



PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF SOCIAL CHANGE: FASHION, STYLE, FAD AND CRAZE

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ABSTRACT

The reader would have often heard of people talking of a particular thing being in fashion in a particular field or of the fashion of a particular thing having been ousted from a particular sphere. Young men and women almost never tire of talking of fashion irrespective of the place in which they are and are always desirous of appearing the most fashionable among their friends. It is not unusual for women of a neighborhood to go stampeding to buy a new sari if one of the women among them has bought a new one. Previously, the men used to wear trousers which were open at the bottom but now they have reverted to the use of what is known in knowledgeable circles as a drainpipe.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion is not limited merely to the sphere of clothes but extends to practically every field such as jeweller, modes of behaviour, conversation and thought, etc. And yet this does not mean that the field of fashion is all comprehending. Despite its appearing to comprehend a very large part of life, fashion influences only those spheres concerning which we are indifferent. For example, the legs of a salvar can be either wide or narrow. And as one cannot turn to a specialist when one wants to sew a salvar as to how should its legs be fashioned the mode in the fashion at the moment is chosen. On the other hand, the modes of behaviour in the relationship between men and women, particularly in the case of the marital relation, are not governed by fashion because this is one sphere in which we are indifferent but tend to conform to some specific traditions. In this way, the sphere of fashion increases with an increase in the field of indifference. For example, if there are no definite traditions or well defined modes of mutual address between husband and wife in some society then fashion takes command of this sphere as well.

Fashion:

What is Fashion?

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As is evident from the foregoing description, there is an intimate relationship between fashion, custom, etiquette, usage, convention and tradition. Before proceeding to describe this relationship it would be better to know what fashion, scientifically considered. Generally, People take fashion to mean personal choice or the choice of the majority or the choice of the leading people but such an indistinct definition cannot serve the purpose of scientific study. Hence, it must be defined more precisely.

Defining fashion in his book Social Psychology, Ross writes “Fashion is a series of recurring changes in the choices of a group of people which though they may be accompanied by utility, are not determined by it.” This particular definition of fashion stresses the following four facts:

1. Fashion is a change in the choice of some group :

Fashion is related to the choice of the liking of a group of people. Fashion transforms this choice For example, in India previously the number of people who wore bushshirts was very small but now even the most ordinary individual can be seen wearing it because its fashion has spread to every class in society.

2. Fashion is a chain of recurring modification :

Fashion is constantly changing and the effect of this invariable variation is that some object goes out of fashion at one particular time but it stands a chance of being included in the fashion parade at a later date. For example, there was at time in India when the educated and literate individuals sported the buttoned up coat. Then, for some time this particular article of dress lost its charm and became outmoded and not once again it is considered a very fashionable dress. In this way fashion is a dynamic process. It is a series or chain of recurring variations and changes.

3. Fashion can be related to utility :

Many fashions also have much utility. For example, the bushshirt is a very comfortable article of the gent’s wardrobe, particularly in the warm climate of India. In this way it is both fashionable and comfortable to wear bushshirt.

4. Fashion is not determined by utility :

But utility is not the determinant of fashion. Many objects and articles become fashionable without having any utility whatsoever, such as ties, broaches, jewellery. etc.

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Nature of Fashion :

The nature of fashion is brought to light in some detail from the preceding analysis of the definition of fashion given by Ross. Accordingly, it was seen that fashion causes a change in the choice of individuals. In their book Society, Maclver and Page write, “By fashion we mean the, socially approved sequence of variation on a customary theme.” In this sequence it is not essential that either our contemporaries or our predecessors must be copied and imitated. Further, it is not of essence to fashion that either the higher social classes or the lower classes must be emulated. Fashion can be any one of these. As Maclver has indicated in the definition that he has given of fashion, fashion is neither a contradiction of custom nor is it outside custom. It functions in the field of custom. For example, the Indian dress is determined to a large extent by tradition and custom but minor changes and variations in this dress are governed by fashion. Most Indian ladies wear the sari by custom but the colour, design, border, etc., of the sari are a matter of fashion and contemporary convention.

Psychological bases of fashion :

The power of suggestion or the attraction that characterizes fashion are adequately explained by psychology. At the root of fashion are present two psychological but mutually contradictory desires – those of novelty and of conformity. The individual on the one hand wants to appear distinct and distinguished from the multitude, and for this he indulges in all sorts of eccentricities of dress, behavioural modes, conduct, mode of life, tc., while on the other hand, he resorts to the socially accepted and acceptable patterns of behaviour, dress, diet, etc., in order that he may not appear different from the others and may conform to the general standard of his own class. Fashion satisfies and satiates the demand of both these desires. E. Sapir, in his essay entitled Fashion published in the Encyclopaedia of Social Science writes, “The slight changes from the established norms in dress or other forms of behaviour seem for the moment to give the victory to the individual, while the fact that one’s fellow revolt in the same direction gives one a feeling of adventurous safety.” In this way, fashion is the contradiction of tradition but it itself gradually becomes the convention. Once it has become the common convention it is time replaced by another fashion and thus a change occurs and this chain progresses in this manner, continuing all the time. There is imitation in fashion but this imitation is not one of object but of style and even in imitation every individual has his own style. In this manner then whereas fashion introduces an element of conformity yet it simultaneously provides ample scope for individual nuances and idiosyncrasies.

Fashion and Imitation :



It is certain and indisputable that imitation has an important role in fashion. Fashion spreads in society only by means of the process of imitation but is worth thinking over as the problem of who imitates whom. Psychological analysis of this human phenomenon reveals that imitation takes place according to some well defined laws. These laws are the following :

1. Imitation of person on higher level :

It is generally recognized that everyone wants to attain to a higher social level. Thus, everyone is usually seen imitating the habits, decorations, conduct, etc., that are recognized as fashionable in the higher groups. No one imitates the fashions belonging to a lower social level than his own class. And if he does it, he loses his social prestige and renders himself open to ridicule.

2. Imitation of the rich :

In this way, then people usually imitate those richer than themselves. The middle class people want to copy the richer people and thus win admiration and respect of the society.

3. Imitation of the powerful :

Powerful people influence everyone. The power possessed by the powerful can be of any kind such as beauty, energy, intellect, wealth, office, etc. There is attraction in power. Hence, everyone imitates the powerful.

4. Imitation of the leaders :

In this way, the population possesses a tendency for imitating the leaders, this tendency being particularly evident, in the field of politics.

5. Imitation of the successful :

There is a saying, "nothing succeeds like success." Successful people win the admiration and respect of everyone. Hence, one often comes across people who are trying to imitate them in order to appear as successful as them.

6. Imitation of the citizen :

From the viewpoint of types of community life, the town presents behavioural and fashion patterns to the village. Fashions proceed from the big cities to the smaller towns and villages.



For example, the people living in Bombay and Delhi are believed to be the leaders in matters of fashion.

7. Imitation of the personalities :

Now-a-days, the films have a powerful influence upon the people in practically all countries. At almost all places it is the actors and actresses who determine fashions in matters of dress and hairstyles, etc. For example, this influence can be seen only too clearly on the younger generation in the towns of India.

Fashion and Custom :

Comparing custom and fashion, Kimball Young has written, "If we consider custom as a stable and persistent phase of social behaviour, fashion may be thought of as variation permissible within this general acceptance." In this way, fashions are more unstable than customs and they progress by causing change in the sphere of custom. For example, it is custom among the Indian women to wear a sari and blouse, such as the colour of the sari, the style of typing it, the design of its border, the arms of the blouse, the shape of its neck, its colour matching or differing from the colour of sari etc. That are determined by fashion and not by custom. In this way, then fashion tends to increase the variety in society whereas custom tends to hurry the society on its way to a static and homogeneous condition. Then, in addition to this, there are some spheres of life in which there are no customs and the only determinant of the individual's behaviours is the fashion that is prevailing. For example, art, the decoration of hair, conversatin, pronounciation, etc., are some spheres in which there are no definite customs that may guide conduct and for this reason the common individual imitates the fahsion in these fields. Further, the changes that take place in these spheres also occur comparatively faster than in other spheres. While, one the one hand, custom has the advantage of saving the individual a lot of mental exercise by obviating the necessity of thinking originally on every problem, it, on the other hand, laso satisfies the sense of self-expression of the individual. It is of course not inevitable that fashion has some utility. It is sometimes adopted by the individual in order that he may appear distinct from the crowd and may become the cynosure of all eyes. Distinguishing between custom and fashion, Tarde has written that fashion is the imitatin of the contemporaties, whereas custom is the imitation of the ancestors. Custom proceeds through the ages and the person who upholds custom and traditon acts as those who have acted before him. On the other hand, the fasaionable men and women do just what has not been done before but they resort to doing what is being done all around them in order to appear the most up-to-date and latest in their dress, mode of life, behaviour, etc. The rapid change that is discernible in the young men and women of India today, in matters of dress is the outcome not of custom but of fashion. In the words of Ross, "If we figure the life of a society as a flowing stream then we think of one (custom) as down



imitation, the other (fashion) as cross imitation.” This statement by Ross also points to the same fact that has been mentioned before, viz., that custom is the imitation of ancestors, their thoughts and activities, whereas fashion is the imitation of contemporary thoughts and actions.

Cycle of Fashion :

Describing the cycle of fashion, G. Simmel has written, “The very character of fashion demands that it should be exercised at one time only by a portion of the given group, the great majority being merely on the road to adopting it. As soon as an example has been universally adopted, that is, as soon as anything that was originally done only by a few has really come to be practised by all as is the case in certain portions of our apparel and in various forms of social conduct we no longer speak of fashion. As fashion spreads, it gradually goes to its doom.” In this way, fashion moves in cyclical order in society. For example, in ancient India, the women were accustomed to wearing very brief blouses that looked more like cholis. They covered only a small portion of the stomach and were also fairly low in the neck. Then, as almost everyone turned to this particular form of the blouse, people who were the very personification of fashion proceeded to wear more elaborate blouses. Following this, the fashionable women once more reverted to the brief blouse as a result of the influence of Western fashions. In a slow but steady process the blouses proceeded upwards from the stomach and downwards from the neck. It would be a matter of little surprise if they were soon to assume the form of the ancient cholis which are known for their brevity and economy of cloth. But when this fashion also becomes universally accepted it too will inevitably be outmoded and rejected and it would occasion little surprise if the women again wore the elaborate and sleeved blouse. Similar fashion cycles can also be seen in other fashions.

Fashion cycles are set in motion by the inability of the old fashions to satisfy the psychological elements. They do not possess the characteristic of self-exhibition and they are devoid of any attraction or special feature. Some people are often heard holding forth on the subject of fashion clothes and saying that they are so much in vogue that even the scum of the earth are wearing them, how can they be expected to wear them, as if one of the intentions of wearing the clothes is to distinguish them from what they are prone to call the scum of the earth. On the other hand, the people belonging to the lower strata of society start imitating the fashions that prevail in the higher strata. In the urban communities of India people of even the lowest strata of society like to be called mummy and papa by their children. What is the surprise if the people belonging to the higher strata of society prefer to be called by the old ancient names characteristic of Indian affection such as bapu and maan when these Westernized names become the custom ? Park is definitely right when he says that some of us can stay behind fashion but none of us can be ahead of fashion. And how can we do it > The moment one has the originality to suggest something new, it is immediately imitated by the

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others and it becomes the fashion. The only condition that is necessary for this to happen is that the idea should have the fundamental qualities such as self-expression, sexual attraction, uniqueness, etc. In this cycle of fashion those who set the pace are the people who occupy high posts or the rich men of society. Leaders, cinema actors and actresses are all included in this group. Kimball Young has written, “Reputability is essential to the adoption of a fad or fashion.” Respected people occupy the place of honour among those who set the direction of fashion. The main cause of this is that they are the ideals of the people, each in his own particular sphere. Hence, the people start imitating every aspect of their lives. In America it is the wife of the President and in England it is the Queen who guide women in their quest for the most fashionable and the fashions that they create very quickly take the shape of craze. In this cycle of fashion, the time that the lower strata of society takes to adopt the fashions of the higher strata is sufficient for the higher strata to change its fashion and once again a degree of distinction and in this manner the cycle of fashion continues to progress.

Fashion and Sexual attraction :

One main cause of why the cycle of fashion exists in group behaviour is that fashion is a means to sexual attraction. Almost every one is aware of the fact that with the introduction of co-education in India fashion has also rapidly changed. In the present age, no man or woman wants to be left behind the other in matters of ostentation. Most of the young men and women of the new generation want to prove themselves to be the most fashionable, modern and progressive by whatever means that they can employ or are available to them, and this is done with a view to impressing themselves upon individuals of the other sex.

Contemporary thoughts and ideas also influence fashion. Kimball Young has written, “Our contemporary ideology of the equality of the sexes is doubtless influencing the direction of fashion: Women attempt to prove their equality with them by adopting the manners, dress and habits of men.” One example of this fact is that the number of girls with their hair cut and the number of boys with long hair is now very much on the increase. Even the clothing of the boys and girls is marked by increasing similarity.

Motivation causes of fashion :

In analysing the motivation causes of fashion, Estelle Barr has mentioned the following as the important factors among them – (1) Sense of individuality, (2) Desire for conformity, (3) Desire for comfort, (4) Consciousness of one’s physical form, (5) Desire to be beautiful, (6) Desire to manifest the personality, (7) Desire to appear different and distinguished, (8) Desire to conceal physical deformities.



All the above mentioned factors can be seen in the group behaviour of both sexes in as much as it pertains to the nature of fashion. As Hurlock has written, “One of the chief values of clothing is that it enables people to advertise themselves in a way that will win the attention and admiration of others. Many who lack any ability and could not hope to rise above the ‘average’ on their merits alone, find a satisfactory outlet for this desire for recognition through the medium of dress. One needs only to glance at the men and women, boys and girls, in particular belonging to the new generation, around one in order to see the justification for this statement on the part of Hurlock.

As has been mentioned at an earlier juncture, fashion is of great importance for commerce even though fashions are not utilitarian and are sometimes even considered immoral. In 1929, Stewart Chase made a study of the amount of money spent on fashion by the citizens of The United State of America and came to the conclusion that one-third of all expenditure incurred by the people is an object of fashion. In 1938 also much the same sort of observation concerning expenditure of this nature was made by Elizabeth Hawes. This is not true of only a prosperous nation like America but even in a county like India where the economic development is nothing to be happy about, people spend a large part of their income on objects of fashion. In particular the tendency towards fashionability is most prominent in men and women of the middle class even though because of such action they have considerable difficulty in giving balanced look to their family budget Exploiting this tendency towards fashion, traders and manufactures are always engaged in making articles of fashion. Fashion is of particular importance in the field of dress and in this sphere it also changes very rapidly. To begin with cotton saris were fashionable, to be replaced by silk which in its turn gave way to nylon and now the people of upper strata have again returned to cotton saris while the middle classes have gone over to terylene saris. In this way, with the return to the cotton sari, the cycle has been completed.

Fashion and style :

Concerning style, Kimball Young has written, “The term style is often associated with fashion and fashion change, but it is a vague concept.” Style and fashion are mutually related in a profound relationship. But nevertheless it is important to understand the difference between them. Fashion, in accordance with custom, is a change in behaviour concurring to the contemporary tendency. Style is the term employed to indicate minor variations in this same fashion. For example, it is a matter of fashion whether one grows a beard or not. But the type of beard that one would grow-the French cut, the Muslim style or the type sported by the Rajputs – is a matter of style. Similarly, smoking cigarettes may be a matter of fashion but there can be many styles in this fashion. The well known Indian film personalities Dev Anand and Ashok Kumar are both seen addicted to cigarette smoking but the differences in the styles they employ in doing this are well known to their fans. One sees marked differences in the

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styles of cigarette smoking employed by the older and younger generations. The villain of the Indian screen Pran has his own way of making whorls with the cigarettes.

Fashion, Fad and Craze :

Two other words are related with fashion. They are fad and craze. Both of these words are related with the mobility and speed of fashion. When fashion becomes extremely fast and spreads almost as fast as a contagious disease it comes to be known as a craze. Fad is the stage between craze and fashion. Fad becomes a craze when the former becomes very mobile and extensive and comprehends a very large field. Once the field increases and the fashion attains some degree of constancy it becomes a fad. According to Kimbal Young, fad is related to insignificant things such as clothes, jewellery, etc., and mostly dogmatic people are apt to find interest in it. When the fad becomes a craze it spreads as much as does a contagious disease with the one difference that there is inoculation against it. Almost every individual is seen running after it, and in this too it differs from a contagious disease because people usually run away from it. Objects sell like cheese when they assume the form of craze. If it is an activity that becomes the craze then everybody does it. In this way, fad is more permanent than fashion while craze spreads faster than fad. People who want greater novelty discard a fashion as quickly as they adopt it.

The main factors that assist the fashion in progressing to the stage of fad are novelty, propaganda, advertisement, concurrence with time and interest of the objects, etc. In this way, effective propaganda can be utilised to change fashion into fad and fad into craze. Actually, craze is a form of fad. Fad is of two kinds – of the kind of religious group or of the craze kind. Fad of the religious kind is of a more permanent nature and people obey it with religious faith. On the other hand, craze spreads at an extremely rapid pace but at the same time it lacks permanence. Skilful traders and producers not only try to make their products acceptable to the fashion minded but also try to create a fad or craze for them. Many things rapidly assume the form of fad and craze in the fields of arts, specific and folk art. For example, in the near past rock and roll and become a craze. It is a dance form. Presently, the dance form rapidly assuming the form of craze it is only rarely that they succeed in reaching the stage of fad or craze. There are many causes of this reticence. In comparison with their Western counterparts, the Indians are more dogmatic, satisfied, introverted, religious and at the same time poor. The means of transport and communications are not as well developed in our country as they are in the West. The ideals of the Indian women are also different from the ideals of the Western women. In view of all these and some other causes, the mobility of fashion is not as great in India as it is in the Western societies. Nevertheless, this mobility is increasing along with the increase in the influence of Western culture and modern education. And the most important contribution to this mobility can be said to be proceeding from the cinema.

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