Simplicity is Wisdom – the role of minimalism in fashion and lifestyle A study on the young Indian female consumer
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**A Minimalist’s Train of Thought**

Less money spent means more money saved

More money saved means the longer you can live in financial peace and security

Financial peace and security comes from owning less

Less stuff owned means less to carry around, move or have to travel with

Less responsibility for your stuff also means less maintenance and more time

The more time you have, the more relaxed you will feel

The more relaxed you are, the less you will care about stuff

If you care less about stuff, it means you’ll care less about image

If you care less about image, you will care more about experiences and memories

If you care more about experiences and memories, you will be happier with less

If you are happier with less, you’ll never want or need for more

The less you want or need for more, the more you will feel free

* - The Everyday Minimalist *

**INTRODUCTION:**

SIMPLICITY is an art to strip down a thing from its surplus to its essential elements. It is simply living an uncluttered life, it is simply living with what you need and getting rid of extra.

It is human tendency to simplify things. Minimalism in fashion has its roots deeply rooted in arts and architecture. During 1960’s ‘less is more’ became a guideline for the artists and architecture. The world of modern art celebrated purity of form, cleanliness of lines, simple geometrical shapes. Similar was followed in fashion in by some of the very influential designers of time like Yohji Yamamoto, Jil sander, Calvin Klien worked a great deal in minimalist fashion and defined fashion in a new way with embellishment free, streamlined, simpler silhouettes and monochromatic colour palettes.
Minimalism has long been a special form of fashion, with its own special group of worshippers. This group of people often sees their world as monochromatic, preferring pieces that have a fluid nature from top to bottom with no interruptions in between. But as the world was hit by economic recession in 2008, the trend expanded its boundaries globally, and turned into a statement that now can be seen globally on the runways. The reason behind this shift is very clearly seen from consumers behaviour, with the job cuts and bankruptcies people started buying less and smartly. They focused more on quality, wardrobe that is long term and sustainable, that can be mixed and matched with everything. So brands and designers started focusing on simplicity, from designs to product and to its application, simple and least time consuming to understand.

But in Indian fashion scenario, the behaviour is different here people want to show that they have money and so the luxury in India means shimmer that stands out. Although there are few designers and organizations who follow minimalism and the trend emerging but still its way behind the as it is already a trend globally.

What is minimalism?

Minimalism is an art of stripping a thing of its surplus or unnecessary elements to what are essential. In a world full of colours and patterns and complicated seams and beadings, sometimes we just retreat to the simplest form of beauty, minimalism. It is a modern human’s tendency to simplify things around. Everyone has probably been a minimalist at one time or another without realizing. It could be the classic white button down shirt, or a simple cardigan that matches with everything, or the ladylike black leather bag you carry. We have all been there, trying to spare our minds free of clutter and carry something simple, timeless and comfortable, that can be worn without giving it a second thought.(Andre,1970)

Origin of the concept:

Minimalism or post modernism is an art movement the last modern art movement which followed the popular pop art movement. And as the name suggests after all the loudness was the time for world to lessen the too much from their lives, the term minimalism was supposedly to define art that aimed to not be identified either with painting or sculpture which eventually ended up becoming a global trend. Although minimalism appeared in 1960’s it did not really take off until 1970’s. It was a clear reaction against previous art forms, including unrestrained use of colours and the features of pop art, as well as the other trends of the time. This phenomenon has been repeated throughout history. Artistic trends could be compared to a pendulum, which oscillates from one extreme to the other for example-from gothic to renaissance, neo classicism to romanticism, pop art to minimalism, with its eagerness to essential, putting purity and the simplicity of lines above all. Minimalism therefore can be defined as art of stripping a thing of its surplus or unnecessary elements (Stangos,94)

Correlations- fashion and art:

Elyssa Dimant, a fashion historian and a former research associate at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, examined the role of minimalism in fashion, but also
looked at the broader context of its appearance in art, architecture and design, noticed some surprising correlations along the way (Weber, 2010). The most noticeable aspect was the similarity between art and architecture and the runway looks, such as an organic piece by Zaha Hadid and Patrik Schumacher opposite dresses from an unrelated resort collection by the Calvin Klein designer Francisco Costa, or a Richard Serra installation of curling metal plates next to Hussein Chalayan's coffee-table dress from 2000 (Demante, 2011).

It happened in the first decade of a new century, when designers are likely looking toward the future, “and futurism and minimalism are intrinsically linked.”

According to Demante today’s minimalist fashion owes a crucial debt to the avant-garde visual culture of the Twenties and the Sixties. During both of these periods, she writes, the “clean, streamlined shapes” so fundamental to modern art (Kasimir Malevich’s geometric paintings, Donald Judd’s steel boxes) and architecture (Le Corbusier’s celebration of “the cube, the sphere, the cylinder, and the pyramid) reappeared in fashion and forever changed its face. From Chanel’s unfussy little black dress to Courrèges’s and Cardin’s pared-down, futuristic shifts, the watershed styles of the Twenties and the Sixties folded contemporary artistic values—sleekness, simplicity, and progress—into “a vocabulary of easy dressing that would come to define modern fashion.

In nineties the understatement started gaining its height, Klein and Marc Jacobs “found in the simple slip dress the perfect reductive form in which to clothe their high-end clientele.” (Dimante, 2011). The understatement became the new luxury, it became the status symbol for high-end clientele (Beene, 1990). Even for marketing of these minimalist apparels the backdrops used were by fashion photographers were plain, colourless. The interiors of big and big name famous boutiques were similar with sterile “white cube” architecture of boutiques (weber, 2004). Nineties minimalism made an air of deprivation the ultimate status symbol.

**Evolution of minimalism as a trend in fashion**

Japanese designers such as Yohji Yamamoto set to have a great influence over global fashion trends. The impact of rising levels of austerity and radicalism is being felt in the most unlikely corners— even high fashion. The Japanese minimalist movement radicalised and democratised the fashion world in the 1980s. When the designers Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo, founder of Comme des Garçons, became the toast of Paris fashion week in the early 1980s, their relentlessly monochrome, asymmetric and intellectual vision of clothing was a revelation (O’Flaherty, 2010). It wasn't until the 80s and the Japanese that people really wore black (Dagworthy, 2010)

A whole generation of modernist architects and artists, attracted by its raw, unbranded, anti-fashion status, adopted a look that destroyed established dress codes and created a logo-free, democratic – albeit often expensive – ideal of style. (O’Flaherty, 2010)

By the 1990s it was no longer the done thing to follow fashion slavishly, a sharp contrast to the highly fashionable 1970s and 1980s. The phobia of being underdressed was finally completely displaced by the fear of overdressing. Fashion in the 1990s united around a new standard, minimalism, and styles with simplicity became the vogue. Despite the best efforts
of a few designers to keep the flag for pretty dresses flying, by the end of the decade the notion of ostentatious finery had virtually disappeared. The financial pressures of the decade had a devastating effect on the development of new talent and lessened the autonomy enjoyed by more established designers.

Designers from Japan like Jil Sander brought in the Japanese minimalist fashion, in 1973 she showcased his collection in Milan fashion week and in 1975 on Paris runway which came as a complete failure because of his sophisticated look, as during that period fashion was dominated by glitzy, flashy and colourful clothing. Her luxurious simplicity and understated elegance only started gaining attention in the 1990s.

Fashion at the end of the 20th century was shifting to certain themes which were depressing, dull and poverty. The glamorous and sexy styles were redefined on the runways which were plain, make up less, colour palette was again plain and sober and monochromatic. This was the time when retail brands started making their names with ready to wear, comfortable clothing like Gap, Eddie Bauer because of the growing need of simpler easy to carry wardrobe.

In the 1990s the designer label Prada became a true creative force in the fashion industry. The Milanese Company was first established in 1923, two years after Gucci, and like Gucci, it was a firm that sold high-quality shoes and leather. It was until the 1980s that Miuccia Prada, the niece of the company’s founder, began to produce ready-to-wear fashion, gaining fame for her subtle, streamlined, yet unquestionably luxurious style, that catered for the privileged young woman who prefers understatement to flamboyant extravagance.

In America three of the most influential fashion designers of the time were Michael Kors, Marc Jacobs, and Calvin Klein. Michael Kors set up his own business in 1980. However, it was not until the 1990s that the designer reached the peak of his popularity. His knowledge and consciousness of trends enabled him to produce simple well-cut garments, whose sophistication and elegance appealed to a whole new breed of wealthy American customers drawn to the new vogue for minimalist chic. Marc Jacobs is one of the most notable American designers of the period in that, unlike many American fashion designers in the past, he was not so much the co-ordinator of a mass-produced garment as a designer in the European sense of the word. One of the most promising talents in the fashion industry at the time, the LVMH (Louis Vuitton-Moet Henessy) group offered him the job of designing a line of ready-to-wear to compliment the luxury products of luggage specialist Louis Vuitton in the late 1990s. One of the first fashion designers to anticipate the globalization of world markets, the already well-known designer Calvin Klein started to market his fashions, perfumes, and accessories not only right across the US, but also in Europe and Asia, achieving images tinted with eroticism to promote his sophisticatedly functional mass-produced designs, which won massive popularity among the urban youth of the 1990s.

American fashion was influenced by designers like Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren. Donna Karan gained instant popularity in 1980’s with her sophisticated ready to wear line, with a very feminine yet casual look.

**Return of minimalism as a mega trend and the reason behind:**
Minimalism has been a growing trend on the fashion scene for many years now (Mansfield,2011). With more and more designers tossing their hats into the minimalist ring, it
won't be look till we are all dressed in those super futuristic duds. What precipitated this mega trend?

Since fashion often reflects the way world feels about money, the 2008 crisis and the recession is the reason that turned the movement into a global trend. It is a reaction against our consumers society faced with this crisis, leaving a lot of people unable to keep up with the requirements of said society, namely “BUY BUY CONSUME BUY”. (Copping, 2010)

As a response to frugality manifested itself through the products we consume and use and has become a statement in itself. In the Nielsen Global Online survey, fifteen percent of global consumers said they will spend less on new clothes even when the economy recovers, compared to 37 percent who have cut back on clothes spending during the recession. While the Chinese, Russians, UAE and Indians will be among the first to update their wardrobes in the post-recession world, those pledging to spend considerably less on fashion are Singaporeans, Malaysians, Italians, Turkish, Brazilians and Australians. As economic recovery gathers pace, consumption and spending will increase – but the post recession consumer is likely to consume very differently. The post-recession consumer will think twice and sometimes thrice about making purchases, big or small. The recession affected all social classes and has fundamentally changed how consumers consume – and particularly in the West where it’s now fashionable to be frugal; and trendy to be thrifty.

Luxury was redefined with simple silhouettes clean lines and minimal accessories. Designers are now looking for simplicity and quality, exhibiting desire to create products and environment that are sustainable, simpler and functional. (Weber, 2010)

Dawne Stubbs, creative director John Smedley, the knitwear brand thinks that fashion, and women’s wear in particular, is action and reaction. As women grappled with complex layers of garments and embellishment over the last few years, they became tired of the transient nature of those styles, and the challenges they faced on a day-to-day basis just to get dressed. They began the dig back in their wardrobe for simpler pieces.

Zoe Kuipers, communications director for the London boutique Browns, which opened a new concept store in early September called Shop 24 for the express purpose of selling “basics with a fashion twist”, has noticed a similar movement: “Since the economic downturn, customers have been shopping more discreetly and, to reflect the manner in which they shop, their style has become more discreet also. It is much less about flashy statement outfits and more about a refined way of dressing. Understated can make just as strong a statement as overstated.

This new mind-set has been directly impacted by consumers’ growing concerns about the world we live in, and the world that will exist for future generations. Consumers, especially in the West, are realizing that sustainability, recycling; organic food, bottled water, waste and the global environment as a whole are all related to the actions they choose to take today. (Thoburn, 2010)

Why minimalism?

Minimalism provides a simple solution to the question ‘What am I going to wear?’ The fashion world moves quickly and it can be intimidating trying to keep up. But now a simple
A white shift dress can make a powerful statement, says Justin O'Shea, head buyer at www.mytheresa.com. It is an anecdote to the modern society everything is so hectic that its relief to know that at least some of your wardrobe can be simplified. These pieces will be forever chic. It is smart shopping for long term says Holli Rogers, buying director at www.net-a-porter.com.

**Minimalism in Indian fashion industry:**

Internationally minimalism has become a well known trend but in Indian fashion industry minimalism is restricted to certain level. Not much of this trend is accepted even by Indian designers. Though some of the Indian designers work on the philosophy like- Wendell Rodricks, Rina Dhaka.

It may have worked for the markets that were going through economic recession in the future but it’s a trend that has worked globally over the last few fashion seasons. But the Indian market is predominantly ruled by bridal couture and lately by high street fashion.(Kadam,2011)

For long time now opulent looks, embroidery, embellishments and fringes have ruled the ramp. But heavy embellishments now seem to have taken a backseat. The last fashion week gave a peek into that very return of the world of minimalism.(Dhaka,2011)

Designer Wendell Rodricks who is considered as ‘guru of minimalism’ in India says that minimalism is not a trend that will pass by, it’s a trend that will stay. People are done with overly done outfits, heavy embellishments chains and sequence

Customer in India now have started to demand sleeker pieces, that emphasise more on fabric, construction, shape and colour. In fact playing with fabric and colour is soon going to take over. And these looks will be relaxed yet elegant explain. (D’souza,2009)

If we study the pattern of Indian designers we clearly see a rise in minimal fashion but to a limited extent. The current fashion week held in the capital city witnessed a shift from traditional Indian garments to more of western look. Wills lifestyle spring summer 2011 .studying collections of various designers there are few who are following the trend but majority still does not agree with the concept. Where some of the designers are working on traditional heavy embellishments there are few who are working in Indian with minimal touch, embellishments that are simpler and less flashy.

Big names of Indian design industry like Rohit Bal, Tarun Tahiliani and J J Valaya have their own style and are known for their bridal and Indian outfits. While Bollywood designer Manish Malhotra believes in trends that are ongoing and has started practicing minimalism in his work. desiner Abhishek Gupta works on simple lines and assiduous details, contemporary yet deeply rooted in India.

Well known designer Anuj Sharma also showcased his simple designs in one of the Japan’s fashion week. He creates simple straight free of mess western garments. Another designer Rimzim Dadu famous for her ‘My Village’ collection- an amalgamation of rich fabric
textures and chic street styles of luxury with simplicity, playfulness with soberness denotes the minimalist trends in India.

Another reason of designers sticking to traditional Indian styles is that in India designer wear is meant for high income group. The customer profile is high earning and so they can afford international brands easily. With whole lot of international brands available in India and abroad which are already existing names for western clothing customer tend to buy and stick to those. This in turn makes Indian western clothing industry weak.

The trend has started but yet to be accepted, the changes can be seen in Delhi fashion week this year with designers working on simpler silhouettes. In the west this trend is not new but every season it redefines itself. Lighter fabrics and intricate designs the minimal clothing is soon going to become a classic trend in India. It is fuss free, in spite of being minimal its elegant like no other. even bridal looks can look as beautiful with the threadwork with the blend of fabrics and colours. and if someone wants to add some more zing they can always accessorise this look.(Dhaka'2010)

**Minimalism and runway:**

From Calvin Klein in the 90s to Celine two decades later to Angelina Jolie on the red carpet, minimalism has long been a special form of fashion.(Palina,2006)

With so much of brand clutter, noise going around it is the simplicity that sticks. So from simple branding to simple fashion to simplest lifestyles is what the demand of the decade is.(Davis,2009)

Jil sander: Noted as one of the major labels who helped popularize the minimalist aesthetic of the nineties, Jil Sander stands for luxe purity. Her trademark look, a somewhat New Look for women conquering executive positions in the 1980s, was that of a perfectly cut pantsuit, a form-fitting simple but elegant coat or a slim blouse made of the most luxurious materials in plain grey, black, blue or white leaving out any unnecessary details, extravagant ornaments or loud colours. She has been described as the *Queen of Less, Cashmere-Queen, Master of Minimalism, Cool Blonde, Gentle-Jil or Fashion Reductionist.*

Designers such as Helmut Lang popularized this minimalistic trend by incorporating Japanese avant-garde aesthetics. His clothes had that perfect cut, comfort, and ease of movement and constitutes great fashion luxuries. Common examples of his key pieces slim mannish-shaped trousers for women, and sharply cut suiting that has a more androgynous shape.

In American fashion Donna Karan brought a very personal and feminine approach to the severe, sober-coloured, casual look that dominated American ready-to-wear. Setting up her own label in 1984, her designs won instant popularity among active urban women who greatly appreciated the understated luxury of her clothes.

Japanese designers such as Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto offered a look which marked a total break with the prevailing fashion image of the time. Flat shoes, no make-up,
reserve, modesty, and secrecy were the hallmarks of this modern look. Yohji Yamamoto brought geometric minimalism to the catwalk in the late 1970's while other designers focused on flamboyance, and if his name and clothing has become a brand over the last 30 years, for the man himself, it is always "creation first". (O’Flaherty, 2011)

Wendell Rodricks considered as ‘guru of minimalism’ in India has influenced Indian fashion in a great way with his clean cuts and sophisticated designs. Wear ability and comfort are the key inspirations for his collections. (D’souza, 2009)

FabIndia as an organization known for its philosophy to promote handicrafts and natural fibres is making statement because of its minimalist designs and simple cuts. it has gained popularity among woman shoppers because of their neat designs.

With people sticking to simpler products brands like apple are trying to get the attention through developing higher technology yet least complex application to understand, from there logo to their products everything is based on this mega trend. (Davis, 2009)

Phoebe Philo, creative director at Céline, showcased her, her influential debut collection, which focused on “utilitarian couture” “strong, powerful and reduced”, the focus of her designs is on practicality.

**Identified Gaps:**

A look at the Indian designer arena shows that minimalism in India is not so apparent. Very few designers like Wendell Rodricks and Rimjhim Dadu work on similar philosophies. But when it comes to Indian crafts and couture, ‘more is always less’. Luxury here still means ‘shimmer’ and ‘excess’. India’s main focus is on bridal couture and less on ready to wear long term clothing. And moreover not much of relevant researches are done on minimal fashion. The existing reports and articles talk about how eventually minimalism became a fashion trend but the idea behind is not well understood, as how the art and architectural forms inspired fashion to turn to geometrical shapes.
Bibliography

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