

Nudity and Culture

Gholam Ali Hadad Adel*

Abstract: *clothes and its types were always among the most significant issues of people life. This article is the first part of a discussion on hijab. In this article, this very important issue is under consideration to provide us with answers of the following questions: Why does man wear clothes?, What is the relation between a person's style of dress and his mental traits?,... ; the main focus of this article is on the relationship between culture and clothes and especially on Western clothes and western culture.*

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* Professor of Tehran University

**Translator: Vida Rasoul Zade

Wearing clothes is a human characteristic and value; a phenomenon as old as human history, and spread as wide as today's geographic area. This phenomenon is connected to human's different personal and social characteristics and qualities; it can be studied from different viewpoints including psychology, morality, economy, sociology, religion, law, history, and geography. To find answers to the questions under study, below investigations may be carried out:

- Why does man wear clothes?
- What is the relation between a person's style of dress and his mental traits?
- What is the relation between financial situation and economic class of a person and his style of dressed?
- What kind of clothes different social groups in a society put on?
- What different religions have told about clothes?
- What rules have been stipulated in civil laws regarding peoples' wear?
- What changes have taken place in different nations' clothing during the history and under which incentives such changes have been made?
- What are the differences in people's clothing in different parts of the world, under different regional condition?

It is clear that finding an answer to any of these questions, and numerous similar questions, need a long time and detailed discussions. Researchers, in different fields, have made investigations and speculations, and have written many books on this subject.

According to all of the investigations and studies, it has become obvious that wearing clothes meets, at least, three of human's basic needs:

Clothes protect man from heat and other undesirable climate condition.

By hiding nakedness man shows respect for and complies with moral values;

And finally clothes give good looking, dignity, and value to people.

In one viewpoint man's clothes can be compared to his home. In the first place man makes house to protect himself from heat, and shelter from dangers; In addition, it is a safe place for him to protect his personal properties and wealth. Finally home is a place, to satisfy his beauty loving instinct, applying his own taste. Clothes, therefore, can be taken to mean as one's "home", or, better to say, one's "first home". Clothes is one's primary house, as everyone lives in his clothes first, and then, in his house.

As said before, wearing clothes is rooted in the need to be protected, become dressed, decent and good-looking. However, we are not to believe that all of the existing differences and varieties in dressing style of different societies, in different times, could be explained by taking into account only above three points.

If we look at various social groups, we will notice that women, men, and children get dressed in different ways; rural dressing style is different from urban style. The clothes that housewives in the cities put on are different from the clothes of the employed ones. Owners of different businesses get dressed suitable and proper to their professions.

Other social classes, again, wear different clothes according to their economic and income levels. Regional condition of each region, also, affects dressing style of its people.

Normally, there are instructions regarding the way of getting dressed in different religions, as there are instructions in Islam, which is called "Hijab" in our today's society.

In the present article we only mention different factors effecting the style, size, and type of clothe. We do not intend to study the effects in detail. We do not even mean to discuss quality and restrictions on the way of getting dressed from Islamic viewpoint.

What is mainly intended and emphasized in this article is the "relation between clothes and culture". Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that relation of clothes to the other numerous factors are ignored or disbelieved. The reason that other subjects are not discussed is that we suppose that relation between culture and clothes comes along with the other social, regional, economic and historical factors. In other words, the effect of culture on clothing is more important and common than other issues, and believe that all the changes made by the factors, other than culture, are totally dependent on the relation between culture and clothes and are included in the frame of cultural restrictions.

Relation between Clothes and Culture

We all know what the meaning of clothes is and so there is no need to give a new definition; but culture needs to be explained; it means that we need to clarify what we mean by "culture".

In our opinion, and according to our description, culture means the most common and general perception and insight a society shows into the world. This insight and perception is the same meaning that this society takes for the life and human. It includes all values and ways of a person or society.

In this article, in order to give more clarification, we have occasionally used "view" as a synonym for "culture".

We believe that the view (culture) of every nation has a very strong effect on the profile and quality of the marked and noticeable aspects of their lives.

The world that people make and in which they live, is greatly influenced by their view (culture). Different societies have certain styles in building towns and houses, wearing clothes, etc, depending on the insight they have into the world, the attitude they have towards life, and the principles they believe are ruling the world. In other words, culture of a nation is shown in different aspects of their lives including industry, economy, management, architecture, and art; and it is considered the soul running in the civilization of that nation.

Each of these aspects is the mirror in which the face of that ruling soul and common culture of that society can be seen.

The relation between culture and clothes is so deep that when a foreigner enters a place he can be recognized by the way he is dressed. It seems that people speak to each other by their clothes. Every body introduces himself by his clothes and says: "Who I am, where I came from, and to which culture and world I do belong."

The subject under question is that the differences of clothing of people of different societies result from cultures of

nations besides geographic, regional, social, economic and professional factors.

Dressing style of a person depends on his view towards the world, his judgment of himself, his understanding of his fate and his happiness.

I mean, even in a community, like the current western communities, in which religion is kept silent towards dressing style of people, and where interests of the society have not set rules on the subject, there are still some principles and standards on the qualities of people's clothing and there are reasons for the way people get dressed; likewise, clothing style and related changes are not unintended and nor made by chance. It does not depend on different tastes of different people either.

Basically, we do not see any secular, spiritual or social phenomenon could be accidental, by chance , or free from reason; therefore, we are convinced that even if clothing style in the western countries is not determined and controlled by religion or law, it should not be assumed that people are free to choose and decide their clothing styles and that there is no principle and standard to have control over it.

Man's clothes conform first to the culture of his society, and then to his own taste. Today's western society speaks to us under the guise it has on. If we listen to this speech, we will hear the voice of the western culture and philosophy.

The Proof of the Claim

This claim should be proved. What is the claim? Let's repeat one more time:

In every community, the style and quality of people's clothes, in addition to the regional, social, and economic conditions of that society, strictly follow the dominant culture view and values of the community.

In order to prove this claim, let us have a look at the world around us, and think about two parts of the world; one is the West world that is characterized by developed sciences, technologies, and colonization. And the other part which is inheritor of the ancient civilization and culture, that is attacked by and lost against the western culture. Islamic countries,

India, large parts of Africa, East South Asia, and the American natives are unfortunately among those countries that are going to lose their spiritual heritage under the boots of western civilization.

There are, of course, some people in these countries, who are not totally influenced by the western culture, and if you look at clothing of such groups, you will notice that despite the differences in style, color and size, they have something in common; they are all long, loose and not close-fitting. Most of them are accompanied by a head cover like a hat or turban. There are many differences between their clothes including type of material, color, the cut and number of pieces in each suit and many other differences in quality; however, in spite of all the said differences which are dependant on regional, social, and economical condition, the said common grounds are clear and noticeable. This geographical characteristic and behavior can be completed by a historical investigation. If you pay a visit to clothing museums in European countries, you will notice that clothes of European nations, living in middle ages

and even later, were mostly similar to clothes of today's nations of the countries in which the western patterns are not followed.

Relation between the Western Culture and Western Clothes

Now it is time to question what relation is there between the tight and short dresses of today's western communities, and the western culture.

As said before, wearing clothes is stipulated by human moral values, and has a direct connection with the meaning and definition of human in different civilizations and cultures.

What is human according to the western culture and what position the human holds in a culture which is basically secular?

It is more than four centuries that God is disappeared from the life stage, and is secluded Himself to the church. Spirituality has crept to the margin of life and western civilization and culture has been formed into an earthy and secular structure. History of the last four centuries in the West is history of denial of the high and spiritual values. Western civilization and culture is presenting a life in which spirituality and sacredness has no value, and where human is no longer holder of "divine spirit" who can symbolize God on the earth. since representing the isolated and secluded God, Who has lost His position in the Western culture, is no longer considered to be respectable and important. In such a culture, there is no fundamental and existential difference between human and animal. Every creature has its own characteristics; lion is savage, a peacock is beautiful, elephant is strong, and human is intelligent. The last one, among the children of nature, is more

intelligent than the others. He has got access to science and technology by means of which has become governor of the nature. Yet there is no difference between his destiny and other animals. Human, like other animals, is to live a few years in the nature and then will leave the earth. This is the leading belief in recent western culture; a culture in which the facts and ideas are to be introduced only by the experimental scientists. Some of those scientists have progressively claimed, "We would not approve existence of God unless we see and examine Him by ourselves!"

There have, of course, been some weak courses of spiritual thoughts beside the said dominant and leading beliefs. There have been scholars and writers who used to be different. However, the West is now living in a dark night with no God, and those scattered scholars are like dim stars, unable to light up the dark night, despite the efforts they make. They are not the ones who had built and are building the west; it is the system in which nature is the base and origin. Any value beyond material is considered to be non scientific, imaginative, and idealistic.

What man can do in such a culture, in which there is no life expecting him after death? And there is no heavens inviting him? The short life between birth and death is the only opportunity he has for "existing"; so he has to get scores, as much as possible, before the end of competition, when death arrives; he has to benefit from all the things that are enjoyable in this world as much as he can.

Everything in such a culture is measured by the joy it provides to man, who is basically a physical being and "man's body" is one of those things that gives a great joy to him.

This cultural transition that took place at the time of Renaissance has separated man from his divine and spiritual values, and is reflected in the western humanistic values. Following Renaissance, a new style has been created in the European art and literature, in which "human" was the center and basis of everything. Nevertheless, it was not the human who had heavenly spirit within; it was a totally earthy and worldly human. This style that had been presented mainly in literature and art works of this period was explained as a special style called "Humanism".

Sculpture art of this period described man as a fully somatic and worldly creature, and dealt only with human "body". That is why artists of Renaissance age used to produce nude statues which intended to imply that human is only a body, and an artist is to pay attention only to his body. "David" statue made by Michelangelo is a famous example of the new style of art works. This sculpture work is a statue of a young and handsome man that was completely. The artist carved and shaped not only muscles of his shoulder, chest and limbs but also his sexual organ in detail. This statue is a marked symbol of transition in European culture and shows that what culture and attitude influenced the artists' mind after the Renaissance.

In the painting arts, too, there is a noticeable difference between the works performed before and after Renaissance.

The best way of understanding the differences between the two old and new viewpoints is to compare the pictures of Holy Mary that painters have drawn according to their imaginations. The pictures that were drawn before Renaissance portrayed a woman who doesn't look like ordinary women and there was a divine and heavenly modesty in her face; painters

tried hard not to draw her face similar to the women they normally met around them; and tried to give her a spiritual beauty. Whereas, painters of Renaissance age and after that brought down Holy Mary to the earth and chose their models to pose as Mary out of ordinary beautiful women in the streets

That holy modesty is no longer seen in the face of the Mary that has become worldly and when a person looks at the picture, he stares only at the beauty of the face unable to detect the spiritual values. In the age when human's value is measured by his appearance, even Mary's value depends on her superficial beauty.

Why shouldn't human meet all his somatic and physical instinctive needs? What is going to restrict him? What truly matters in his life and his community beyond the physical world and his body?

Basically human is a free being and if the social life doesn't limit his freedom, there is nothing else in the world to control this unlimited liberty. Human is nothing but the "body"; and this "body" is one of his most important pleasure fortunes; he should enjoy all the pleasures of the life including this one during the short and limited opportunity he has before he/she dies.

That is why sexual attraction became greatly concerned and woman has become a commodity, whose value is measured by the pleasure and delight she gives to men. She is only a "body", and her value relies on quality of her body. If in such a culture and community she can not show her "body" what will be left for her? If she is not watched what is her worth? Her existence depends her being watched and valued as a commodity. Rene Decartes said about four hundred years ago

"I think, therefore I exist". "Women in the today's western societies have to say "they look at me, therefore I exist!!" Woman is only a "body" and man is all "eyes" against woman. Woman is only a commodity who is constantly weighed and valued by men's eye!

In such a culture in which human is so poor and free from spirituality; where human is only body, what could be the style of the clothes. Obviously, in such community clothe is a means of beautification and not a means of protection. In such an environment where woman's personality is judged by her physical appearance, her clothes must be tight to reveal her physical qualities; her clothes should also be short not to cover most of her body! She wears clothes to mould some part of her body, and to frame some other parts! What determines clothing style is sexual psychology. In fact fashion designers are constantly adjusting appropriate proportion of nudity and dressing in order to create the utmost attraction and charm in women, and the maximum desire in the opposite sex.

It is not only women clothes that follow relation between "eye and body", but also men clothes follows this relation.

The fact that the western typical styles of men's suits we are all wearing today are so tight is not unintended. It is also part of the western values which results from the meaning of sexology in the west. This is the desire to show the body which has made even men's clothes so tight and close-fitting.