



Question-10

How did this change come about?

Solution:

In 1905, Lord Curzon decided to partition Bengal to control the growing opposition to British rule. The Swadeshi movement developed in reaction to this measure. People were urged to boycott British goods of all kinds and start their own industries for the manufacture of goods such as matchboxes and cigarettes. Mass protests followed, with people vowing to cleanse themselves of colonial rule. The use of khadi was made a patriotic duty. Women were urged to throw away their silks and glass bangles and wear simple shell bangles. Rough homespun was glorified in songs and poems to popularise it.

The change of dress appealed largely to the upper castes and classes rather than to those who had to make do with less and could not afford the new products. After 15 years, many among the upper classes also returned to wearing European dress. Though many people rallied to the cause of nationalism at this time, it was almost impossible to compete with cheap British goods that had flooded the market. Despite its limitations, the experiment with Swadeshi gave Mahatma Gandhi important ideas about using cloth as a symbolic weapon against British rule.

Question-11

Comment on the experiments of Mahatma Gandhi with clothing.

Solution:

The most familiar image of Mahatma Gandhi is of him seated, bare chested and in a short dhoti, at the spinning wheel. He made spinning on the charkha and the daily use of khadi, or coarse cloth made from homespun yarn, very powerful symbols. These were not only symbols of self-reliance but also of resistance to the use of British mill-made cloth. Mahatma Gandhi's life and his experiments with clothing sum up the changing attitude to dress in the Indian subcontinent.

As a boy from a Gujarati Bania family, he usually wore a shirt with a dhoti or pyjama, and sometimes a coat. When he went to London to study law as a boy of 19 in 1888, he cut off the tuft on his head and dressed in a Western suit so that he would not be laughed at. On his return, he continued to wear Western suits, topped with a turban. As a lawyer in Johannesburg, South Africa in the 1890s, he still wore Western clothes. Soon he decided that dressing 'unsuitably' was a more powerful political statement. In Durban in 1913, Gandhi first appeared in a lungi and kurta with his head shaved as a sign of mourning to protest against the shooting of Indian coal miners. On his return to India in 1915, he decided to dress like a Kathiawadi peasant. Only in 1921 did he adopt the short dhoti, the form of dress he wore until his death.

At this time, he did not want to use this dress all his life and only wanted to 'experiment for a month or two'. But soon he saw this as his duty to the poor, and he never wore any other dress. He consciously rejected the well-known clothes of the Indian ascetic and adopted the dress of the poorest Indian.

Khadi, white and coarse, was to him a sign of purity, of simplicity, and of poverty. Wearing it became also a symbol of nationalism, a rejection of Western mill-made cloth. He wore the short dhoti without a shirt when he went to England for the Round Table

Conference in 1931. He refused to compromise and wore it even before King George V at Buckingham Palace. When he was asked by journalists whether he was wearing enough clothes to go before the King, he joked that that 'the King had enough on for both of us'!

Question-12

What was the dream of Mahatma regarding the clothing of Indians? What was the response?Solution:

Mahatma Gandhi's dream was to clothe the whole nation in khadi. He felt khadi would be a means of erasing difference between religions, classes, etc. Not many could take to the single peasant loincloth as he had. Nor did all want to. Some examples of other responses to Mahatma Gandhi's call:

1. Nationalists such as Motilal Nehru, a successful barrister from Allahabad, gave up his expensive Western-style suits and adopted the Indian dhoti and kurta. But these were not made of coarse cloth.
2. Those who had been deprived by caste norms for centuries were attracted to Western dress styles. Therefore, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, other nationalists such as Babasaheb Ambedkar never gave up the Western-style suit. Many Dalits began in the early 1910s to wear threepiece suits, and shoes and socks on all public occasions, as a political statement of self-respect.
3. A woman who wrote to Mahatma Gandhi from Maharashtra in 1928 said, 'A year ago, I heard you speaking on the extreme necessity of every one of us wearing khadi and thereupon decided to adopt it. But we are poor people, My husband says khadi is costly. Belonging as I do to Maharashtra, I wear a sari nine yards long ... (and) the elders will not hear of a reduction (to six yards).'
4. Other women, like Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Nehru, wore coloured saris with designs, instead of coarse, white homespun.

Question-13

What does the change in styles of clothing linked with?

Solution:

Changes in styles of clothing are thus linked up with shifts in cultural tastes and notions of beauty, with changes within the economy and society, and with issues of social and political conflict.

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