Standard VI
Action Research Project Topic for 2023–2024

Fashion and Environment

Introduction

Imagine the clothes we buy all year round. From the ones we need every day to the ones we only wear occasionally. Think about all the accessories we buy to go with these clothes. How often do we use them? Do we have cupboards and drawers full of things we haven't used for a long time? Also, what about the beauty products we use? What are they made from? What happens to the clothes, belts, and earrings we discard? How are they made, and do they harm the environment?

Octogenarians or nonagenarians, seniors belonging to a much older generation, who wore (or still do) *dhotis* or nine yard sarees, were never known to wear a special attire while on vacation or to ride a horse. Neither did they have the need to purchase new clothes for every occasion nor did they desire special footwear for specific occasions. Yet we notice that they seemed most comfortable and confident about the way they carried their apparel. What could be the reason for this confidence? Is it because they did not get carried away by what we call 'fashion'? We, on the other hand, are 'image conscious' and feel a strong urge to keep abreast with the changing times and be trendy. Though we may hesitate at times, we often pause and contemplate if we should follow the latest trends. Are we blindly 'sale crazy' or out to chase 'affordable fashion'? Does this habit of keeping up with the trend, really make us happy? Or are we actually stressed by it? Does it affect our carbon footprint? It is about time we gave this a serious thought…

What is Fashion?

According to the definition, fashion is the style in clothes, beauty products, accessories, and so on, especially the most recent or most admired. The word 'fashion' is used by professionals and researchers to generally refer to an industry which includes many areas: textiles, clothing, leather, knitwear, accessories, sunglasses, beauty products, jewellery, and more. The word 'fashion' comes from a Latin word 'Facere' which means 'To Make'.

The fashion industry involves the design, making, distribution, marketing, selling, advertising, and promotion of all types of clothes, accessories and cosmetics.

Fashion includes expensive and customised designer items made from high-quality materials and ready-to-wear items available in large quantities and standard sizes. These are reasonably priced. Fast fashion is a newer idea in the industry that refers to quickly making lots of cheap, stylish clothes that match celebrity styles.

Why this Topic?

Today, the fashion industry is responsible for more than 8% of all the greenhouse gas emissions around the world. That's 1.7

billion tonnes of CO_2 emissions globally. If we keep this up, the number is expected to grow by 50% by 2030. The fashion industry also makes a lot of waste that ends up in landfills or gets burned. It also creates 20% of all the wastewater in the world.

When we wash our clothes, tiny fibers come off them. These fibers can range from 124 to 208 mg for every kilogram of fabric, depending on what kind of clothing it is. These tiny fibers, or microplastics, end up in large bodies of water, which is harmful for both animals and people. These microplastics come from the making, washing, or breaking down of cheaper synthetic materials like polyester. These synthetic materials can also cause skin rashes and allergies.

Chemicals used for making materials wrinkle-free, stain-resistant, shiny, especially for school uniforms and formal clothes, also harm the environment. Dyes used for clothes and chemicals used in tanneries are serious pollutants.

In ads, we see grandmother doing yoga in sarees, but we wear special clothes for gym! We have two types of uniforms and a few types of shoes to wear at school according to the rules! Is this necessary? We must think about these things.

And it's not just your clothes... Have you thought about what you're putting in your jewellery box? Though jewellery made of precious metals can last for generations, mining for precious metals harms the environment. But gold- or silver-plated jewellery and cheaper plastic or metal jewellery is even more harmful for the environment. Plastic gemstones, bangles, earrings etc. end up in landfills for a long time and chemicals from cheap jewellery ruin the quality of soil and water. The glues used are also harmful.

The leather industry, which makes things like shoes and handbags, is known for chemical pollution. But we should also know that it causes eutrophication. Besides real leather, a lot of artificial materials are used in making shoes, purses, and schoolbags. Not just throwing away these things, but also the whole process of making them causes pollution.

The beauty and makeup industry also harms the environment in its own way. While most of the waste from this industry comes from fancy packaging, it also leads to chemical pollution of water through pollutants like BHT, BHA, benzophenone etc. Microbeads made of plastic used in scrubs and exfoliants cause microplastic pollution. Perfumes, deodorants, and hair sprays may contain harmful chemicals that pollute the air. Animals are also often used for testing cosmetics, which causes them distress.

Human Factor

Fast fashion which essentially involves mass production of high fashion trends at a low price, impacts garment industry workers who often work in hazardous environments for low wages, and are even denied their fundamental human rights. Farmers who grow the raw material, invariably work with toxic chemicals that can have a devastating impact on their health.

Fast fashion affects us, the buyers, too. It encourages a throw-away culture because trends change quickly, and the quality of the products is usually poor. It makes us feel like we need to shop more and more to keep up with the latest styles, which creates a never-ending feeling of wanting more and never being fully happy.

Does that mean we shouldn't buy fancy clothes? What about special clothes for theme/ birthday parties, traditional outfits for festivals, trendy accessories and dealing with the peer pressure to fit in with our friends?

We don't have to give up little moments of joy, but we should be creative and mindful. We should try to reduce, reuse, recycle, share, and care!

Before we buy something, we should think about whether it is necessary or not. We should try to convince others to do the same.

As consumers, we should educate ourselves, as well as our friends and family, about fast fashion and consumerism. We should only buy clothes if we really need them and are sure we'll wear them a lot. We should be okay with wearing the same outfit more than once and support brands that treat their workers fairly. We can also upcycle, donate, and thrift clothes. And we can rent clothes if we know we won't wear them more than once. Simple, right?

What can be the Categories of Fashion for Our Study?

Let's try to list which parts of the fashion industry we can study.

Clothes:

This includes the materials and types of clothes.

A. **Types of Clothes:** Sportswear, uniforms, evening wear, traditional wear, formal wear, casual wear, seasonal wear, shawls/scarves/dupattas etc.

B. **Materials:** Cotton, different types of silk, mixed blends, synthetic materials like polyester, dacron, acrylic, nylon, rayon, wool, linen etc. Also, decorative items used in dress making like, laces, sequins, embroidery threads, tassels, buttons etc.

Accessories:

An accessory is anything that is used with an outfit to complete the look. There are many sub-categories to this:

A. **Eyewear:** Glasses, contact lenses, sunglasses etc.

B. **Head gear:** Hats, caps etc.

C. **Bags, belts etc.:** Made of various materials for different purposes. Can be decorated or not. We can also include phone covers in this.

D. **Jewellery:** Can be made of precious or semi-precious gemstones, precious metals, plastic, or coated metals etc. This includes rings, pins, bangles, broach, earrings, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, chains etc.

E. **Watches:** Analogue, digital, smart watches, etc.

F. **Footwear and related accessories:** Socks, shoelaces, silicone heel socks, insole etc. footwear can be formal, sports, floaters, sandals, canvas, traditional like Kolhapuri *chappal, mojris* etc.

G. **Hair Accessories:** Clips, hairbands, combs, hairpins, ribbons, traditional ones like *parandi* etc.

H. **Forehead Accessories:** *Bindis/tiklies, kumkum,* liquid *kumkum* etc.

I. **Other Accessories:** Gloves, suspenders, neckties etc.

Cosmetics: These are things we use on our body to clean, beautify, or change our appearance without affecting the body's structure or functions. Perfumes, moisturizers, nail polish, nail art material, makeup, hair products etc. fall under this category.

What Students have to Do?

- **There are two parts of the project.**
- **Both are compulsory.**

Part 1) Fashion and Me:

- Analyze the trends of fashion-related activities at your home. This includes the quantity, use, waste, and disposal of items.

- Think about ways to minimize your 'fashion footprint'. This refers to the environmental impact of your personal fashion habits.
- Try to implement your ideas and monitor the effects.
- Record your observations.

Part 2) Sustainable Fashion:
- Title of your project report should be based on Part 2.
- In this part you will select any one aspect of fashion.
- For this selection, you may observe and discuss at home/neighbour hood/ school etc.
- Study the selected aspect carefully understanding how the associated product is manufactured, marketed, consumed, and discarded. Explore the potential for pollution at every stage of this process.
- You may either,
  A. Suggest an eco-friendly alternative to the same.
  OR
  B. Suggest creative way of recycling the same.
- Write a report.

Please Note:
- Both parts of the project are compulsory.
- The title of your project report should be based on Part 2 of the project.
- You can select ANY ONE option from Part 2.
- If you suggest an eco-friendly option, ensure that it is economically viable and made from readily available materials. You may want to consider traditional alternatives, particularly if you have chosen cosmetics.
- Remember, even 'green' solutions have an environmental cost. For example, while cotton is an eco-friendly material, it requires a significant amount of water to grow and process. A Cotton T-shirt requires approximately 2,700 litres of water to produce - enough drinking water for one person for two and a half years. Therefore, even when using eco-friendly materials, we must do so responsibly.

Specimen Study:

Study of *'Manuskichi Bhint'*, an initiative that facilitates the reuse of clothes/shoes etc. by those in need

Hypothesis:

Initiatives like *'Manuskichi Bhint'* can promote the reuse of surplus and unused items, thereby reducing the burden on landfills.

In this project, you can explore the creation of fashion-related waste, its volume, disposal methods, and the importance of redirecting such waste towards constructive initiatives like *'Manuskichi Bhint'*. If such an initiative does not exist in your area, you could consider starting one and documenting your experiences.

Other possible topics include: Old socks, used and waste *bindi (tikli),* waste jewellery etc., or even studying the turnover and materials used for footwear from a low-cost roadside shoe shop to speculate the amount and fate of such materials in the environment and create relevant awareness.

The examples provided here are merely suggestions. Students are free to choose any topic that aligns with the overarching theme of the action research for the year 2023-2024.

References
- *https://www.google.com*