

Dress: Issues and Impacts under Globalization – An Ethnographic Study in the College Going Girls in Rural Areas of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

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Abstract: Dress is the basic material cultural component of our daily lives. Through clothing, individuals establish their sense of self as well as their place in society. The connections between dress and both individual and collective identities continue to be of interest to scholars and practitioners in the domain of its interdisciplinary appeal in anthropology of dress and fashion. The present study has been undertaken among the girls of the academic institutions in rural areas of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The objectives of the present study are to consider the patterns of dress and allied fashion as found among the girls of academic institutions in rural areas of North 24 Parganas under the study; to throw light on the formation of identities, norms and values around the dress and fashion followed in the present day and finally, to find the impact of urbanization and globalization on the existing pattern of clothing. During investigation it has been observed that besides their traditional dresses, the college going students under study occasionally choose various fashionable dresses through on line shopping, urban markets as well as shopping malls in the present days. There are social, cultural, socio-economic factors in the selection of dresses and fashions. Individuals try to wear dresses with social norms and cultural value. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the impacts of urbanization, modernization as well as globalization along with the influence of mass media play a vital role in this regard.

Keywords: Dress, Fashion, Institution, Girls, Rural, Identity, Tradition, Modernity, Urbanization, Globalization.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dress and culture is the subject of intense anthropological, sociological, historical, and semiotic analysis in contemporary social theory. The phenomenon of fashion, the impact of which is recognized by the famous Cliché: — “You are what you wear”, offers a dense, rich set of costume options and reveals multiple and unexpected ways through which fashion is part of the concrete, tangible, profound, complicated and symbolic process of forming of the modern and postmodern Self, identity, body and social relations. The development of gender identity is a social construct with garment and fashion being two factors of this configuration. Even fashion should be considered as part of the social processes of discrimination, namely the reproduction of hierarchy’s position and prestige¹.

There are social restrictions on clothing along with legal disciplinary practices, which restrict people and increase the pressure on the participants to adapt into prevailing standards about their appearance and behavior. Dressing, because of its ability to transform the social body, has been also used for recording social identities through laws that limited the costs of clothing and marketing. Because of these regulations, tension is created giving a strange ability to clothing; to express separation or deviation from the social group, thus contributing to the creation of subgroups (Voss, 2008). Thus, clothing may become an operator of socialization, social control, and/or freedom from cultural factors. This socialization is shown by the important role played by the uniform in education, religious organizations and the military, while liberalization is shown by the plenty members of various forms in clothing of popular groups (folk groups) during the last fifty years (Crane & Bovone, 2006).

Everyone at the moment of her/his interaction with others, through clothing selects the Persona who she/he wishes to be. Namely she/he can freely choose one of multiple determinations or better, decide which favors her/his self-determination at that time (Crane & Bovone, 2006). Dressing is an important and controllable way to communicate one's values, particularly rich in emotional and psychosocial consequences. The public and instantly visible nature of dressing makes it an ideal field for the study of values surrounding this consumer good, as a link between values and clothing. The style in clothing is a combination of personal expression and social rules. Dressing influenced by dominant values, social attitudes, socioeconomic status, life status, and some of the circumstances through which people want to assure their self-introduction. Clothing communicates symbolically the social identity, namely how a person wants and seeks to appear in society (Davis, 1985). In each case it Fashion, Gender and Social Identity reflects the deep class character of contemporary society, considering the abysmal difference between the acquisition costs of branded clothing from cheap copies. Also men's clothing reflects the concentration of power and emphasizes the male prestige.

Anthropologists have studied the significance of clothing in ritual, its symbolism, how designs express identity (as in subcultures), or how designs follow the dictates of fashion. The "exotic" dress of some cultures is a key indicator of their otherness in the western imagination, where it is usually shorn of precisely the meanings that give it resonance to its wearers. Choice of dress may be ethnically sensitive, as when a person operates between two cultures and is faced with deciding between the "uniform" of one or the other. In recent years issues around Islamic dress have been notable in western social discourse. Anthropologists have sought to understand processes of social, cultural and historical transformation through the study of changing dress forms and practices. Anthropologists have on the whole been less concerned with definitions of fashion than with understanding dress practices within a comparative cross-cultural and transnational framework. (Barnard & Spencer, 2010).

Aims and Objectives:

The present study bears the following objectives:

- To construct an ethnographic account of the pattern of dress and fashion as found among the youths of rural areas under the study.
- To throw light on the formation of identities, norms and values around the dress and fashion followed.
- Finally, to access the impact of urbanization and globalization on the existing pattern of dress and its trends among the studied population.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study was basically ethnographic and qualitative in nature. For this, in order to make an anthropological ethnography, the traditional socio-cultural anthropological methods were applied for the present study. Participant Observation, Intensive interview (Structured and Unstructured), Case Studies, along with the Questionnaires & Schedules were applied. Some data have also been analyzed quantitatively. Few secondary sources (like Books, Journals, Newspapers, Internet sources and administrative materials etc.) have been utilized.

III. BRIEF PROFILE OF THE VENUES OF OBSERVATION:

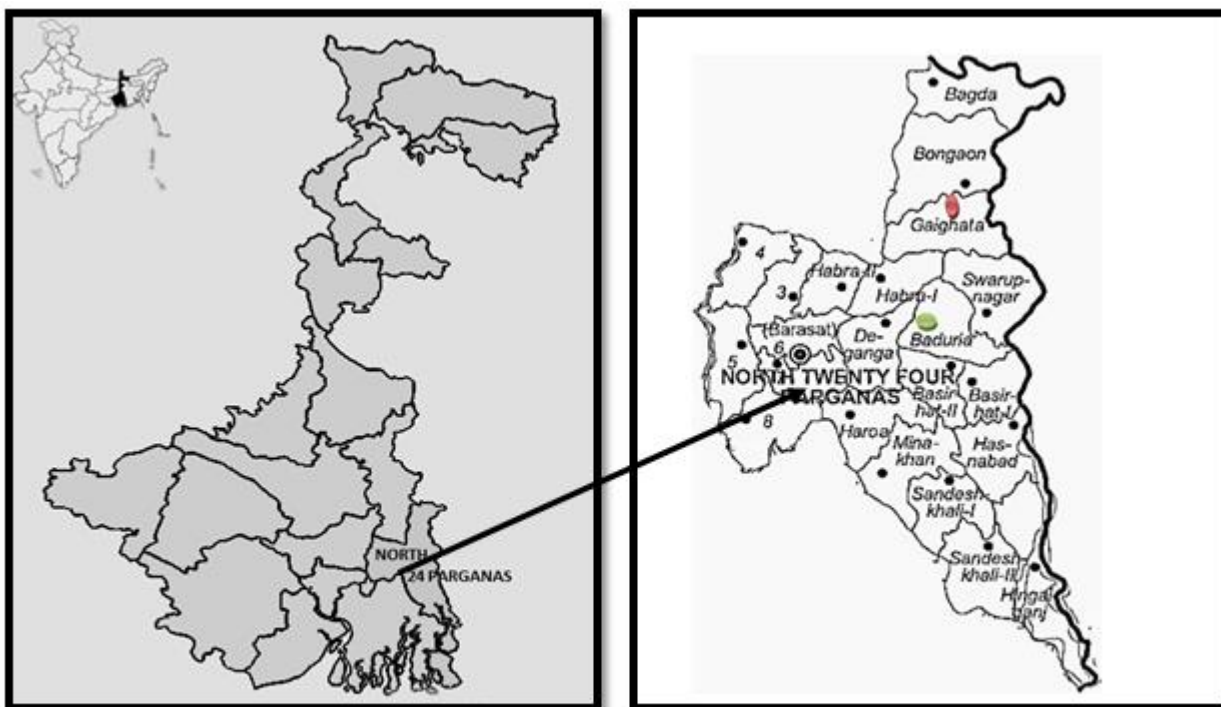
The present study is based on an ethnographic field work covering two colleges that are situated in rural areas of North 24 Parganas:

1. Chandraketugarh Sahidullah Smriti Mahavidyalaya, Berachampa.

P.O: Debelaya. Established in 1997, is a general degree college in Berachampa. It offers undergraduate courses in arts. It is affiliated to West Bengal State University. Address: Berachampa Baduria Road, Kaukepara, West Bengal 743424

2. P. R. Thakurnagar Govt. College.

P.O: Thakurnagar, P.S: Gaighata. Established in 2013, is an honors degree college in Thakurnagar, West Bengal, India. It offers only undergraduate honors courses in arts and sciences. It is currently affiliated to West Bengal State University. Address: P. R. Thakur Sarani, Ganti, West Bengal 743287



Maps of the Studied Contexts

● Thakumagar College
 ● Berachampa College

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

A. The Pattern of Dress- An Overview:

During investigation it has been observed that specially; in the time of collage going girls choose different kind of dresses to express individuality and maintain norms of society and to adjust the circumstances. Girls wear salwar (74%) with *dopatta* and few wear kurti-leggings (18%) and kurti jeans (8%) with *dopatta* in both dresses. Though there is very little variety of dresses among rural college going girls but all the time they try to wear *dopatta* with every dresses. In general college going girls show unity in their dress pattern.

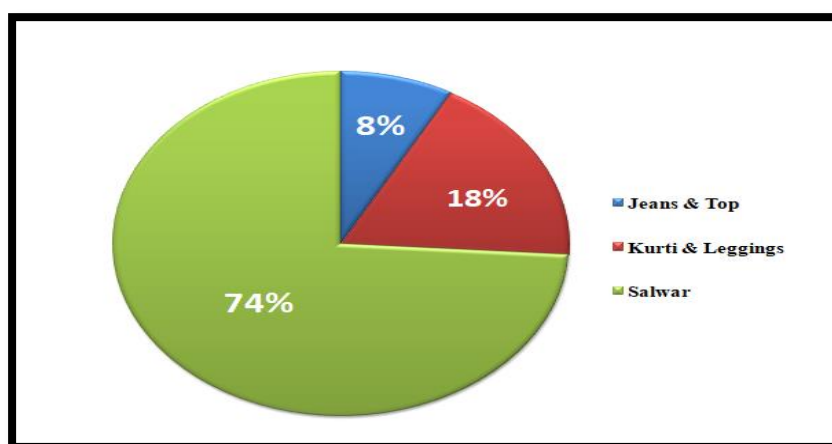


Fig 1: Distribution of Dress Patterns of Girls

a. Dress Pattern: Regular Use

Maximum numbers of informants are private tutor. They try to wear three pieces when they go to their students' house and try to maintain a formal look with dresses when they go for giving tuitions because of their role is changed at that moment and they became a teacher instead of student. In contrast when students come to their home to take tuitions, at that time they are less bothered about their clothing because they stay their home.

b. Dress Pattern: Seasonal and Occasional Variations

Now a day, all girls are aware of sun tan and maximum is health or beauty conscious. Many of girls in both colleges try to wear cotton clothes in summer. Some of them try to cover as much body surface area as possible at least at the time of reveal in the sun with the help of scarf, *dopatta* or full sleeves.

In winter, girls use sweater, jacket, and muffler. Sweater is the most useable winter cloth. Some of the girls accepted that if they buy any new winter clothes they usually wear those to show their friends.

In some occasions like Teachers' day, Seminar and festival like *Saraswatipuja*, *Ashtamee* of *Durgapuja*, girls of both the colleges prefer traditional dress specially *saree* in group. Some time it is the theme made by institute or department or by friends group. Girls of both the colleges have almost same emotions or feeling about *sarees*. Maximum girls believe that they looking most beautiful in the *sarees*.

At the time of birth day party, girls generally wear appropriate *salwar* with matching accessories. At the time of marriage ceremony, girls of both colleges try to wear traditional dresses including *salwar* but it have to be gorgeous with color, design or style. Maximum girls accepted that they choose dresses on the basis of how they close to the couple.

They wear *saree* if the married couples are very close relative of them and they try to wear *saree* in group because according to them it feels odd if they wear it alone. Other than *saree* girls of both colleges choose to dress like long or full length *salwar*, *Anarkali* (a type of long rounded *salwar* which is famous by name of a famous character *Anarkali*) with dark color and stylish one.

At the time of funeral, girls of both colleges try to wear *salwar* with light color or white as a symbol of piece. And it is also known from some informants that they are not interested to attend funeral occasion. Girls who are Muslim, wear black *salwar* with 'HIJAB' (a piece of cloth by which faces can be hidden) to express sorrow.

B. Psycho-Social Similarities and Contrasts in the Choice of Dress:

Choosing the dress to express individuality and personality there are differences between girls of both areas but at the same time there are few similarities also. Though all individuals have different psychology but there are some psychic unites in the girls of rural colleges.

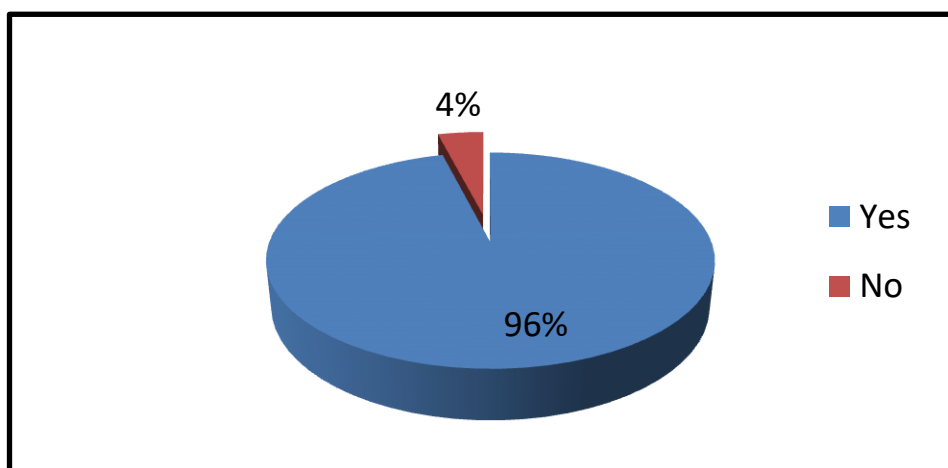


Fig 2: One of the Causes of Rape Depends on Girls' Dress

Surprisingly maximum girls (96%) believe that girls' dress is a major factor of being raped. According to them girls wearing, attitude, over smartness, desperate behavior all are the vital reasons behind the rape. In response of being rape of child or mentally challenged girl, they said that there are some pervert who have distorted sexual needs. According to them if one girl does not wear socially approved dresses or wear vulgar dresses (according to given society), it can provoke a guy and this lead to rape. May be this thinking prevent them to adopt more western dress like urban ones and stay more traditional though this is fruitful or not, is a big question. Though no one accepts that they have ever experienced roadside eve-teasing but their body language shows different things. Psychology behind this may be they don't want to express their kind of problem to others in fear of society or other may be misunderstood them.

Where rural college going girls generally prefer the boys who like the girls wear traditional dresses and *salwar* with *dopatta*. They believe that those boys are good in natures, who don't like the girls who wear western dresses. Because according to them girls who wear traditional dresses are more polite, decent, gentle, respectful and 'cultured' (maintained their traditional culture) than the girls who wear western dresses. Not only that they believe the girls who are more adaptive to western culture, are not good enough and to some extent characterless also. Behind this thinking there are actually the mindsets which cannot adjust with these differences.

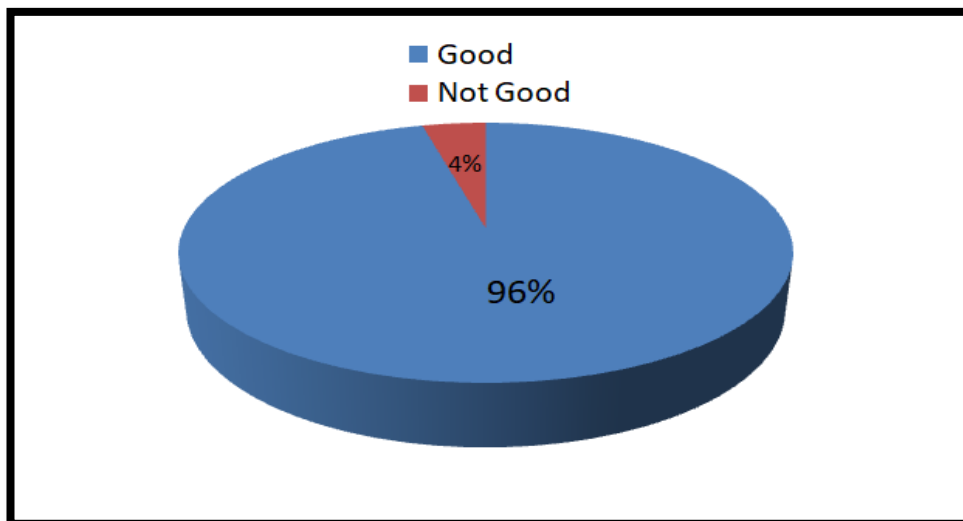


Fig 3: Opinions about the Logic of Dress Restriction in Colleges

In response to dress restrictions in some colleges, all rural college going girls believe that restrictions of academic institutions are good (96%) to maintain an academic ambience. If some girls wear different clothes from others or attractive dresses, it may distract boys from study. Boys may tease them or situations become nasty. So it is easy to avoid all those possibilities with those restrictions.

Though colleges of my study areas have restrictions about dress but it defer from each other. *Thakurnagar Govt. College* and *Chandraketugarh, Sahidullah Smriti Mahavidyalaya* both are the rural colleges. The former one has less restriction but backless or shoulder less tops are not allowed and skirt or jeans above the knees are not allowed.

At the date of counseling representative of college union give a short lecture in that dress restrictions should make aware among the students and guardians both. But later one has more restrictions—like jeans are not allowed in the college campus whatever they wear, they should carry *dopatta* always. Though maximum number of my informants of both colleges accepted that they never feel any problem for those dress restrictions.

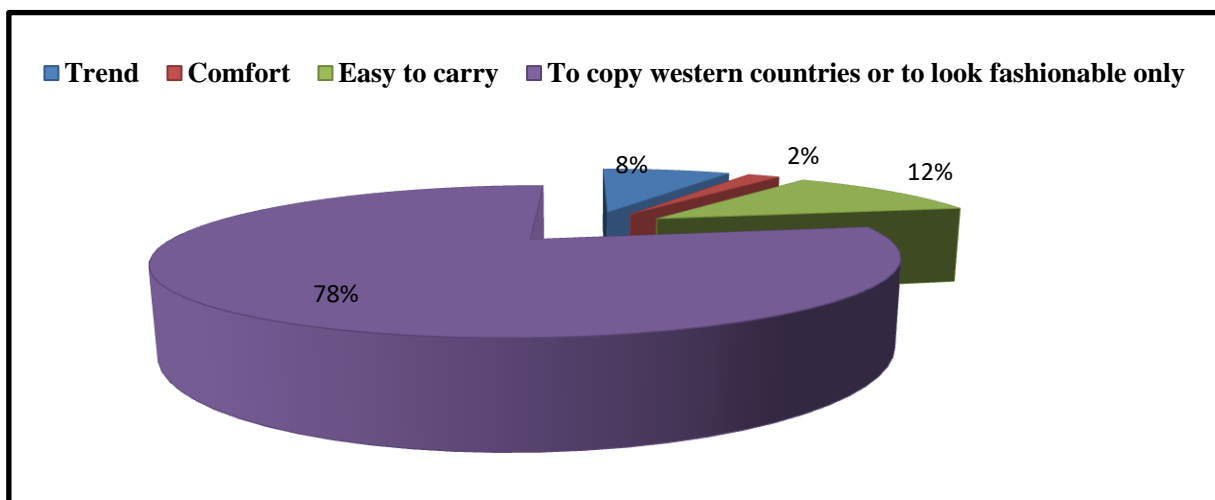


Fig 4: Causes of Choosing Western Dresses over Traditional One

Most of the girls of my studied area belief that now a day's western dresses getting market only because of people become more interested to look fashionable and they try to copy western countries (78%). Very few of my informants talking about comfort (2%) and western dresses are more easy to carry (12%) than the traditional one according to them.

C. Impacts of Modernization and Globalization -- An Overview:

Access online shopping is very rare. Maximum of them never open those sites for a single time. Few of them try to buy from those sites but their guardians did not permit them saying that clothes should be bought by hands examine. It shows their conservative minds which do not permit them go out from their comfort zone of thinking level.

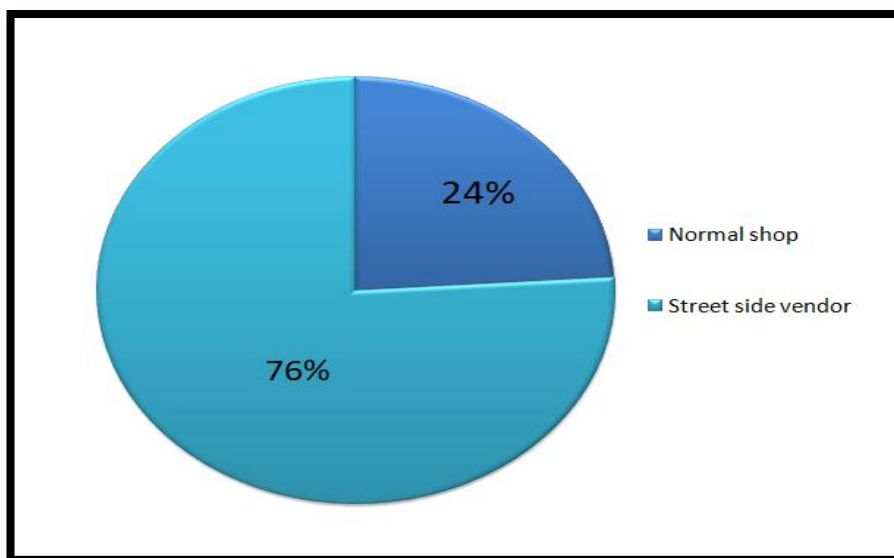


Fig 5: Purchasing Areas of Clothes

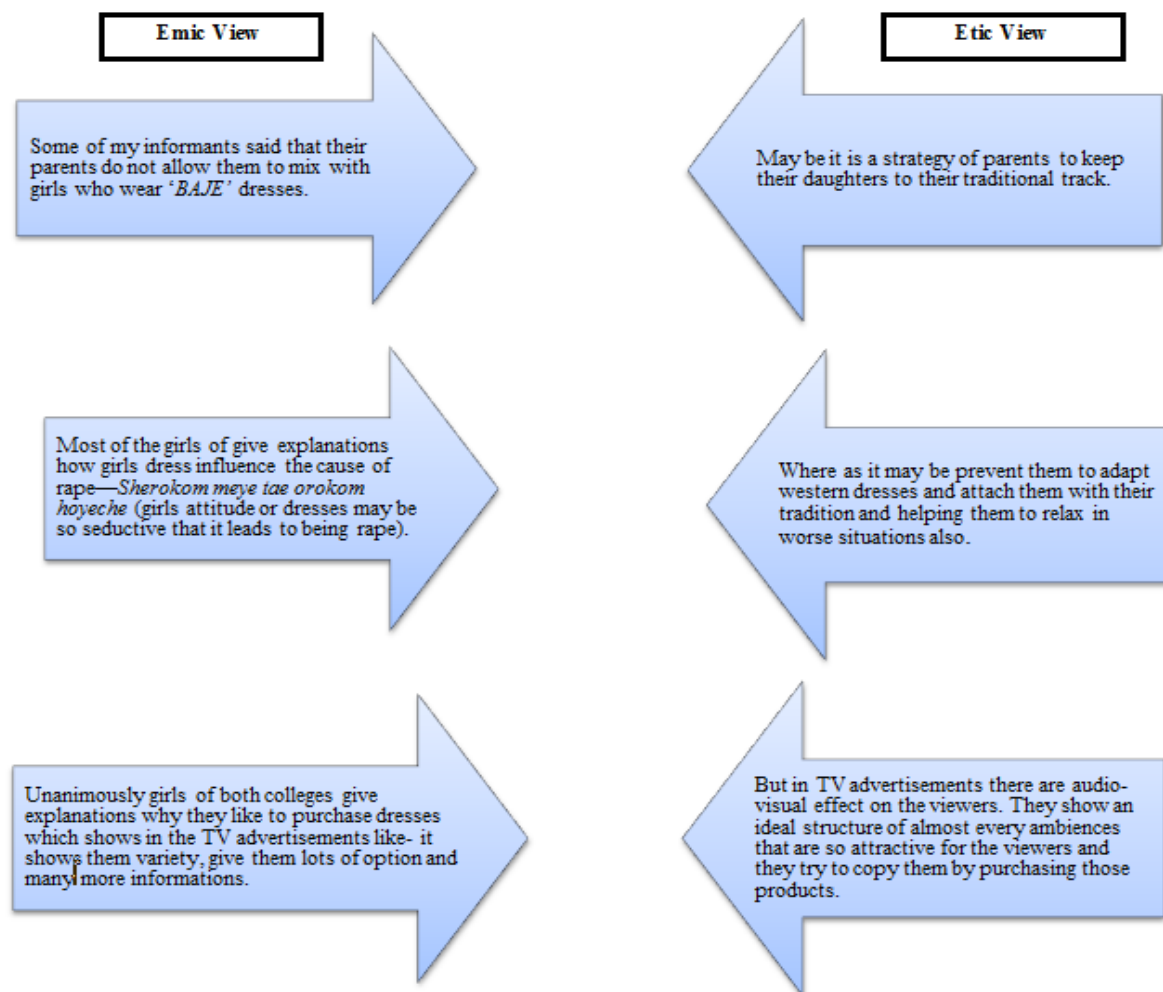
Girls generally prefer normal shops (24%) than the shopping malls. Because they believe that in the normal shops, price of products are reasonable in compare to shopping malls. They can bargain with shop keepers where malls have fixed price. Most of my informants accepted that they generally prefer their known shops from unknown one only because of reliable issues.

They try to buy cheap dresses from street side vendors (76%) to save money. In rural area if someone is economically strong and their parents give them enough money to buy their favorite dresses than they prefer huge amount of dresses rather than few braded one with that money. But if someone is not that much economically sounded or their parents do not give them enough money to buy their favorite dresses then they try to buy clothes from street side vendors. Few of my informants accepted that most of the time they sacrifice their desire to buy clothes to make fulfill other basic need for financial problem.

Unanimously girls accept that television advertising is the main sources to know and make a decision of purchasing clothes. TV advertising has enhanced their involvement in product selection and purchase, they prefer to buy TV advertised products and it is helpful in buying the new products, getting the best product and also supports collective decision making. Girls in rural colleges generally get the inspiration from family only and they are not bother about any celebrates fashion levels because they thought that is beyond their level.

D. Dressing in Culture: Patterns and Perceptions- Emic and Etic views

During investigation it has been observed that there are several perceptions on the basis of emic and etic views which is the combined a culture or society can be understood. In this context it can be explained that the dressing culture of girls in both colleges have defined their own perceptions about the dressing culture. As well as an observer tries to explain same issues with the help of etic perceptions.



V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Finally the study reveals the followings:

- **Dress can express the identity:** Girls wear their common dresses in the colleges or coaching classes but they maintain a formal look with dresses when they go for giving tuitions because of their role is changed at that moment and they became a teacher instead of student. At that time they all are try to maintain a formal look to make a teacher like appearance.
- **Changing the situation, role of individual is also changed and dress is also changed to match with the situation:** At the time of different occasions dress may also changed as per the situation. When the girls go for a marriage ceremony, birthday party or funeral, their roles are changed. At that time they become invitee instead of other acquaintances. Then at the time of marriage ceremony, they try to look good and wear bright and shiny dresses to match with the marital environment and cope up with couple also. At the birthday party, size of the party can affect the dresses and the dresses should less stylish than the former one. But at the time of funeral, all try to wear light colored sober dresses because at the funeral, all invitees come to console the family members of deceased person.
- **Fashion is going beyond the comfort zone:** Now it seems that fashion is going beyond the comfort zone day by day. Latest trendy dresses which do not suits with the environment of West Bengal also get their market in the West Bengal only because of their style sense.
- **Religion can affect the dress pattern:** At the time of funeral where Hindu girls try to wear light color especially white colored dress as the symbol of peace, but Muslim girls should wear black to express sorrow. Few of my informants from *Berachapa* College wear *hijab* (dalles) to hide their head and face and wear *Borkha* (veiling) also.

- **Economy affects the dress pattern:** Girls try to buy cheap dresses from street side vendor to save money. In rural area if someone is economically strong and their parents give them enough money to buy their favorite dresses than they prefer to buy huge amount of dresses rather than few branded one with that money. But if someone is not that much economically sounded or their parents do not give them enough money to buy their favorite dresses then they try to buy clothes from street side vendors. They compromise the quality over the style. Few of my informants accepted that most of the time they sacrifice their desire to buy clothes to make fulfill other basic need for financial problem.
- **Season also affect the dress pattern:** Girls are aware of sun tan and maximum are health or beauty conscious. Many of girls try to wear cotton clothes with full sleeves in summer. Some of them try to cover as much body surface area as possible at least at the time of reveal in the sun with the help of scarf, *dopatta* or full sleeves.
- **Revivalist movement:** Presently ethnic dress increases its popularity. Ethnic dress is the proof of revivalist movement. It is the traditional dresses in the modern form. Now a day tribal printed dress in form of modern trend is also frequently used by college going girls.

Here more focus is required along with practical approach towards rural areas regarding the dress in culture among the college goers as well as the researcher who want to work on the fashion Studies. The present study, depicts that the following suggestive measures for the people of the North 24 Parganas as observed and interoperated by the present researchers-

- If any shopping mall or brand wants to catch rural market and open show rooms than they have to do social impact analysis.
- Social awareness or campaigning is very much needed among the rural people.
- The traditional notion and westernization should be simultaneously followed and took forward.

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