs as opposed to a much smaller number in Gargi.

When asked to describe the clothes and personality of a fashionable girl, LSR girls described a fashionable girls as wearing figure hugging, exposing clothes, sexy, revealing etc. On the other hand, Gargi girls described the clothes and personality of a fashionable girl as no exposing of the body, reviving Indian culture, decent, having self respect, maintaining dignity, clothes a little covered etc. In a combined way, this gives the differences in sexual mores as reflected in fashion attitudes as between LSR and Gargi.

7. FASHION ATTITUDES AND INDUSTRY

The fashion industry is a part of the fashion system and the fashion process, is a part of the regular seasonal flow of the fashion industry, as
already noted in Chapter 2. The fashion industry in India is trying to model itself on the fashion industry of the advanced capitalist system of the West. There are many players in the fashion industry but the most prominent are the designers, the models, the fashion photographers and the celebrity consumers of fashion. An excellent, graphic account of the industry is provided in Coleridge's (1987) book which is highly informative though not written by an academic. Like many other industries, outsiders know little about the industry. However, because of its high visibility, the large sums of money involved and the superrich celebrity consumers, attitudes towards the fashion industry, the actors in the industry and the images it creates are very varied and possibly reflect structural differences among the respondents. Hence we place below our findings on these attitudes.

7.1 FASHION SHOWS

By seeing the data it is evident that more than half the girls had never seen a fashion show. However, this did not prevent them from having and stating strong opinions about fashion shows. The largest proportion of girls from both LSR and Gargi thought shows were both good entertainment and informative regarding latest fashions; this group may be thought of as acceptors of fashion images created by the industry. The other consisting of a third of LSR girls rejected fashion shows as a waste of time and the clothes as unacceptable, included in this category are girls
with a traditional outlook for whom the exposure was excessive. It is suspected that a large part of the remainder are feminist.

In Gargi, two thirds of the girls were again acceptors of fashion. However, among those who reject fashion, a large number consisted of those who felt that the exposure of flesh was unacceptable, who belong to the traditional camp.

7.2 ACTRESSES AND FASHION MODELS

To understand the attitude towards the consumption of the images created by the fashion industry, we documented the reactions of the girls to images. It was observed that there was a big difference between the perception of LSR girls and Gargi girls. 64.8% of LSR had a moderate to favorable impression about actresses and models. The most revealing cultural attitude is that of Gargi girls, more than half of whom said that actresses and models misuse their bodies. This shows the attitude of Gargi girls towards women who they believe to be responsible for their own objectification. On the other hand, LSR girls view these women as being used by the industry i.e., LSR girls view actresses as simply doing a job for pay and therefore not responsible for the images that are projected by the industry. On the other hand Gargi girls have the 'she asked for it' attitude. This gives the impression that Gargi girls are not against the gender roles but are against the women performing the roles.
It is of equal interest to note the reactions to the question regarding the portrayal of women in the film and fashion industry. It is observed that Gargi girls, by and large, view the portrayal of women in the films favorably which portrayal they describe as glamourous, great and trend setting, despite viewing the actresses and models themselves negatively as noted above. LSR girls on the other hand viewed the portrayal as negative and the women as used and objectified by the industry.

8. FASHION ATTITUDES AND FEMINISM

In the history of fashion to date, women have been the primary consumers of fashion. For this reason alone, it is important the relations and interrelations between fashion and femininity.

The feminists view fashion as an important tool for the oppression of women. Fashion attitudes therefore become an important indicator of women's views on gender identity or more generally the way women perceive other women and themselves. Broadly speaking there are three types of attitudes which reflect three different roles for women; the traditional housewife, demure and dutiful, the modern yuppie, married, working, upwardly mobile professional trying to make the most of what ever opportunity comes her way. And finally, the liberated feminist, rewriting the script of femininity. These three gender stereotypes allow a
spectrum of possibilities in between a level of detail which is too vast to
document in the present study, but which we may briefly allude to.

The students were asked why fashion is visualized as a woman’s
question. A large number of students from LSR said that fashion has come
to be associated with women due to social conditioning of the patriarchal
culture in which gender is socially constructed. This shows that feminist
thought has diffused to quite an extent in LSR. However an almost equal
number were thoroughly conditioned in the patriarchal construction of
women and therefore felt that women were more beautiful or had more
time to pursue fashion.

In Gargi a smaller number of girls spoke about social conditioning
(21.6%) which shows that gender consciousness is much less developed
there relative to LSR. One half of the girls in Gargi believed that fashion
has come to be associated with women because women are more beautiful.
This shows that these girls have come to believe that the social construction
is natural. This is what Barthes describes as ‘seeing contingency as
eternity and historical construction of gender nature’ This is how Barthes
analyses the formation of myth.

A fifth of girls believed that fashion is important to women because
it better enabled them to attract men. It is important to understand that this
group is marginally better than the above mentioned group because it
indicates greater awareness of the reason for women's involvement in fashion. This view is likelier to be held by the modern, upwardly mobile woman because of its use in a patriarchal setting.

It was asked by the respondents whether they thought it was necessary to emphasize some part of the body for a fashion to become a hit today. Two thirds of the responding students of both colleges said that it is not necessary to emphasize any part of the body for fashions to take off as most women would feel much more comfortable in wearing clothes that did not define, emphasize or reveal. They were in favour of unisexual clothes for women as clothes like trousers, Shirts, Jeans, Jackets which are more comfortable for an active life.

This response strengthens Faludi’s study of women’s fashion in America in the Eighties which she documents in her famous work ‘Backlash’. Faludi’s stance is that the fashion system in general largely ignores the likes, dislikes and expectations of women from feminine clothing and focuses on the likes, dislikes and expectations of men. With most of the designers being men this is not even surprising. Therefore while women look for comfortable and less emphasizing clothes, what they get in the market is revealing the flesh, emphasizing the contours of breasts and hips and in general the clothes that turn a woman into a sex object.
This response enables us to understand that women in India too have a similar problem with the products of the fashion system as women have in other parts of the world. By this premise we can even say that women suffer a similar objectification and high handed ness from the fashion industry across the globe.

The girls were asked to respond to why do men dominate society to day yet women dominate society to day.

It is noteworthy to see that despite Gargi being regarded as a college of good standing for women in the capital, there is a massive amount of gender repression the students suffer in their life, this gender repression comes through in their lack of understanding of patriarchy as they reply that it is women's nature do fashion. This kind of an understanding of gender roles makes one see the kind of conditioning that goes on in the Indian Society.

A smaller section of Gargi girls felt that women dominate the society even through indirectly, this view was also held by an equal number of girls in LSR. We can say that these girls are a little more gender conscious as they regard women to be performing important roles and dominating the society even though indirectly.

The students were also asked to respond to what should a designer keep in mind while designing a dress for women. This was to illustrate the
kind of expectations girls had from Designers regarding clothes for women. It is to nobody’s surprise that wearability and comfort were most desired while vulgar cuts and emphasis on contours was asked to be down played.

This again brings us to the problem that the expectation of women consumers being for off from the products offered to them.

This reveals that there is an implicit patriarchal thinking that underlines the fashion system which is the determining factor in what the women should look like and thereby constructing and imposing the image of femininity far removed from the breathing, feeling, thinking, real women.