

A Critical Study on Why did people, 'accustomed to nakedness', begin to cover or decorate their bodies?

Nidhi Suhag¹, Dr. Neeraj Rawat Sharma²

¹Assistant Professor, Apeejay Stya University

²Assistant Professor, Banasthali Vidyapith

Abstract:

Evidence of the very first clothing is mostly indirect. Almost all of what we know about early clothes is based on conjecture and assumption. It is impossible to say when humans first started wearing garments. Based on the cave drawings, carved figures and other such evidences including remnants and traces of very early cloths, the archeologists suggested that humans may have begun wearing clothing between 100,000 to 500,000 years ago. Neanderthal man, who lived between 200,000 B.C.E. to 30,000 B.C.E., learnt to use the hides of the animals they hunted to keep themselves warm and dry, referred as the first known person to fabricate clothing. It's also possible that clothes were designed for other functions at first, such as adornment, worship, or prestige, and were later discovered to be useful as well. This paper includes the investigation about need and psychology behind the origin of clothing through some fundamental theories of clothing and their applications to perform very specific functions. This research aims to reveal fashion concepts, as well as the path from prehistoric man's clothing demands to present fashion trends. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for those who are keen to learn fashion by starting a discussion on why people wear clothes so that the readers/ fashion graduates and professionals can recognize the motivations behind the desires of individuals in order to design and construct clothes in creative ways to maximize wearer's satisfaction level.

Keywords: Clothing, Fashion, Culture, Identity, Neanderthal man, Cro-Magnon man, Pre- Historic Period.

Technical Definitions:

- **Clothing:** The word clothing refers to all items of apparel and adornment.
- **Utilitarian needs:** The needs which focuses on the function performed by any piece of clothing in terms of comfort, protection, durability etc.
- **Hedonic needs:** Such needs are subjective and involve emotional responses like consumers may rely on a product to meet their needs for excitement, self-confidence, fantasy, and so on.

Introduction:

Who doesn't want to know what life was like before the 19th and 20th centuries' technical advances! Humans are naturally inquisitive, and we want to know who our predecessors were and how they lived, what they ate, and what they wore. Some of those questions appear to have been answered by

archaeologists and researchers. Clothing was once seen to be a means of protection from harsh weather, animals, and bug bites, stings, and an expression of modesty. (Aishwariya, 2018) In addition to physical conditions clothing reflects societal factors such as spiritual beliefs, aesthetics and status of the wearer and society. (STATESMAN, 2001)

Research Methodology:

This study is based on primary sources such as market visits, workplace, social gatherings, and so on, as well as secondary sources such as research journals, doctoral/dissertation theses, books, newspaper articles, blogs, and so on. To obtain detailed information about this subject, an extensive literature review was conducted. Field observations & personal views have been used to craft primary data.

Objectives:

The study's objectives are as follows:

- Give an overview of the historical basis of clothing.
- To gain a fundamental grasp of the diverse human needs and demands that led to the creation of clothes.
- To explain how clothing helps to meet psychological, personal, social needs and desires of humans.
- To raise understanding of the various perspectives that must be considered while designing cloths.
- To determine whether the notion of necessities in current society remains the same or not.

Literature Review:

Clothing evolved when Neanderthals learnt how to shield themselves from adverse climatic circumstances by using thick, hairy hides from animals and vegetable fibres in form of a tunic. Around 40,000 years ago Cro-Magnon man (considered as the next stage in human development) made advances in Neanderthal clothing by covering the body, legs, head, and feet. Furthermore, the needle composed of animal bone was one of the most notable Cro-Magnon inventions. (anonymous, 2022) During the Neolithic Era, around 8000 BC, people began to weave fabric. Fragments of flax fibres discovered in Switzerland provide evidence of early weaving. Fabric was formerly made by beating sheets of bark into a soft, flexible fabric in various cultures. Agriculture progressed, resulting in the domestication of fibre plants such as cotton, hemp, and flax. According to the oldest historical documents, Prehistoric humans employed local supplies such as animal skins, leaves, twigs, and vegetable dyes to make garments, which are practiced even today, in diverse tribal societies across the globe. (Aishwariya, 2018)

Theory on Origin of Clothing

Clothing does plenty more than just to cover our bodies. Clothing has long been associated with people's own abilities, artistic expression, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and aesthetics; it exhibits individual rank/status; denote distinction within a group. The cause why humans first started to wear apparel or why they wear clothing nowadays is unsure. Anthropologists and scientists proposed hypotheses on the Origin of Clothing based on historical data found in caves and valleys, which can also be viewed as the fundamental motivation for clothing are discussed below. (Aishwariya, 2018) (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014)

1. Theory of Protection

It is also known as ‘Climate Theory’, and it proposes that humans evolved clothing to adapt to the harsh climatic conditions they encountered, to serve specific functions, such as animal skin was used for heat and insulation; tied around the feet for warmth and comfort on long hikes while leaves or barks were used to hide the genital sex organs.(Aishwariya, 2018) Furthermore, clothing has been worn since ancient times to bring good luck, fend off the evil eye, and protect against bad spirits. For example, Cowry shells, which resembled a woman's genital organs, were used in clothing and accessories to shield women from the curse of sterility, as it was regarded as the greatest fear in ancient times. Similar belief has led men to wear amulets, rings, and other adornments as good luck charms.(Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014) (Wickramarachchi)

2. Theory of Modesty

This theory is based on the tale of Adam and Eve and the fig leaf that is why often referred as ‘Shame Theory’ or ‘Fig Leaf Theory’ or ‘Biblical Theory’. This specifies the right way to cover the body for social recognition as per to the code of decency and moral values of one’s respective society. For example, in today's educated society, going without clothes is considered impolite. (Wickramarachchi) Although, modesty, or a feeling of shame associated with an exposed body part, is not universal. As a result, the concept of modesty is contentious in many ways, because what is covered or kept exposed varies among cultures. Even within a single culture, differences emerge based on age, gender, subcultural groupings, place, event, and situational considerations. The examples below refute the notion that shame is always associated with a lack of clothing.

- Botocudo and Suyu tribal women wear wooden plugs in their earlobes and lower lip and are extremely ashamed if they are seen without their discs rather than seen naked.
- Women on the island of Yap in the South Pacific have a strong modesty custom which states that the thighs must never be revealed although the breast can be.
- Americans and Europeans find nudity in art repugnant, but they are uncomfortable with the concept of the sexes bathing together. For example, at schools and colleges, students shower together after physical education sessions that are separated by gender. In Japan, men and women bathe together, yet naked art is considered insulting. For example: Jjimjilbang public baths in Korea.



Figure 1: Tribal Women with wooden plugs



Figure 2: Yap Tribal Women

- It is embarrassing to be spotted eating among Australian tribes, however there is nothing wrong with seeming naked.
- Exposure from ankle to shoulder was originally deemed sinful in Western culture, but later on it became socially acceptable for an unmarried woman to show her breasts or any other portion of her body. (Aishwariya, 2018)
- If someone witnessed Mohammedan women bathing in various parts of Africa, they would swiftly cover their faces rather than their bodies.
- Only men wore the veil among the Tuareg tribe in Southern Algeria, and they wore it almost all the time at home, travelling, eating, and sleeping as it was considered impolite for a man to reveal his mouth, especially in front of his own people.



Figure 3: Tuareg tribe men in Southern Algeria

It is clear from the abovementioned examples that modesty and nakedness depend on different beliefs of people. Another reason to reject the concept is because it is clear that modesty is a culturally induced habit that varies depending on the time and place. Eg: A three-year-old baby is not embarrassed to undress in front of the house and visit a neighbor because the sense of modesty is absolutely absent in children. Another example is 1920's swimsuits which differ greatly from today's, in terms of acceptable exposure. Several studies have proven that modesty is not a powerful motivator in clothing behavior. Many people in today's society, nevertheless, wear clothes for modesty; nonetheless, this is probably not the most essential reason, and it cannot account for the genesis of cloths.

3. Theory of Immodesty

The basic idea of clothing, according to this theory, is attraction seeking, hence, termed as 'Sexual Attraction Theory' (named by Westmark & Havelock Ellis, 1921, as they considered *Dress Is A Powerful Sexual Tool*). According to the immodesty theory, cloths were employed to draw attention to the body parts that were covered. Women continue to conceal their bodies to varying degrees in order to appear attractive. Many articles of clothing appear to be designed primarily to draw attention to body parts, such as short skirts, pants, narrow skirts with lengthy slits, tight clothes, bare backs, shoulders, low necklines, textured stockings, and pointed shirt tails, and so on. (Das, 2022)



Figure 4: Gigi Hadid in Versace swirled cut- out dress

4. Theory of Adornment

It is often known as ‘Decoration Theory’. This theory logically claims that humans have been preoccupied with body adornment from ancient times in order to look appealing and lend beauty for many reasons such as social standing, self-beautification, self-image, sexual attraction, indicator of wealth, age, and profession. Body adornment is a significant cultural activity that involves carrying everything that is completely beyond the basic needs. Many of these practices can still be seen, in similar or a modified version in our own societies. Leaves, sea shells, wood, precious stones, dried nuts, and animal parts such as claws, hooves, fur, feathers, bone, and teeth were worn as accessories in early societies, believed to display the wearer's strength and imbue them with the traits of that creature. (Aishwariya, 2018) (Wickramarachchi) (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014) For example:

- The lion's tail and claws were an essential element of the Pharaoh's regalia in Egypt, representing bravery, energy, and shrewdness. (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014)
- Braves among American Indians wear one or two feathers in their hair whereas chiefs wear an ornate headpiece made up of several gorgeous feathers. (Aishwariya, 2018)
- In some African tribes, a woman's beauty is evaluated by how fat she is, while Americans encourage females to maintain a healthy weight.



Figure 5: Braves among American Indians wearing war bonnets



Figure 6: Young girl in Mawritania tribe, force-fed a diet of up to 16,000 calories/ day

- Some African tribe believes that the ideal wife should be shiny, thus the women apply fat to achieve this.
- A woman is considered beautiful in the Mursi tribe if she wears a lip plate and a set of cow horns atop her head; the more decorative her appearance, the higher her standing.

- A piece of bone, wood, or stone run through a hole in the lips, nose, or ears had been worn by people all over the world across numerous civilizations. Similarly, the leader used to wear a necklace made of teeth, bone, or polished stone, as well as an animal skin waist belt, during the battle.



Figure 7: A still from the film *Apocalypse Now*



Figure 8: A warrior in Guinea wearing a nose bone



Figure 9: Mursi woman

The concept of beautification has been a varied factor in many communities and historical periods. This is accomplished through four distinct methods: Body modification, scarification, tattooing, painting and body piercing.

i. Body modification:

Historical evidences show that the first method of clothing was to alter one's bodily structure. This was seen to be a way of beautifying oneself and was a fairly prevalent practise among the tribal society. Here are several examples:

- The Kichepo women of Sudan wear enormous circular lip plates as a custom.
- Changing the shape of a neonate's fragile cranium by compressing it between two wood panels, resulting in a long oval face. This skull deformation was created by tying a cloth around the head of the baby right from birth, while the cranial bone is still soft.



Figure 10: African Women with Their Traditional Lip Plates, Early 20th Century



Figure 11: Head binding tradition used by the Mayan people Century

- The Chinese had a well-known body alteration method known as 'foot binding', which is now illegal. This ancient rite is regarded as the pinnacle of feminine beauty and sexuality. The female infant's foot is bound securely, resulting in a fabricated artificial heel known as 'lotus foot'. (Aishwariya, 2018)
- The Paduang tribe, also known as Kayans, has a practise of using a series of metal rings to artificially lengthen the necks of girls and women. (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014)



Figure 12: Foot binding tradition of Chinese people



Figure 13: Giraffe neck women, Kayan Tribe

- Sawing the teeth down to sharpen them or chiseling them into pointed or altered shapes is thought to be a sign of beauty in rural communities throughout the Pacific, Asiatic, African, and South and Central Americas.
- Teeth blackening is a traditional practise in tribal areas of Southeast Asia Islands/Mainland, South Africa, Peru, Ecuador, and Morocco, and it occurs around adolescence to welcome the young into adulthood.
- Japanese practice “Ohagura”, process for tooth blackening as it was thought to improve sex appeal as well as keep teeth healthy.
- In ancient Mayan times, the upper class drilled holes in their teeth to fill with gemstones as a symbol of beauty and class; that symbolic status symbol is still prevalent today



Figure 14: Forms of Teeth modification

ii. Body scarification

Scarification is used in several African societies to indicate status and tribe identify. Extensive incisions in the form of a cutting edge are formed in certain areas of a person's body during this process with the help of knife blade made of bone, thorn, flint, and other fine-pointed stones. Natural skin irritants are rubbed into the skin, resulting in distinctive scars and raised pattern-like patterns on the face and body. (Aishwariya, 2018) (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014)

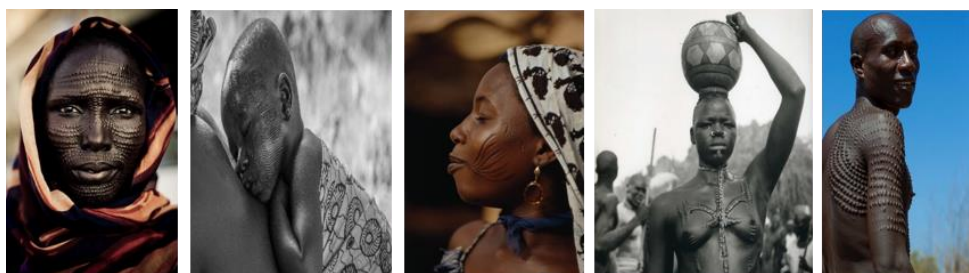


Figure 15: Africans Body Scarification

iii. Body tattooing

Body Tattooing has been practiced since the Neolithic era, and it entails a permanent change in body colour caused by the introduction of an indelible dye into the pierced skin. Mummified bodies have revealed evidence of the art and its intricate designs. It involves a permanent change in the body's base colour, which leaves a permanent mark on the skin. South Sea Islanders, Burmese, Chinese, and Japanese tattoo artists who specialize in generating various sophisticated and elaborate tattoo patterns are big fans of the culture. Following were the reasons behind tattoo art:

- It began as a symbol of barbaric culture, displaying portraits of folk heroes.
- Greeks used to get their prisoners tattooed as a form of punishment. (Aishwariya, 2018)
- The Thracians tattooed themselves to show rank.
- Women's foreheads in some African tribes were tattooed so that if abducted by rivals, she could be sent back to her own tribe. Whereas, tattoos on men served the same purpose as military uniform by making them identifiable by their own tribe.
- Maoris in New Zealand have tattoos on their faces, symbolizing distinction and esteem.

Some Indian tribes tattoo their bodies as well. Tattooing can be used as a form of personal ornamentation or to signify one's relationship / loyalty to a group in modern society. Eg: The Japanese Yakuza have a tattooing history with symbolic meaning. Tattooing is popular in western society, especially among sailors and biker groups. Today, tattoos are very common among youngsters around the globe. (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014)



Figure 16: Barbarian Tattoo; Traditional Māori's Face tattoo; Facial Tattoo in Africans



Figure 17: New Zealand journalist who anchors primetime news; New Zealand's foreign minister

iv. Body painting

This was the most common type of body decoration. Clay, wood powder, oil, and coloured pigments from plant parts, such as white, red, and yellow ochre, were used to paint or colour with. On special occasions, certain tribes painted their bodies with blood.



Figure 18: "Geisba" girl

- Girls from Congolese communities grease themselves all over and dust themselves with red coloured cam wood to appear more appealing
- Noble ladies of various ancient Chinese dynasties, as well as Japanese "Geisha" girls, used a heavy face make-up of rice and white lead powder. Covering with rose petals in the center of the cheeks and lower lip is an imitation of a small mouth that follows, which is very beautiful.
- Australian savages use white, red, and yellow dots on his face on a regular basis and all over his body on special occasions.
- The Adamese of the Andaman Islands paint their bodies pale green during mourning as a symbol of the occasion. (Aishwariya, 2018) (Fashion Studies Class–XII, 2014)
- A young man from Sudan's Nuba Mountains was allowed to paint himself red and white at the age of eight, but he couldn't wear yellow until he was a little older, and he couldn't use black until he was initiated into the group. Between puberty and their first pregnancy, young Nuba Mountain women coated their bodies with oil and red ocher, a reddish type of clay.
- Ethiopians also used body painting to commemorate each stage of life, from childhood to old age



Figure 19: Forms of body paints in African and Australian tribes

v. Body piercing

Body piercings have a fascinating history spanning thousands of years and affecting nearly every continent. Many historical records show nostril and various ear piercings as the most common types of body piercings. Many different cultures, including Ancient Rome and Ancient India, incorporated nipple and genital piercings into their tribal practices. There have been numerous instances of body piercings throughout history for a variety of reasons. Piercings have been used in many cultures to indicate tribal or clan affiliation, wealth, status, or social standing, to enhance attractiveness, to appear fierce to enemies, one's spiritual inclinations, or even to symbolically represent a rite of passage. It is even an essential body modification for many of the world's tribes.

- Piercings were frequently used by women to celebrate their fertility and status. In India, nose piercings were frequently performed just before a wedding to commemorate the woman's transition into womanhood.
- Aztecs and Mayans would also wear lip labrets made of Jade and Gold, intricately carved into mythical or religious figures, which were regarded as highly attractive and were thought to enhance sexuality.

- The Brahmin and Chhetri people of Nepal have a tradition of nose piercing those dates back to the 10th century and is mandatory for all female tribe members, representing prosperity and innocence.
- Women in the Aleutian Islands, for example, used to wear sea lion whiskers as earrings. This was regarded as a symbol of marrying a good hunter.
- Septum piercings were observed in warrior cultures in both New Guinea and Solomon Island. Warriors in these cultures would wear tusks through the septum to appear more intimidating and fiercer to enemies.
- A more extreme form of piercing marks a young woman's transition into adulthood among the modern-day Mursi people of Africa. The function of this piercing is frequently thought to be dependent on a woman's father's wealth and how much he is willing to present as a wedding gift (or bride price) to a future son-in-law.



Figure 20: Forms of Septum Piercing



Figure 21: Traditional piercing in India & Nepal

5. Theory of Combined Need

It implies that clothes arose as a result of a convergence of needs such as safety, protection, self-esteem, self-actualization, and belongingness. (2018) (Aishwarya) Clothing is an intricate but intriguing aspect of everyone's life. It boosts our self-esteem and allows us to express ourselves. Everyone has basic human requirements. Some of these demands are met by clothing. In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow created a hierarchy of requirements and proposed that humans go through a series of stages in order to meet their needs. The first need is physiological, the second is safety, the third is belonging, the fourth is esteem, and the last need is self-actualization, according to Maslow.

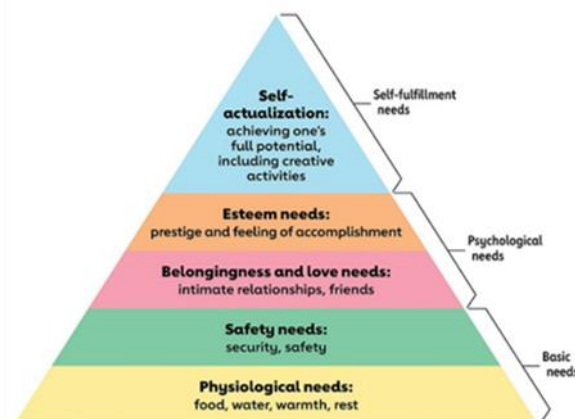


Figure 22: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

For example, if we apply this concept to clothing, we can see that clothing can satisfy the desire for safety by keeping the wearer warm, dry, or protected from insects. However, when people attempt to fit in and feel good about themselves, the role of clothing can move from clothing to fashion. Maslow's hierarchy is a useful tool for organizing clothing and analyzing various motivations. Following are the functions which Maslow Hierarchy performs:

- **Physiological/ Safety needs** (shelter, security, protection): The primary motivation for clothing, according to this theory, has always been to protect oneself from physical and psychological (moral) hazards, where physical danger refers to weather, accidents in dangerous occupations, human or animal enemies and psychological dangers refers to indecency and immodesty, sexual assault, war etc.

Eg: One needs cloths and shoes _Utilitarian clothing (Mass Produced Fashion) (Leghaei)

- **Belongingness needs_ Social** (Love, friendship, acceptance by others): Some cultures or groups place strict restrictions on what people can and cannot wear, such as corporate, school, fraternity, or sorority dress codes (belonging). Some people may disagree. Some groups of people, such as punks, motorcycle clubs, or cowboys, may not have rigorous dress codes, but they do have a distinct look that makes them stand out; in order to belong, one must dress like them.

Eg: One's friends like his/her shoes & cloths. (Ready -to- Wear Fashion & High-End Retail Fashion)

- **Self- Esteem needs** (prestige, status, accomplishments): This form of decoration is used to display the wearer's strength, courage, or competence. When the hunter hunts the prey, he frequently wears the skin, teeth, or claws to show off to his tribe. Another example is war medals, merit badges, and so on. Some people choose clothing because it makes them feel good about themselves or provides them with status (esteem), such as wearing gold or the latest high-end fashion.

Eg: One feels gear wearing an evening gown (Couture) while other loves buying Versace (Haute Couture)

- **Self-actualization** (self-fulfillment, enriching experiences): Clothing also acts as a means of identifying and distinguishing people in a variety of ways. This level of need clearly states that "My clothing is an indication of who I am." It must be considered that the needs of different customer groups may differ depending on the type of clothes. Clothing symbolization can reveal the wearer's social rank, occupation, religion, and formal and informal group memberships. For example, some people may desire to exhibit their uniqueness and potential by developing appearances that mirror their inner-being (actualization).

Eg: To be more productive, many successful people wear the same outfit every day. Steve Jobs was the most famous example, as he wore his signature black turtleneck with jeans and sneakers every day. (Outfit Formula)

Conclusion:

The study as a whole reveal that clothing is the result of a complex set of reasons, all of which are interrelated and emerged from various physical, psychological, and social factors. All of these theories and the motivations behind them argue that humans have an insatiable drive to make their bodies more beautiful/to look attractive as a whole, than nature designed. The hypotheses concerning the origins of clothes, whether modesty, immodesty, adornment, or protection, are still relevant today while people

constantly driven by the same or different motivation. The factor of adornment alone has undergone numerous changes. Lipstick and eyeshadow belong into the same category. Piercing the ears, plucking the brows, getting plastic surgery, buzz cut hairstyle, dreadlock and other cosmetic procedures are examples of attempts at ornamentation. Unlike the past, most people today have the liberty to make choices which include braiding their hair, piercing various parts of their body, and wearing specific set of clothing. Celebrities in today's culture get specially made teeth plates, grills, or permanently modifying the teeth to incorporate diamonds and gems to signify their wealth and status. Scarification is changing in Africa as a result of the shame experienced. Furthermore, with the introduction of identification cards, the need for scarification has decreased. The origins of ornamentation, modesty, and immodesty remain, but the meanings behind the forms have altered over time including American views of suntanned skin have changed considerably over the last century. In Victorian America pale complexion was a symbol of prosperity, indoor enjoyment and relaxation at a time when many people still earned a living by laboring outside. However, by the late twentieth century, the majority of individuals were working indoors. As a result, tanned skin became a sign of well-being, a sign that you have time and money to relax at the pool, play golf or tennis or travel to the tropical destinations. Finally, it can be seen that mankind has gone through many painful stages to get at this modest state. Nowadays, customers like to purchase things that satisfy both utilitarian and hedonic needs, such as purchasing a mink coat to project a luxurious image while also providing warmth on chilly winter days. Finally, we can say that over the centuries, cultures have adopted physically uncomfortable, painful, and even experimental trends in the pursuit of societal acceptance, personal self-expression, and vanity, resulting in the advanced society we live in today.

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