

Social Science

(Chapter – 8) (Clothing: A Social History)

(India and Contemporary World - I)

Question 1:

Explain the reasons for the changes in clothing patterns and materials in the eighteenth century.

Answer 1:

After the 18th century, the colonisation of most of the world by Europe, the spread of democratic ideals and the growth of an industrial society completely changed the ways in which people thought about dress. People could use styles and materials that were drawn from other cultures and locations. Western dress styles for men were adopted worldwide.

Question 2:

What were the sumptuary laws in France?

Answer 2:

From 1294 to the time of the French Revolution in 1789, the people of France were expected to strictly follow the sumptuary laws. The laws tried to control the behaviour of those considered socially inferior, preventing them from wearing certain clothes, consuming certain foods and beverages, and hunting game in certain areas.

Question 3:

Give an example of any two examples of the ways in which European dress codes were different from Indian dress codes.

Answer 3:

European dress codes were different from Indian dress codes. Let us take the example of the turban and the hat. The two headgears not only looked different but also signified different things. The turban in India was not just for protection from the heat but was a sign of respectability and could not be removed at will. In the western tradition, the hat had to be removed before social superiors as a sign of respect. The shoe is another example. The Indians took off their shoes when they entered a sacred place. The British did not do so.

Question 4:

In 1805, a British official, Benjamin Heyne, listed the manufactures of Bangalore which included the following:

- Women's cloth of different musters and names
- Coarse chintz
- Muslins
- Silk cloths

Of this list, which kind of cloth would have definitely fallen out of use in the early 1900s and why?

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Answer 4:

Muslin would have fallen out of use as machine cloth had flooded the Indian markets and was cheaper. Muslin was expensive and hence was not used. In fact, the Industrial Revolution brought about a complete change in which muslin cloth had no place.

Question 5:

Suggest reasons why women in nineteenth century India were obliged to continue wearing traditional Indian dress even when men switched over to the more convenient western clothing. What does this show about the position of women in society?

Answer 5:

Women in the 19th century India were obliged to continue wearing traditional Indian dress even when men switched over to more convenient western clothes. This clearly shows that women during that time were accorded a lower status than men in society. They were not allowed to be aware of what was going on outside the house and were confined within the four walls of their homes. Modernity and change were not for them.

Question 6:

Winston Churchill described Mahatma Gandhi as a ‘seditious Middle Temple Lawyer’ now ‘posing as a half naked fakir’.

What provoked such a comment and what does it tell you about the symbolic strength of Mahatma Gandhi’s dress?

Answer 6:

Mahatma Gandhi went to the Viceroy’s house clad in a dhoti. This signified the symbolic strength of his dress. It showed the pride he had for his nation and its people, especially the peasants. It also signified how he identified with his people and the strength he derived from them.

Question 7:

Why did Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of clothing the nation in khadi appeal only to some sections of Indians?

Answer 7:

Mahatma Gandhi’s dream was to clothe the whole nation in khadi. But it was not easy for everyone to follow in his footsteps. Not many could take to a single peasant loincloth as he had. Some could not afford khadi which was expensive and some preferred to be dressed in finer cloth of various colours and designs.