

Androgynous Fashion: A Study on its Growth, Acceptance, as an Agent of Change and an Effective Tool for the Cause of Gender Equality

Srijana Baruah*

Assistant Professor, Amity School of Fashion Technology, Amity University, Kolkata, India

Abstract: Since time immemorial, Fashion has reflected the cultures and practices of people residing around the globe at different periods. Thus, 'Fashion' when we speak in terms of garments has been a witness, path breaker, and agent of change. Fashion being a mode of self-expression reflects the changing views and mindsets of people of a particular society through their choices of garments and what they choose to do while living in a particular environment during a particular period and in a specific geographical location. The present paper aims to study the role of Fashion as an agent of change and its ability to contribute to the cause of Gender Equality. It further aims to study the scope and perception of Gender-Neutral clothing among various groups today. Primary and secondary methods of data collection have been used to write this paper.

Keywords: Androgynous fashion, Change, Fashion designers, Gender equality, Gender-Neutral, Gender fluid.

1. Introduction

Fashion may be defined in many ways. It is a broad concept and means different things to different people. When we say 'Fashion' we inevitably relate it to Clothing. However, 'Fashion' as we know is not connected to only clothing. Rather it is a complex process of self-expression as bodies move through space and time. It reflects changing mindsets, cultures, habits, and thought processes of people at a given time (Simmel, 2001). Fashion is an ongoing process and changes with each person's visual and material explanation of who she/he is becoming and how this connects with others' interpretations. It involves mixing, borrowing, belonging, and changing (Kaiser, Susan B., 2012).

Nothing reflects 'Culture' better than 'Fashion' and as such, it crosses all sorts of boundaries and remains in constant dialogue with other fields of study. In countries like India where most people are highly bound by traditions, Fashion plays an important role in speaking volumes about who they are. Women have been and continue to be ruled by dos and don'ts when it comes to the choice of apparel. More than being a personal choice, it becomes a matter of traditions, beliefs, culture, and marital status of a woman when it comes to 'Fashion'. For instance, the wearing of toe rings by married women in North India (Minturn, L. and Kapoor, S., 1993), and compulsory

wearing of traditional two-piece sarees (*Mekhela Chador*) to work in most colleges in Assam. In India, women are seen as preservers of traditions to a large extent, and as such most of these traditions are upheld by women while such traditions are almost nonexistent for their male counterparts.

Not only in India, when we look back in history, we find that in other countries as well where people have subjected themselves to many rules, regulations, and customs when it came to dressing up and fashioning their bodies during different periods. With the changing roles and status of women over time, their dresses also changed. For instance, the Victorian women who were mostly confined to the boundaries of their homes wore luxurious gowns, corsets (tight fitting bodices) and headdresses that restricted their movement considerably. However, when women started to step out of their homes to find work, their dresses also became simpler in tandem with their changing roles in society. Simpler silhouettes like culottes (divided skirt) were introduced that allowed greater freedom of movement to them. Most of the extravagances in dressing that was popular during the Victorian era were abandoned.

We strive for a world where men and women share equal opportunities and status and where there is no bias based on gender. There have been continuous efforts in this direction by many organizations and societies and maybe as a result of their efforts people across the globe are slowly waking up to the need for equal treatment for women. The United Nations had highlighted the importance of Gender Equality by adopting it as the theme for International Women's Day in 2016. The official United Nations theme for International Women's Day 2016 was "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality". The former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon has rightly stated that "Let us devote solid funding, courageous advocacy and unbending political will to achieve gender equality around the world. There is no greater investment to our common future."

The theme for International Women's Day, 8 March 2022 is "Gender Equality Today for a sustainable tomorrow", recognizing the contribution of women and girls around the world, who are leading the charge on climate change adaptation, mitigation, and response, to build a more sustainable future for all. (Burcu, Koleli 2022).

*Corresponding author: srijanabitaly@gmail.com

2. Contribution of Fashion Designers in promoting Androgyny through the Ages

During 1960's and 70's many designers came up with androgynous collections, however, the variations in cuts, silhouettes, proportions, styles, and color have always served as elements of distinction between men's and women's clothing. Fashion has always played an important role in highlighting gender roles and social beliefs.

Legendary fashion designers like Coco Chanel, in the 20th century, sought inspiration from Menswear to simplify Womens-wear and succeeded in removing many vagaries in women's fashion that existed during that period by introducing the jersey as an outerwear fabric for women and by adopting a distinctly androgynous silhouette in her collections known as 'Garconne' or boyish look (Paolis De, G 2021). In 2002, an exhibition was held in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London titled 'Men in Skirts' which stressed the topic of men wearing draped garments throughout fashion history and attempted to reinvent 'skirts for men. Androgyny has always been an interesting subject for designers to explore and it has attracted considerable attention of fashion designers around the world throughout history and it continues to inspire designers to create new and innovative methods to explore this subject.

Fashion designers like Paul Poiret, Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, and Yves Saint Laurent were some of the noteworthy designers who were responsible for bringing about major changes in Women's fashion that revolutionized the way women dressed forever. It would not be wrong to say that their designs were instrumental in liberating women from the rigid social roles that they played during these periods.

Paul Poiret:

Paul Poiret was one of the leading French fashion designers of his time (during the first two decades of the 20th century). His efforts were also instrumental in liberating women from the corseted figure. At a time when women's fashion was all about frills, corsets, embellishments, and embroideries, he infused simplicity and modernity into the fashion world. His first design was a red cloth cape (a shawl-like semi-circular or rectangular garment that is spread across the shoulders like a shawl and held in place under the chin with a clasp, brooch, or tiers). He designed simple, practical dresses which were hugely criticized by a section of the society who found the bold modernity of his designs too much to bear. Poiret presented the Confucius coat, a coat with an innovative kimono-like cut that was hugely frowned upon and criticized by the conservative clientele.

Poiret made his name with his controversial kimono coat and similar loose-fitting designs created for an un-corseted slim figure. He introduced the hobble skirt, harem pants, and lampshade tunic for women. He developed a dressmaking technique called draping. His work was inspired by antique and regional dresses, and he preferred garments cut along straight lines and constructed of rectangular motifs. The structural simplicity of his designs was a turning point in the emergence of modernism that changed the direction of costume history. He paved the way for experimentation and innovation in the field of fashion.

Coco Chanel:

If there was one fashion designer who stood for gender equality through her designs, it was Coco Chanel. Her personal style was also way different from the women of her time. She was responsible for liberating women from the clutches of the tight-fitted corsets (that hid the actual proportions of a woman) and introducing 'casual chic' as the feminine standards. She introduced bell-bottom pants, crewneck sweaters, and espadrille shoes—all traditionally worn by sailors and fishermen.

She introduced women to the concept of power dressing and style that was sophisticated and fuss-free. Gone were the days of fashion stereotypes where women were decked up in frills, fuss, and constraints. Her design aesthetic redefined the fashionable woman for the post-WWI era. The Chanel signature style was a look of liberated physicality, youthful ease, and unfettered sportive confidence. Her own interest in sports and outdoor activities was responsible for the creation of clothing lines that facilitated women to take part in such activities.

The Chanel Suit:

The Chanel tweed suit was made for functionality and comfort. It comprised of a jacket and skirt in mohair and light wool and a blouse and jacket lining in jersey or silk. She didn't use shoulder pads or stiffen the material as was the common practice in the contemporary fashion of that time.

Little black dress:

Little Black Dress is one of the greatest contributions of Chanel to the fashion world after the jersey suit. It is a fashion classic that women around the world vouch for even today.

In 1926, a photograph of Chanel's little black dress was published in the American edition of Vogue magazine which predicted that such a simple, yet chic design would become almost uniform for women of taste and compared its silhouette to the Ford Automobile. It was widely criticized by a section of male journalists who wrote: "no more bosom, no more stomach, no more rump... Feminine fashion of this moment in the 20th century will be baptized lop off everything." (Papalas, Marylaura 2016).

The Chanel bag:

Chanel came up with a handbag for women in 1929 which was inspired by soldiers. It had a shoulder strap that allowed the user to have her hands free.

Jersey Fabric:

Chanel made innovative use of the jersey fabric by creating garments that allowed women the freedom of movement that was the need of the hour at a time torn by war. Supply of fabric was short, and women were working as nurses, in factories, and civil service. The fluid jersey suits and dresses were apt for the needs of women who wanted simple and practical clothes for work as they had to ride trains, buses, and bicycles to get to work. They wanted outfits that offered durability and comfort, and this made Chanel's jersey suits and dresses even more popular among women.

Suntan:

Chanel made sunbathing fashionable by making suntans a symbol of luxury. Historically, it was identified as the mark of a laborer or hard life, and clear milky skin as a sign of

aristocracy. But Chanel was successful in changing that mindset and by the 1920's it became fashionable for women to have a suntan and women could be seen lounging on the beach without a hat to shield them from the sun.

Coco Chanel had made immense and unparalleled contributions to the field of fashion. Her designs and thought processes revolutionized the way what was considered fashionable and what was not. Her designs which were much ahead of her time changed the scenario of women's fashion for decades that followed.

Yves Saint Laurent:

Yves Saint Laurent was a French fashion designer and is one of the greatest names in fashion history. He was one of the most celebrated and influential designers of his time, he brought back sixties couture styles and made prêt à porter (ready to wear) reputable. A firm believer in the equality of both the sexes, he introduced tuxedo suits for women and non-white models. At the age of 21 he found himself as the head designer of the House of Dior where he created a softer version of Dior's New Look which later came to be known as the "trapeze dress" which gave him international stardom. In 1966, he took the world by storm with his 'Le Smoking' style, a tuxedo jacket for women that promoted the androgynous look and paved the way for pantsuits and power dressing. The firm popularized styles such as beatnik look safari jackets for women and men, fitted trousers, thigh-high boots, and his extremely popular tuxedo suit for women. His Mondrian collection gained widespread popularity in 1965. As put in an article titled 'All-TIME 100 Fashion Icons' that appeared in TIME Magazine (time.com), "Coco Chanel gave women the little black dress, and Yves Saint Laurent gave them the option of leaving it at home." (Sun, F 2012).



JILL SANDER SS15

THOM BROWNE SS15

ALEXANDER WANG SS15

Fashion Designers from time to time have tried to create androgynous looks. Of late this trend has been gaining widespread popularity. Designers like Jil Sander, Thom Browne and Alexander Wang have showcased variations of androgyny in their spring/ summer 2015 collections. The Year 2015 saw many collections from various designers whose collections were hugely influenced by the androgynous look.



Source: AP Photo/Antonio Calanni Models wear a creation for Gucci men's Fall-Winter 2015-2016 collection, part of the Milan Fashion Week, unveiled in Milan, Italy, Monday, Jan. 19, 2015



Pieces from Christoph Rumpf SS22 collection, Paris Fashion Week, Source: AP Photo/ Christoph Rumpf Vogue Scandinavia, 2021



Pieces from Balenciaga SS22 collection, Paris Fashion Week Source: Vogue Runway, Vogue Scandinavia 2021

Gucci's Fall-Winter 2015-16 Menswear Collection in January 2015 made a huge statement as the men who walked down the ramp looked like women and in fact, some of the models who walked down the runway were women, a trend increasingly adopted in Menswear shows. Models of both the sexes were wearing garments and accessories that traditionally appeared in womens-wear. Gucci's designer Alessandro Michele deliberately made outfits that included massive pussycat bow blouses, shrunken jackets, and low-slung, wide-leg trousers—on svelte models with matching delicate features and long, messy hair. Gucci's Fall/Winter Gucci's helped set the trend and more designers came up with collections

comprising Unisex clothing.

In pop culture, Gender-bending is not an unexplored genre. Pop and fashion icons like David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Marc Bolan, Prince, etc have played with looks that were influenced by women's fashion in the late 1960s but the theme has not been fully explored since then. However, contemporary designers like Rick Owens, J.W. Anderson, Jil Sanders, etc have helped to explore this theme of the gender-neutral dress. Online stores like www.androgynousfashion.com have come up that sell only unisex clothing. Celebrities like Ellen DeGeneres, Tilda Swinton, Kanye West, Jared Leto, etc. are seen sporting this look very frequently.

Tom Kalenderian, former executive vice president and general merchandise manager for men at Barneys New York pointed out, "Androgyny is certainly not a passing trend, but one that is going through another cycle with a new generation."

He referred to music subcultures of the past as well as present as a source of unisex movements but also to a few fashions of their times in their ideas and innovations.

From 2020 onwards, gender-fluid fashion has been doing the round in major fashion weeks like Paris Fashion Week, Milan Fashion Week, and London Fashion week. Power dressing for women like women dressing up in Power suits, Pants suits, etc. has been in vogue for quite some now. Gender-fluid fashion has brought many options for men to choose from and expanded the scope of menswear manifold. Fashion houses like Valentino, Maison Margiela, Lanvin, Balenciaga, Vivienne Westwood and designers like Paul Smith, Christoph Rumpf, Raf Simons and Amsterdam-based gender fluid brand Nina Mounah have shown their Androgenous s/s collections in Paris Fashion Week 2022(Puttonen, Mikko 2021).

3. Androgyny – The Indian Context

Androgynous clothing has captured the imagination of Indian Fashion designers as well. Many Indian designers have also explored this theme as unisex clothing is high on comfort and a refreshing change to the Indian fashion scene.

As Malini Banerji, former Fashion Editor of Elle India had put it "I look at androgyny as having no gender boundaries. Whatever the term being used, fashion is moving towards genderless clothes, and moving away from the norms of the past. I believe this trend is here to stay as it is all about having the freedom to express yourself".

If we take a closer look at the history of fashion we see that, it is not uncommon for men to wear androgynous clothing although unintentionally. Men in ancient civilizations of Rome and Greece wore knee-length tunics and draped garments. Wearing trousers were considered barbaric (Köhler, Carl 2012). The traditional costume for men in Scotland comprises a Skirt called Kilt, (Reid Stuart 2013). Men in Southeast Asian countries have been donning skirts since the 1800s. In Burma, "longyis" (stretches of cotton/silk fabric that men drape around their waist, in a skirt-like fashion) are worn by men (Andaya, Barbara Watson 1997).

In India, men have been wearing traditional dhotis and lungis as comfort drapes (Ranavaade, Vaibhavi P, and A. N. J. A. L. I. Karolia 2017). The dresses of Sufi saints and Mughal Anarkalis,

Churidars, and Angrakhas were also androgynous. In western cultures, wearing too many prints, embroidery, and colour is generally considered to be feminine whereas in India men have never been shy of wearing embroidery, prints or colours as it has always been a part of our costumes and culture (India NetZone E-Magazine 2016)

Indian women on the contrary have not had a lot of opportunities to wear Androgynous fashion or dress like their male counterparts. We still refer to *Salwar-Kameez* as suits and it is difficult to find a proper business suit for women in Indian markets. However, this trend is changing slowly but steadily owing to the work and efforts of designers like Suket Dhir who have created full-fledged Androgynous collections, the most prominent being '*He for She*' (Banerjee, R 2019). A few Indian male fashion bloggers and stylists have embraced saree and have successfully created appealing looks combining them with Bandgalas and jackets or simply wearing them as dhotis, the prominent of them being Delhi-based Himanshu Verma, also known as the sari man who has been trying to establish saree as a gender fluid garment for the past sixteen years. Content creators Siddharth Batra, Pushpak Sen, and Rohit Bose are a few of the bloggers who champion the cause of gender-fluid fashion in India and abroad (Mazumdar, S 2022)

Many Indian celebrities like Ranveer Singh, Jim Sarbh, etc have been able to make successful Androgynous clothing choices. Indian designers like Rohit Bal in the recent past have attempted to create androgynous looks by creating androgynous skirts for men. However, this look had a shock value as it was a very direct or rather a very strong take on androgyny and it received mixed responses from men. This look in India however is mostly worn by men mostly celebrities to make a statement. Indian actor and fashion icon Ranveer Singh was also spotted donning a Skirt for men at the premiere of his movie '*Bajirao Mastani*'.

In the words of fashion designer Raghavendra Rathore(Asian Age 2015),

"Ranveer was able to pull it off well because he was confident, and the garment has a shock value. It's more of an experimental thing and I have seen musicians adorning these skirts with jackets in the West. Here it's a new thing, Ranveer is making a historic film, it is necessary for him to catch people's attention, make a statement."

Former Head of Godrej India Culture Lab, Parmesh Shahani gives his view in this regard (Asian Age 2015),

"It's good, because I think for too long we've been conforming to Western ideas such as shirts and trousers. So it's good when someone like Ranveer can remind us so confidently about the possibility that Indian fashion has."

Namit Khanna, model and actor who has walked the ramp in a skirt for Rohit Bal at the India Bridal Fashion Week says, "*I would never wear it otherwise, having grown up in an environment and being shown that it's more of a feminine thing.*" (Sundar Nivetha 2015)

At the same time model Rouallah Gazi says "*Outfits are all about comfort and if you are comfortable, it doesn't matter whether it's a pair of jeans or a skirt. The more it trends, we will see more people wearing it.*"



Actor Ranveer Singh at the Premier of his movie, *BajiRao Mastani*
(Source: Internet)



Actor Jim Sarbh wears an attire designed by Suket Dhir
(Source: Mensxp magazine)



A piece from the 'He for She' collection by Suket Dhir,
(Source: Instagram)



Rohit Bal's look for Indian Bridal Fashion Week 2013, (Source: Internet)

4. Review of Literature

In a broader context, Fashion has always been the reflection of changing times and the change in tastes and preference of a particular group of people in a particular area during a period of

time. Simmel (2001) argues that fashion is the pursuit of change and peculiarity. More specifically, it involves the way in which we fashion our bodies, our choices of clothes, accessories, etc that ultimately define our look or what we represent knowingly or unknowingly and reveal about ourselves in the process and the society in which we operate perceive us. As such, the society that we operate in influences our choices and how we express ourselves to a large extent through fashion (Fontein,2019)

In societies that operate under strict gender constructs, like ours (India), we find ourselves adhering to such norms irrespective of whether we necessarily agree or disagree with them. Women more specifically find themselves bound by this socially accepted construct of gender rigid clothing, accessories and customs. For instance, married women in some parts of North India have to mandatorily wear toe rings and in no way are they supposed to remove them even it means not wearing closed shoes for the rest of their lives (Baruah.S,2016). Adherence to such social norms when it comes to dressing also creates a sense of gender inequality as people tend to become more conscious of their physicality while operating in a particular environment. This demarcation that begins from childhood during the growing stage of children creates a sense of division or consciousness about sexes in their minds and conditions them to believe and operate in gender-biased way which they are otherwise unaware and this starts creating gender inequality in the long run. This image of physicality and the social roles associated with each gender can be considerably blurred with the help of unisex clothing which would help in creating an image of equality among the sexes which is of utmost importance in the formative years of a child.

Lee M, (2020) studies the emerging trend and popularity of Gender Fluid Fashion among Generation X. Lee M argues that Generation X is more open, keen, and experimental when it comes to embracing gender fluid Fashion and experimentation owing to its extensive exposure to social media and that gender fluid fashion has seen exponential growth in the recent years. Lee M (2020) also observes the blurring of lines between gender-restricted fashions has opened the doors for more creativity and experimentation which has created exciting avenues for various brands. Lee studies Gender Fluid fashion from a consumer and commercial perspective and its acceptance and demand among the masses at large. The year 2018 saw New York Fashion Week adding unisex/non-binary as a new category (Lee,2020). He also emphasized the roles of various fashion icons or influential figures that had contributed to the growth of gender-neutral fashion and also threw light on the representation of identity through fashion, Toxic Masculinity, and Men's Mental Health. Lee M,(2020) also discussed how gender fluidity may be achieved outside the ambit of fashion by mixing menswear and womens-wear on the display racks in stores rather than segregating them into predefined sections according to their genders. This would allow customers to view Fashion as a means of self-expression and take the focus away from predefined gender roles or labels that they felt they needed to apply to themselves. Lee stressed the importance of inclusivity in fashion.

Hickman (2017), Ozuem (2017), and Okoya (2017) argued that Gender is a concept that evolved with time and kept on changing its meaning and importance on a regular basis. Gender according to them was not limited to the physical attributes of an individual but the way in which individuals perceived themselves and choose to express themselves. Thus, Gender is a matter of personal identity. They further stressed on the social construct of modern-day gender identity as well and its impact on the technologically laden marketing environments, the impact of social media, and how the brands are increasingly challenged by these developments to reconsider and revamp their marketing and communication strategies. The role of price equality in markets selling unisex fashion was also examined and it was argued that price equality within unisex fashion creates a symbol of gender identity equality not only for the fashion industry but for modern society as a whole.

It was observed that Gender, in terms of feminist theory, where the body does not represent how an individual fits into the society but rather treats it as a vehicle for self-expression (Davis 1997). The changing role of the modern women in the society where some of them choose to distance themselves from the societal pressures placed on them to reproduce has changed the definition of formative gender identity to some extent. In fact genderless fashion may provide an opportunity for women to move away from social expectations and act as an outlet for self-expression.

Hillman (2015) pitched unisex fashion as a symbol of freedom of choice for people who do not wish to conform to traditionalism. Eckhert (2013) argued that unisex fashion helps in removing inequality by removing strict categorization of men's and women's fashion and explained that this strict categorization of fashion only helps in creating more gender inequality at large. Conversely, Gender neutral fashion reduced inequality by not promoting one gender over the other. However, Spade (2008) was of the view that gender-neutral clothing was just a means to create newer demands and markets and as such is a consumerist version aimed to garner more profits as sufficient non-gender-neutral elements were added to create these lines of clothing that were sold as unisex fashion.

Reis B, Pereira M, Azevedo S, Jeronimo N, Miguel R (2018) focused on understanding whether Gender Fluid Fashion represented a paradigm or a trend. They studied Gender fluidity in fashion from a societal point of view and how this issue interacted with and was treated in multiple disciplines like sociology, fashion design, cultural studies, and marketing. Their research also focused on studying different body types, key consumer issues, and facts. They also discussed the distinction between sex and gender. Sex was the anatomy or biological differences between the bodies whereas gender involved, social, cultural, and psychological differences between men and women (Giddens 2010). They argued that clothing was the link that connected the biological being to social being and the public to the private and that clothing recognized the human body as more than a biological entity but as a cultural organism without well-defined borders.

However, most of the available research on Androgynous Fashion to a large extent focuses on the study and discussions

of Gender identity, consumer behavior, and markets or how the subject of Gender neutral fashion is treated across multiple disciplines. A few of the literature also suggests that there is no in-depth literature available on this concept which leaves scope for further research. In addition, there is very little literature available on how Gender-fluid fashion can positively contribute to Gender Equality in the long run.

The goal of the present study aims to understand how far Androgynous Fashion will be able to bring gender equality. It also studies the scope of acceptance of androgynous fashion by the modern consumers as their preferred choice of clothing. It also tries to study the level of understanding among the masses about unisex fashion and the impact it may have on bringing about gender equality. The study also aims to discuss the role fashion has played from time to time as an agent of change. It further strives to discuss the roles of various designers and personalities that were instrumental in promoting the cause of Androgynous fashion and contributed to removing vagaries in fashion that was rampant during their times. The present study further strives to add to the existing literature on the topic of Androgynous Fashion. To test this hypothesis, a group of respondents from different age groups and varied professions and geographical locations was asked to fill up an online questionnaire to present their views on gender-fluid fashion.

5. Methodology

Primary and secondary methods of data collection have been used for this research paper. Secondary data sources include references from research papers, articles on the internet, newspapers, and books.

For primary data collection, a sample size of nine respondents, both male and female were chosen from different age groups of 30 to 70 years. They were asked to fill up a questionnaire. They were from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds and held different job profiles. Questions were asked with the help of a concise questionnaire and their responses were recorded to understand their perception of androgynous fashion and how open are they to accepting pieces of androgynous clothing in their wardrobes. They were also asked to describe their view on whether gender-neutral clothing would be able to remove strict dress codes based on gender and bring about gender equality in cultures operating under the construct of strict gender stereotypes. The responses of the sample group have been recorded and analysed in the form of pie charts that directly reflect the percentage of the choices made that clearly showed their perception, views, and acceptance of the whole concept. Each respondent also gave a description of whether gender neutral clothing would be or not be able to bring about a degree of gender equality at large.

Respondent 1 is a petroleum engineer in her early 30s working in Mumbai while respondent 2 is a Fashion designer in her mid-30s married and settled in Abu Dhabi, Respondent 3 is a doctor in his late 20s from Lucknow, Respondent 4 is a housewife in her early 60s while respondent 6 is a retired professor in his early 70s based in Assam. Respondent 7 is an Engineer in his mid-30s based in Sikkim. Respondent 8 is a Graphic /Fashion Designer in his early 40s based in Italy and

Respondent 9 is a Fashion Designer in her mid-30s.

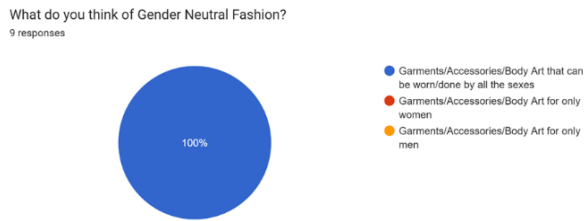


Fig. 1. A pie chart depicting their knowledge of Androgynous Fashion among the respondents of the Questionnaire

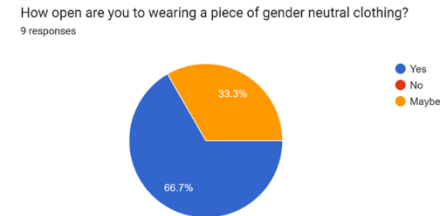


Fig. 2. A pie chart depicting the acceptance of Androgynous Fashion among the respondents to the Questionnaire

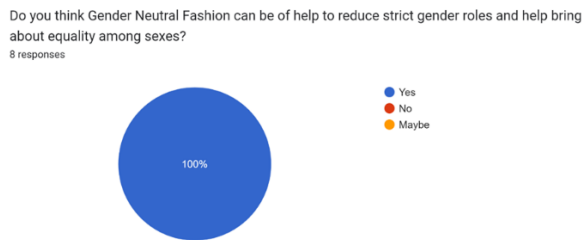
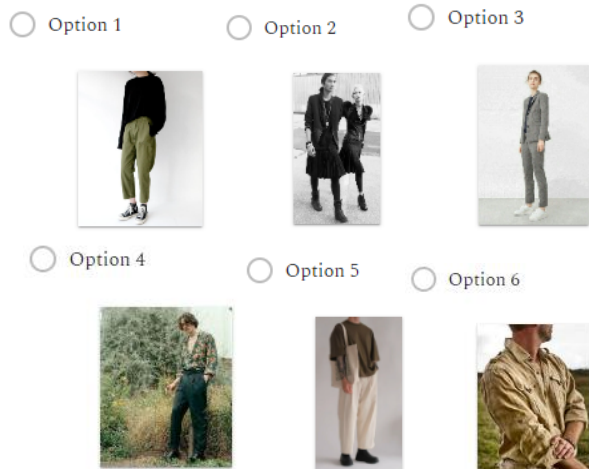
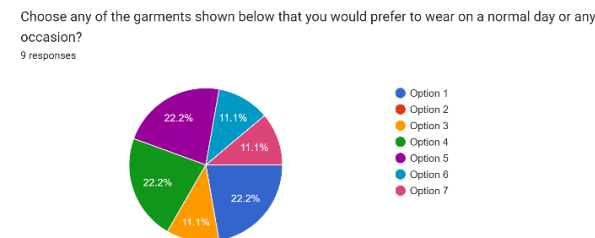


Fig. 3. The above pie chart shows the level of acceptance of androgynous Fashion among the respondents



Option 7



Fig. 4. The above pie chart shows the choice of garments that the respondents would choose to wear

Q. Can you give me your brief view on Gender Neutral Fashion?

Respondent 1

“I believe having a gender-neutral fashion will encourage society to open their minds to want to see especially a woman be dressed in a certain way. In fact, it will perhaps put the thought in their minds that women and men are both the same i.e., human beings and that’s how society needs to see and treat each other with equality and respect for each other.”

Respondent 2

“Fashion that can be used by both genders is Gender Neutral Fashion. It can also serve as a psychological trigger to establish gender equality in the society.”

Respondent 3

“Any individual should wear what they feel.”

Respondent 4

“Fashion, in general, should be both aesthetic and functional which can ensure one with living in comfort. As such Gender-Neutral Fashion which combines all these elements will be accepted by all”.

Respondent 5

“I believe everyone has the right to choose the kind of clothes they want to wear. And hence should not be looked down upon. When it comes to clothes, I look for comfort more than anything else.”

Respondent 6

“I think there is no need to differentiate clothes. Is up to the individual to pick up garments that fit one’s necessity because gender is part of a social construct that isn’t useful when it comes to fashion. Being free to express ourselves wearing what one wants is the key.”

6. Results and Discussion

Through the analysis of the data collected it could be inferred that the majority of the respondents had fair knowledge and idea about Gender neutral fashion (Fig. 1). When asked whether they would be open to incorporating gender-neutral fashion in their wardrobes, 66.7 percent of the respondents gave a positive response while 33.3 percent of them were either reluctant or were not ready to accept Androgynous fashion (Fig. 2). Again, 100 percent of the respondents were of the view that Gender neutral fashion would actually be able to bring about gender equality among the sexes in the long run.

The respondents were also shown a number of picture references (Fig. 4), pictures of models/people wearing different types of clothes where some of them were strictly gender coded that could be clearly seen as menswear or women swear

(options 6 and 7, Fig. 4), some were out and out androgynous (option 3 and 4) while the rest were subtly androgynous and not very obvious in their androgynous element (options 1,4 and 5). It was observed that Options 1, 4, and 5 received equal votes from the respondents i.e. 22.2 percent each while options 3, 6, and 7 received equal votes i.e. 11.1 percent each while Option 2 didn't receive any votes at all.

From these observations it can be inferred that the majority of people irrespective of their age group, career profile, or geographical locations are open to the idea of wearing gender-fluid fashion but with subtle elements of Androgyny as observed from the percentage of votes received in this category i.e. 22.2 percent. Garments that are comfortable like loose T-shirts, shirts, and trousers that can be worn by both sexes are widely accepted. The second, category of garments that have clear demarcations of menswear and womens-wear are also preferred (11.1percent). However, garments that are highly Androgynous (option 2 received 0 percent) in nature and can be considered to be highly risky choices are not preferred by any respondent from the sample group.

When asked their views on gender-neutral fashion, the respondents had these answers. Respondent 1 believes that gender-neutral fashion can bring about a positive change in society as it will allow society to see people as humans rather than treating men and women differently and expecting them to dress in a particular way according to their biological anatomy. Respondent 1 further believes that Gender neutral fashion will open up the minds of people to view everyone equally and give equal respect and importance to them. Respondent 2 is of the view that Gender Neutral fashion may be able to act as a psychological trigger to establish gender equality in society while Respondent 3 is of the view that any individual should wear whatever they feel like wearing. Again Respondent 4 argues that Fashion should be both aesthetic and functional and should also ensure the comfort of the wearer as such Gender-neutral fashion if comfortable would be widely accepted by many. Respondent 5 stressed the importance of the comfort element in clothes and that nobody should be judged for their choices of clothing and that everyone should be free to wear whatever they feel comfortable in. Again Respondent 6 does not believe in the classification of clothes and believes gender to be a social construct that should not influence the fashion choices of an individual and that each individual should be free to wear anything they want and express themselves through fashion.

Thus, it may be understood that more and more people have ample knowledge of unisex fashion and are opening up to the idea of accepting and exploring gender-neutral fashion. Most of them find themselves moving away from the idea of strict gender-coded clothing to a more inclusive way of dressing up.

The present study is aimed to understand whether Androgynous Fashion or Gender-fluid clothing will be helpful in contributing to the cause of Gender Equality in the society we live in by blurring the lines of gender rigid fashion that involves a clear distinction between menswear and women wear without any scope of dialogue between the two.

A group of people from different cultural backgrounds,

geographical areas, age groups, and cultural backgrounds were interviewed through a questionnaire. They were shown photographs of different looks that were a mix of experimental androgynous looks with a shock value, androgynous looks that were subtle in their representation of this style of dressing, and pictures that showed subjects wearing garments that come under the ambit of strict gender-based demarcations. The responses of each of the respondents were recorded and analysed to interpret the results.

The results of this study were very interesting as it could be understood that most of the participants of the sample group had a positive view of androgynous fashion and they did have an understanding of the whole concept. They were also keen on accepting and experimenting with subtler forms of Gender-fluid fashion. Although the respondents were chosen from different age groups, different professions, and different geographical areas both in India and abroad, they were unanimous in their acceptance of subtle forms of Gender fluidity in their choice of fashion.

The findings of this study offer a novel perspective and clearer view of the acceptance, awareness level, and understanding of androgynous fashion among the general public and whether they view it as an apt tool for Gender Equality. Previous literature available on the topic mainly discussed androgynous fashion in terms of Gender Identity or how it has been a part of fashion through different ages. Many discussions also focused on the contribution of Fashion designers in this context and also studies the consumer and commercial aspect of it. However, the study of Androgynous fashion as a tool for gender equality has not been studied in-depth so far. As such, this study adds to the existing literature on the broad topic of Gender-fluid fashion and Gender bending at large and leaves scope for further discussions.

The most important limitation of this study lies in the fact that the respondents in the sample group were not very big. When the questionnaire was published on social media, there were no respondents who came voluntarily to answer the questions, which showed the level of interest that people have in the topic. As such, the respondents were chosen and contacted through emails to respond to the questionnaire.

However, in spite of these limitations, it was possible to extract a desirable result as the chosen respondents were from different age groups, varied cultural and professional backgrounds, and different geographical locations, because of which an interesting mix could be had in the sample group.

7. Conclusion

Through this paper, the scope and perception of Gender-Neutral clothing among various groups have been studied and discussed, and how it can be used to advance the cause of gender equality among the sexes. It further studied the contribution of eminent fashion designers and personalities throughout fashion's history and how they contributed to removing the vagaries of fashion and liberating women. The results of the study suggested that more and more people are aware and opening up to the idea of embracing Androgynous fashion in their wardrobes and daily lives. They further believe

that Androgynous fashion can actually help bring about positive change in the mindsets of people and contribute to bring about gender equality at large. Thus, the results show a positive trend that tilts towards a more inclusive, exciting and experimental future for fashion. This paper further leaves scope for research in Androgynous Fashion in the future.

References

- [1] Achrekar, Sanika. "Has India Finally Achieved Gender-Neutral Clothing?" (2021), Retrieved from <https://www.mansworldindia.com/style-luxury/has-india-finally-achieved-gender-neutral-clothing/>
- [2] Andaya, Barbara Watson. "Historicising "modernity" in southeast asia." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): 391-409.
- [3] Banerjee Rushmika, "Ahead of the Curve" *Verve Magazine* (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.vervemagazine.in/fashion-and-beauty/ahead-of-the-curve-designer-suket-dhir-on-his-debut-at-lotus-makeup-india-fashion-week>
- [4] Baruah, S, Gender bender, *Horizon, The Assam Tribune*, 2016
- [5] "Costumes of Indian men" *India NetZone E-Magazine* (2016) Retrieved from https://www.indianetzone.com/2/costumes_men_women.htm
- [6] Davis, Kathy, ed. *Embodied practices: Feminist perspectives on the body*. Vol. 1. Sage, 1997.
- [7] Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet. *Language and gender*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- [8] Felgueiras, Sérgio Ricardo Costa Chagas. "Diagnose da desordem social manifesta." (2017).
- [9] Hickman, Mary-Kate, Wilson Ozuem, and Jummy Okoya. "Gender fluidity in the age of technologically mediated environments: implications for fashion industry." In *Gender Economics: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice*, pp. 135-174. IGI Global, 2019.
- [10] Hillman, Betty Luther. *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s*. U of Nebraska Press, 2015.
- [11] The genius of androgyny- *The New Indian Express*, Retrieved from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/2021/apr/18/the-genius-of-androgyny-2290478.html>
- [12] "Meet the skirt-chasers" *Asian Age* (2015) Retrieved from <https://www.asianage.com/fashion/meet-skirt-chasers-577>
- [13] Kaiser, Susan B., and Denise N. Green. *Fashion and cultural studies*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.
- [14] Köhler, Carl. *A history of costume*. Courier Corporation, 2012.
- [15] Koleli, Burcu. "International Women's Day 2022: Gender Equality today for a sustainable tomorrow" (2022) Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org>
- [16] Lee, Maisie. "The Intensification of Popularity Surrounding Gender Fluidity within Fashion and How This Demand Has Been Ameliorated by Generation Z." Retrieved 27th March (2020).
- [17] Mazumdar Shreyanka "Sarinotsorry: Men in Saris take the spotlight" (2022) Retrieved from <https://m.timesofindia.com/life-style/fashion/style-guide/sarinotsorry-men-in-saris-take-the-spotlight/articleshow/>
- [18] Minturn, Leigh, and Kapoor, Swaran. "The Khalapar Rajputs," *Sita's daughters: Coming out of purdah: The Rajput women of Khalapur revisited*. Vol. 10. Oxford University Press on Demand, 1993, pp. 25.
- [19] Paolis De, G (2021) Retrieved from <https://www.nssgclub.com/en/fashion/25536/3-styles-fashion-history-dandy-sporty-garconne>
- [20] Papalas, Marylaura. "Avant-garde cuts: Schiaparelli and the construction of a surrealist femininity." *Fashion Theory* 20, no. 5 (2016): 503-522.
- [21] Puttonen, Mikko (2021). "10 best gender-fluid moments from Paris Fashion Week SS22"
- [22] Ranavaade, Vaibbhavi Pruthviraj, and A. N. J. A. L. I. Karolia. "The study of the Indian fashion system with a special emphasis on women's everyday wear." *Int J Tex Fash Technol* 7, no. 2 (2017): 27-44.
- [23] Reid, Stuart. *Scottish National Dress and Tartan*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.
- [24] Reis, Benilde, Madalena Pereira, S. Azevedo, N. Jeronimo, and Rui Miguel. "Genderless clothing issues in fashion." In *Textiles, Identity and Innovation: Design the Future*, pp. 255-260. CRC Press, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/03/international-womens-day-un-officials-call-step-gender-equality/>
- [25] Russel, Aidan, (2020), Retrieved from <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/8750/the-history-of-androgynous-fashion-up-to-contemporary-times>
- [26] 'Step It Up' for gender Equality- Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.
- [27] Simmel, Georg. "The philosophy of fashion." *Simmel on culture* (1997): 187-206.
- [28] Spade, Joan Z., and C. Valentine. "The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms." *Patterns and* (2008).
- [29] Sun, F. "All-time 100 fashion icons: Coco Chanel." *TIME Magazine* 179, no. 13 (2012): 91-9
- [30] Sundar Nivetha, "Men in Skirts" (2015), Retrieved from <https://nivethasundar.wixsite.com/dunsar/post/2015/12/14/men-in-skirts>
- [31] Yadav, Dutta Medha. "The genius of androgyny", *the New Indian Express* (2021).