CHAPTER-10

After its invention some 9,000 years ago: Cloth would soon become an essential part of society, as clothing and as adornment expressing self-awareness and communicating variations in social rank. For good reason, poets and anthropologists alike have employed cloth as a metaphor for society, something woven of many threads into a social fabric that is ever in danger of unraveling or being torn.

--John Noble Wilford (1993:C1)

Clothing and Social Status

The use of clothing can be a powerful social statement. Luxurious, perfectly tailored clothing in expensive fabrics marks the wearer as wealthy and powerful. Royalty has long assumed the exclusive privilege of wearing unique materials, such as purple-dyed cloth, ermine fur, or feathers of rare birds. Garments with a unique or trendy appearance show that the wearer has an exclusive taste, is knowledgeable about fashion and desires to make an impact upon the other members of society. Clothes are often responsible for making a favorable impression when one appears for an interview. Mahatma Gandhi wore a simple loincloth to show his humility as also to symbolize the poverty of the country. A well turned out, excessively worn, soiled clothing may indicate either poverty, illness, or disdain for appearances.

In India, the Brahmins wore mostly white cottons; the Kshatriyas [warriors] wore shades of red and the Vaishyas [working class] yellow and bright colors. It is said the South-Indian Chola princes [1000-1100] wore only cotton. The king's robe was of quilted cotton, with gold thread woven in. Chola soldiers also used quilted cotton fabrics.

There are dress codes on certain social occasions and for certain jobs. Schools may require school uniforms; if plain clothes are allowed there may be restrictions. A doorkeeper of a disco or nightclub may judge visitor's clothing and refuse entrance to those who are not exotically or expensively clad or even wearing clothes as per the accepted norms of a social network at its various levels of interaction.

The Slave Sultans controlled Northern India for most of the thirteenth century. Foreign rulers in a predominantly Hindu land, they did not integrate initially, remaining isolated in their courts and retaining their Islamic traditions. Their attitude was matched with equal indifference on the part of the indigenous population who considered their conquerors to be barbaric and impure. It wasn't until the early fourteenth century, when the Khiljis and the Tughluqs came to power, that the assimilation of cultures began. The number of intermarriages between Sultanate nobles and Hindu princesses increased, although there was a natural resistance to these political alliances.

Plate: 69

Nizam-ud-din Awaliya and Amir Khusraw.

Deccan, Hyderabad, mid 18th Century
Paper, 29 X 22 cm.
Acc. No. 57.30/7

The above depiction is of the Amir Khusraw who is shown sitting below a tree and listening to his companion, Nizam-ud-din Awaliya, trumming the rabab or string instrument.
Amir Khusraw is shown wearing garments that have a sufi element to them. He is wearing a green, full-sleeved angrakha over an off-white, fine muslin, also full-sleeved undershirt. The angrakha is fastened left over right at the chest. His turban is a green, probably woolen cap like headgear that has probably an orange kula around which is wound the turban. He is not wearing any accessories.

Nizam-ud-din Awaliya is shown wearing a floral block printed orange and red angrakha. The angrakha is fastened left over right with a fan-like attachment near the armhole. It is full-sleeved and has a closed neckline. He is wearing a pale pink waistband or cummerbund which has edges in a block-printed material. The turban seems to be of the same material as the angrakha. In his right hand he is shown holding a rabab or a string instrument which he is playing upon with the fingers of his right hand.

Sultanate Clothing

During the Sultanate period, Delhi was the seat of Islamic religion and learning from the fifteenth century onwards. The provincial capitals of the Deccan, Bengal, Gujarat, Jaunpur, Kashmir and Malwa emerged as important centres of Muslim art and culture. The clothing of the Sultanate rulers during the early part of their reign conformed to the Central Asian styles of their homeland and they did not take to the unstitched cloth worn by the local people which was an unfamiliar form of dressing for them. The trends of clothing changed. The ruling class had worn draped clothing till their coming. But during and after the advent of the Sultanate kings the clothing styles changed and stitched clothing made its presence more and more among the royalty raiment.

In his comprehensive account of Indian customs, Al-Biruni, the eleventh-century writer of Khwarazm, had observed:

“They use turbans for trousers; those who want little dress, are content to dress in a rag of two fingers’ breadth, which they did bind over their loin, with
two cords; but those who like much dress, wear trousers, lined with as much cotton as would suffice to make a number of counterpanes, and saddle rugs. The trousers have no visible openings, and they are so huge that the feet are not visible.’

Ibu Batutta, an ambassador of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq, arrived in India in 1333 and was struck by the way Indian women dressed: ‘they do not seem to wear sewn clothes, but only un sewn garments……..they form a girdle with one of the sides of the garment, and cover their heads and breasts with the other.’

Some of the first literary references to the dress and ornaments of the Sultanate period mention that the ensembles worn by some of the royalty and higher officials comprised the creation of an ensemble that was created by wearing a successive and layered assortment of stitched garments. These garments were usually woven and embellished with gold embroidery. Their turbans were wound tightly around a skull cap or kullah which was greatly embellished. The ends of the turban were often left dangling at the back. The Sultanate nobility wore richly embroidered shoes which often had upturned toes.

Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq and his Delhi courtiers are described as wearing different kinds of ornate and expensive garments as the Sultan himself is said to have worn a kullah costing almost 100,000 gold sovereigns. In public audience, he wore a barani — often a woollen or silk coat with elaborately embroidered shoulders. In private, he preferred a tunic-like garment. The officers in the Sultan’s court wore silken robes in public and tunics or long shifts in private. The amirs (courtiers), maliks (noblemen) and other nobility at the Sultanate courts wore a type of gown called a talariyat, a coat or qaba and short turbans. Judges and learned men wore a very full gown, the farajiyat and an open garment buttoned down the front called a durra. Muslims of the Eastern and Western regional courts were similarly attired. Duarte Barbosa, a
Portugese traveller of the fifteenth century, described the clothes worn by the Moors of Gujarat.

In accordance with Islamic law, women of aristocratic Muslim families lived within the strict confines of the harem. Many Hindu rulers introduced the practice to their courts as they believed that this was the best way to protect their women from the unwelcome attention of strangers and foreigners. The tendency was to house them in sequestered sections of the palace called the *zenana* which was known as the *deorhi* in Western India and the *onder mahal* in Bengal. The practice of *purdah* [veiling ones face to gain anonymity quickly spread all over the country and radically changed the lifestyles of Hindu noblewomen. This is probably the reason why there exist very few eyewitness accounts or pictorial references of women of royal birth, whether Hindu or Muslim, in medieval India. There are some references which presume that the Muslim women maintained the clothing styles\(^{40}\) of their Central Asian homelands and dressed in tunics, gowns and *paijamas* similar to those worn by the men. These were accessorized with scarves and jewelry in a tasteful manner by the women. A special over-garment called the *burqa* or *hijab* was worn for traveling which covered the body from head to foot.

Among the Mughals, Akbar made several innovations in dressing style and dress sense. He had a say even in the women’s costumes. This process was given further impetus with the arrival of Rajput princesses in his harem\(^{41}\). His liberal mindedness, and policy of ‘*Sul-i-kuf* allowed them to follow their own style of dressing. The main item of wear for the Rajput ladies (which is still prevalent in Rajasthan and Haryana) was an *angiya* or tight-fitting bodice. It could be half or full sleeved. Below the *angiya*, a wide skirt [usually having many gores] called the *lehnga* was worn. To the two ends of the *izarband* (binding cord) were attached bunches of pearls to add elegance and grace to the dress. Last came the *odhni*, which was used for covering the upper part of


\(^{41}\) The Tribune on Saturday September 6, 2003, Slice of History: A royal way to dress up - Pramod Sangar
the body and head and became highly popular among the Hindu and Muslim women alike. Similar types of clothes were probably worn by ladies in the cold season. There was, however, the addition of a woollen \textit{qaba}. They often had a fine shawl manufactured in Kashmir draped across their shoulders.

Akbar brought many changes in the fashion of the day by ordering that the court dress be made with a round, well gored skirt that was to be tied on the right side. He also introduced the fashion of wearing the shawl doubled (\textit{doshella}) on the shoulder by both men and women. His innovative mind was always dwelling on the style and drape of materials, the workmanship and the ideal of making clothes which could be the cynosure of all eyes. Not only the clothes but also the jewelry and the manner of its wearing was studied well by this monarch.

The ladies belonging to the Mughal aristocracy wore dresses, which were prepared or stitched for them in the royal \textit{karkhanas}. The material used for the dresses was simply marvellous and was the ‘wonder of the age’. Early writers have claimed that these royal \textit{karkhanas} manufactured some of the best silk, brocade and fine muslins of which were made turbans, girdles with golden flowers and drawers worn by women, so delicately fine that they could worn only once. They further add that the dress lasts only a few hours and may cost a kings ransom or even more, when beautifully embroidered with needle work. Some of them also say that some calicoes were made so fine that one could hardly feel them in the hand. Even the threads when spun are scarcely discernable. The superiority and fineness of cloth meant for the royal ladies forced many a traveller to admit that if someone were to put it on, his skin would appear as plainly as if it were quite naked. Once Aurangzeb remonstrated his daughter for not being properly dressed, as her skin was visible through her clothes-but she vehemently protested that she was wearing not one but seven Jama on her body. This muslin (cloth) was so delicate and fine that when it was spread out on grass and dew fell on it, it was no longer perceptible.
Before Akbar, the Persian dress was commonly used by ladies of the royalty. Mughal Emperor Humayun, introduced an overcoat which was cut at the waist and open in the front. He wore a quba of many colours which he wore in deference to his according to his astrological fancies. He made it a ceremonial dress and gave in the form of royal gifts to the nobles and important personages of his court and those who were visiting him. Muslim women of the upper classes usually wore loose drawers, a shirt and a long scarf, with the veil or shroud covering. The nobility evolved a common dress code for itself.

In South India, jewelry was designed to fulfill various ritualistic requirements of different communities. The size and shape of an ornament sometimes denoted the caste or creed of its owner. Some ornaments were meant to exhibit the marital status of women.

During the early twentieth century, a large proportion of Indian villagers remained in Indian styles but took to wearing machine-manufactured cloth, imported from the West. This was not only cheaper than most Indian manufactured cloth, imported from the West but was also finer, and was thought to be associated with higher levels of refinement. By the mid-twentieth century a considerable proportion of village men were turning first to Western-style shirts and then to shirts and trousers. They were not so much following the British- with whom they had little or no contract – as following the Indian elite who, in their gullibility, were following the British. Women, as we have seen, were more conservative in their dress, owing partly to ideas of female modesty and partly to the fact that Indian men were anxious to preserve their women from the tainting influences of the West.
The above depiction of a scene of revelry in which the main couple is dancing in abandon. The male is probably a royal personage while his partner is probably a nautch girl who is the focus of his attentions. There seems to be little variation on the political status of the these members of society. All the attendants and musicians standing around are almost as well dressed as the royal personage. The man is wearing a rich orange, dyed, short, angrakha that overlaps on the left and is complemented by a vertically striped churidar in green, red and white. At the waist is a yellow ochre cummerbund which hangs down the front and is printed in a geometric black outlined motif. He is wearing a turban in yellow with thin orange stripes and some glitter type embellishment. Around his neck he is wearing two large strings in pearls and one string of golden beads. Close to the neck is a gold chain on which is suspended a large golden pendant with a central ruby and a pearl suspended a the bottom.

His partner is dressed all in white. She is wearing a short choli over which is a sheer self printed white jama that falls over a gold printed white skirt.
that has a border of red and gold at the edge. At the waist is red belt that is 
buckled with a heavy gold buckle. Down the front of the skirt falls a large 
quantity of pleats that are in fine muslin and have a gold print. She is wearing 
elaborate golden bands in meenakari probably at her wrists and at the upper 
arms. She is also sporting a choker in gold at her neck and a thin beaded 
golden necklace up to her bust. She is also wearing a large ruby in gold as a 
pendant strung on some black beads. Her earrings are large and studded with 
pearls. Her earlobes are also studded with gold beads.

The ladies on her left comprise a musician who is playing upon some 
string instrument and an attendant who is standing ready with a flask of wine 
with a leaf at its mouth. The flask is golden and bejeweled. She is wearing a 
short pink choli with an orange skirt which has a golden print all over the 
foreground and a blue grey and gold edging at the hemline. At the front are 
gathered pleats in a gold printed grey material that are clipped at the navel and 
have a tassel of many strings of pearls and black beads suspended from it. She 
is wearing a sheer chuni in white which has a broad golden border. Her jewelry 
comprises rubies studded gold arm bands and wrist bands as well as a similar 
choker at the neck. Her earrings are round and pearl edged. The musician is a 
dark complexioned woman who is probably a slave but can be seen to be 
wearign ornaments equally well made as the other women. She is shown 
wearing a brown short choli that is embellished with piping in golden trim 
around the bust and the sleeves which is teamed with a printed pink skirt that 
has a bluish, trefoil pattern printed pleated material gathered at the front of the 
skirt. At the hemline is a border of red and gold. This bunch of pleats is clipped 
with a multi-stringed pearl and beads tassel at the navel. She is wearing bands 
of rubies encrusted gold at her wrists and around her neck which are 
complemented with pearl strings. Her earrings are large circles of gold encrusted 
with rubies and having an edging of pearls and black beads.

The ladies on the right comprise another musician who is playing the 
dholak and another maiden who is standing close by probably singing verses 
in praise of the royal personage. The dholak player is wearing a full navy blue
coloured block printed skirt that has a white, gold and red border at the hemline and has a sheer, red pleated panel down the front. She is wearing a short yellow coloured choli and a rust chuni that has a similar pattern in gold as the skirt. It is edged in a thin golden border. On her wrists are broad bands of gold worked in meenakari probably and around her neck are several strings of pearls. She is wearing large round earrings that are similar in design to the wrist bands edged in pearls.

The singer standing next to her is wearing a white printed skirt down the front of which is hanging a minutely gathered, orange and gold dotted as well as gold bordered frontal panel. She is wearing an orange choli with a pink dupatta casually draped around her shoulders and bodice. She is shown holding a pearl necklace which has probably been given to her as a reward by the royal personage for her efforts. Around her wrists are similar gold bands as worn by the other women and her earrings are also similar. Around her neck are several strings of pearls. An interesting feature is the net veil over her head and part of her face that is embellished with golden beads.

Fashionable Clothing

Fashion in clothes has allowed wearers to express emotion or solidarity with other people for millennia. Modern Westerners have a wide choice available in the possible selection of their clothes. What a person chooses to wear can reflect their personality or likes. When people who have cultural status start to wear new or different clothes a fashion trend may start; people who like or respect them may start to wear clothes of a similar style. Fashions may vary significantly within a society according to age, social class, generation, occupation and geography as well as over time.

Fashion houses and their associated fashion designers, as well as high-status consumers (including celebrities), appear to have some role in determining the rates and directions of fashion change in clothing.
The Amirs and the Maliks and other officers at the Sultanate courts are described as wearing "gowns (tatailyat), jakalwat and Islamic qabas of Khawarizm tucked in the middle of the body" and short turbans which did not exceed five or six forearms. Of other Amirs we learn that they were as well dressed "as the soldiers except that they did not use belts ... ".

When it comes to head-gears, there are many names that one comes upon, including *usbnisba, kirita, patta, veshtana, vesbtanapatta, sbirovesbtana*. The manner of wearing the turban evidently varied as much in ancient India as it did in medieval. The range of turban-styles that we encounter is reminiscent of the many styles in the 19th century, each style having a specific name for it as recorded by Forbes-Watson." However, there are close-fitting caps that one finds soldiers and some foreigners wearing in Indian sculptures and paintings. Exceptionally every head was covered by a turban.

There are specific references to the clothing of religious men, special mention being made of the *sanghati or double chadar* that the Bhikshuks of the Buddhist orders were meant to wear. This was combined with an *antarvasaka* or loin-cloth and a dupatta or loose upper garment, also called the *uttarasanga*.

The linen garments which are imported from Alexandria and the land of the Russians are worn only by those whom the Sultan honours with them. The others wear tunics and robes of fine cotton. They make garments with this material which resembles the robes (makati) of Baghdad. But these latter as also those called wasafi differ very much from those of India as regards fineness, beauty of color and delicacy.

Most of their Tartar (Tatari) robes are embroidered with gold (muzarkasa bi-dhabab). Some wear garments with both sleeves having a tiraz border of gold embroidery (zarkasb). Others, for example the Mongols, place the tiraz inscription between the shoulders.
The scene portrays the royal personage seated in the company of his beloved who is entertaining him with her entourage of maids and artisans who are musicians and songstresses. The royal personage is shown wearing a white very fine muslin angrakha which is quite short and looks eminently comfortable. It is tied on the left side and has short tassels hanging from the ties. At the waist is tied a short yellow, green and maroon patka which is knotted at the front and falls just up to the thighs. He is wearing a simple orange colored turban and the sole accessories that he is wearing are golden kadae and a long string of pearls.

His lady love is wearing a very fine muslin see-through choli in a beige shade which is teamed with a green, printed skirt that has a yellow, red and deep green motif all over it. In front of the skirt is a deep red sash and her choli is also a translucent red colored one with a thin golden edging. Her accessories include golden, precious stones encrusted armbands, wristbands and pendant that is worn on a golden chain. She has elaborate gold and pearls earrings. Just behind her is standing a maid [probably] who is waiting on her mistress so

Plate: 71

Dara Shikoh and his beloved Rana –Dil

Mughal, Late 17th century
Paper 34 X 26 cm, Acc. No. – 58.27/16

The scene portrays the royal personage seated in the company of his beloved who is entertaining him with her entourage of maids and artisans who are musicians and songstresses. The royal personage is shown wearing a white very fine muslin angrakha which is quite short and looks eminently comfortable. It is tied on the left side and has short tassels hanging from the ties. At the waist is tied a short yellow, green and maroon patka which is knotted at the front and falls just up to the thighs. He is wearing a simple orange colored turban and the sole accessories that he is wearing are golden kadae and a long string of pearls.

His lady love is wearing a very fine muslin see-through choli in a beige shade which is teamed with a green, printed skirt that has a yellow, red and deep green motif all over it. In front of the skirt is a deep red sash and her choli is also a translucent red colored one with a thin golden edging. Her accessories include golden, precious stones encrusted armbands, wristbands and pendant that is worn on a golden chain. She has elaborate gold and pearls earrings. Just behind her is standing a maid [probably] who is waiting on her mistress so
that she is near at hand in case her mistress requires her assistance for fetching or carrying something. Near her are two other maids who are carrying some eats, probably, on a tray. They both have their heads covered. One is wearing a pinkish dupatta while the other is wearing an orange one. They are both wearing their dupattas draped in a manner that covers their bosoms completely and fall almost to the waist. Their skirts are also rather plain. One of them is wearing a white printed skirt while the other is wearing an ochre one with a green border at the hemline. They have some pleated material hanging down the front of the skirts which is draped like a sari around the skirt. They are wearing pearl earrings and probably glass bangles as one of them is wearing distinctively green coloured ones and the other is wearing orange-red coloured ones.

In the foreground are seated three women, two of whom are probably singers and the third one is a musician giving them accompaniment. All three of them also have their heads covered with their dupattas but these are of sheer see-through material that are also edged in gold and have some small embellishments on them. Their cholis are made of sheer material that is totally see-through and in shades close to their skin tone. Even the dark complexioned musician is wearing a blouse close to her skin tone. All three of them are wearing strings of pearls around their necks and pearls and broad golden wrist bands adorn their wrists. All of them have daintily painted hands probably with alta and all of them are wearing almost similar forehead ornaments in gold and pearls. Even their earrings are alike.

Behind the royal personage are standing two maids. One of them is holding a peacock feather flywhisk with which she is fanning the Mughal prince. Her attire is very simple. She is wearing a thick green coloured dupatta that covers most of her upper body and an orange coloured skirt that is having a dark orange coloured bright pleated material hanging down the front. Her jewelry comprises a number of pearl strings around her neck and dark coloured glass bangles [probably] around her wrist. The other maid is holding what looks like a towel in her hand probably to wipe the brow of the royal personage with
scented iter. She is wearing a transparent dupatta with an orange and gold edging. It covers her head which is adorned with a forehead ornament in gold and pearls. She is wearing a yellow skirt with a lavender pleated material hanging in front and wound around the skirt like a sari. She is wearing several strings of pearls around her neck and has pearl earrings in her ears. She is also wearing glass [probably] bangles in orange colour.

Dress codes

Dress codes function on certain social occasions and for certain jobs. It is in this very strain that we have other descriptions from this period, Firuz Shah Tughlaq and his courtiers wearing different kinds of dresses. The Sultan himself is said to have worn a kulab costing a lac of tankas which once belonged to his predecessor. In public audience, he is said to have worn a barani with embroidered sleeves, but in private he wore a shirt. The officers are said to be wearing silken robes in public and shirts in private life.

Again the Amirs and the Maliks and other officers at the Sultanate courts are described as wearing "gowns (tataiyat), jakalwat and Islamic qabas of Khawarizm tucked in the middle of the body" and short turbans which did not exceed five or six forearms. Of other Amirs we learn that they were as well dressed "as the soldiers except that they did not use belts and at times they let down a piece of cloth in front of them after the manner of the supers. The judges and the learned men wore ample gowns (farajiyyat) that resembled jaradiyat (striped material from Yemen) and an Arabic garment (durra) (a garment opening in front and buttoned).
The scene depicted by the painter is a typical evening scene outside the home of a courtesan where the lower and middle soldiers are seen flocking to partake of the evenings entertainment before retiring for the night. There are two ladies shown seated on the thada or raised platform in front of their home with a raised fence in red [probably a folding screen like contraption that is put up to maintain the distance between the ladies and their seating area as well as the limit to which the others are allowed to approach]. Within the fence is also enclosed the area where a number of containers [samowar-like or surahis] of probably wines are placed to entertain and extend hospitality. There are also four hookahs or the hubble-bubbles on the platform of which the clients are taking a smoke freely. those whom the courtesan favours are being presented the hookah from her own hands while others are simply taking the pipes in their own hands and smoking.
The lady in the foreground is wearing a brocade, red choli or blouse teamed with a red-orange salwar like lower garment over which is worn a transparent gauzy skirt having golden lines and dots. It is gathered at the waist. She is shown wearing a tissue or see-through chuni with a golden edging. The chuni covers her head and her open hair can be seen through the chuni. One loose end of the chuni can be seen coming from under the knee of the courtesan. She is wearing common jewelry which shows her status as a middle level society member who is surviving on her talents of hospitality and probably poetry and singing. Around her neck she is wearing a choker of three strings of pearls with a small pendant probably in emerald. There is a longer string of pearls that extends to her waist. She is also wearing a floral necklace in red flowers around her neck which extends up to her waist. Her wrists are decorated apparently with red colour glass bangles. She is also wearing two pearl bangles at the two ends of her bangles band. Her feet are adorned with red paint or alta and she is wearing elaborate golden anklets or pairi. She is shown wearing pearl earrings with some precious stones also strung into the hoops. She is shown resting her back on a large bolster having a cover in light green colour with bold black stripes. This too seems to be status symbol.

The lady at the back is probably a menial who serves snacks like fish and what looks like meat on skewers to go with the wine being served to the guests/clients. She is wearing a purple skirt with a floral, printed [probably block-printed], and transparent over-skirt a white choli. Her head is covered with a transparent, reddish tinged chuni with a golden edging. The chuni covers her head, and part of the upper body. She is wearing a long pearl necklace with pearl earrings and green glass bangles. She is also wearing a red floral necklace that reaches down to her waist-level.

Bollywood Elite and Imagery

In general independent India showed a return to the modernization of dress in the form of machine-made fabrics and foreign styles. In the cities, the development of the film industry popularized certain images, in particular the
hero in jeans and sunglasses and the heroine in a variety of shapes and guises.

Quite apart from the fact that synthetic saris and shalwar kamizes are relatively cheap and easy to maintain, there is also the fact that for many women their adoption is part of a process by which they can distance themselves from the backward associations of local dress and join the ranks of the ‘progressive’, Adopting such clothes becomes one of the many strategies through which a social group is able to upgrade itself. In areas where cinema, television and videos are easily accessible, there are no doubt many village women who, like urban women, are influenced by the fashions of Hindi film-stars42. There have been cyclical changes on the fashion palettes as the modern changed places with the rural and the rustic gave place to the punk. The dress lines come full circle when the jeans reach the village and the village in turn sends its ‘jutti’ and phulkari to the towns.

Ethnic chic is a means of asserting one’s membership of a high social sphere by dressing in peasant and tribal fabrics and/or styles which for most of the century have been associated with a low social sphere. Its exclusivity is safeguarded by the ‘tribals’ and ‘peasants’ who themselves rejected them once they in the city. The young in the city tend to associate the dress of the common Indian peasant with backwardness, illiteracy, a tough farming life, restrictive rules for women and a general lack of taste and refinement. In fashion terms, however, the return to ethnic dress cannot be equated with the return to khadi in the nationalist period, although ethnic fashion relies on the khadi philosophy to give it credibility43. Gandhi’s romanticization of the village involved the idea of the simplicity and morality of village life, and identification and participation with the villager. Ethnic chic relies on the idea of identification with the rural life without any real attempt at participation. This theme is played

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42 In Jalia television were still is very limited supply, and going to the cinema in the city was predominantly a male activity; I only once heard women’s clothes referred to in terms of films-when an itinerant trader arrived in the village, claiming to sell the type of sari worn by sita in the television version of the Ramayana. I am not aware that he obtained any sales.

43 For example, Bina Ramani employed refugee tailors in her workshop in Hauz Khas village. In this sense she perpetuates the Gandhian association between craft and social welfare. But, unlike Gandhi, she did not participate in the menial work herself. Rather she designed clothes which were made by the poor and sold to the rich, keeping in line with the fashion industry’s characteristically capitalist organisation.
upon in many of the Hindi films in which the heroine changes in and out of different regional outfits without being associated with the region or the groups that are traditionally habituated to wearing such clothes. This extraction of the aesthetic and marketable elements of peasant and tribal India has played an essential part in the evolution of fashions in India. It brings into striking contrast the actual distance between the urban elite and the tribal performers. It is the same distance that has enabled the ‘ethnic’ to become the ‘chic’.

Yet ethnic chic, despite its distance from the people it imitates, poses to some extent a cultural revival that venerates the Indian aesthetic above the Western one. It is a means by which the Indian elite distinguish itself not only from the Indian masses but also from the West. Many people describe their personal choice of ethnic clothes as part of a sudden realisation that the West does not hold all the answers; it is a sort of anti-modern, anti-Western approach to dress. On the other hand, the fashion of ethnic chic and the new appreciation of Indian culture that accompanies it is, linked to the West and to the West’s appreciation of India’s art and craft heritage. Fashions ‘went ethnic’ in the West before doing so in India, and few years pass without some mention of a new ‘ethnic’ wave hitting the fashion houses of Paris, New York and London.

Ethnic chic is, therefore, not only a means of differentiation from other Indians and from the West, but a means of identification with an increasingly cosmopolitan ‘global elite’ who share common tastes. As Bina Ramani put it, her designs were for ‘international people’; such as the international elite, bound together through shared tastes and who to some extent transcend the geographical and cultural boundaries.

People can only change their clothes within the accepted limits of their social situation. Fashion relies on the people’s ability to play with the image, to select one image one day but be able to abandon it later if required. It offers the potential for transforming identities rather than trying to fix any particular identity in time and space. A fashionable Delhi student can dress like an
American sportsperson one day and like a Gujarati peasant the next, and no one will fix him or her to these images unless he or she choose to fix themselves to a particular identity by wearing the same style constantly. And then, sooner or later, he or she will be ‘out of fashion’. Fashion goes hand in hand with the notion of individualism. We are constantly told by fashion pundits that it is through fashion that we can express ‘ourselves’.

Plate: 73

Maharaja Abhai Singh on horseback
Jodhpur, C.1725, by Dalchand
Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur,
Paper 30.6 X 44.3 cm,
Acc. No. – 24(20)

The raja on horseback, his attendants and the two scouts that go before his horse are the three levels of political rank that are depicted in this picture. Class variants are beautifully differentiated by the use of dress and ornamentation of the individuals. The scouts who are walking in front of the train are shown wearing no ornaments at all barring two bands around their
wrists probably in some baser metal like copper or iron while the attendants are shown wearing very few ornaments like the earrings of pearls and wristlets or kadas of probably gold. The royal personage on the horse is, however, shown wearing a lot of ornaments in the form of kadas which are thick and heavily ornate, fingerings, bajuband and a number of pearl and gold embellished necklaces besides earrings and elaborate head and turban ornament. It seems to be the politically correct raiment for a royal person to be decked in all finer. The quality of the dress is also very fine with a maximum number of embellishments and the motif and colour used to distinguish the various political stages in the career of a person are also probably distinctive. A detailed description of the dress and ornamentation of the people depicted in the painting would bring out the salient features of their political demarcations in rank and file.

The two scouts walking in front of the train are shown wearing plain garments with not much of embellishment except for the beautiful cummerbunds. One of them is wearing a light chrome jama, a striped pyjama and red shoes. His cummerbund is white with green striped edges which have been tucked in at the waist. In the waistband is also tucked in a dagger with two wooden or metal handles. There are probably two leather thongs that tie the dagger’s red scabbard to the waist. He is carrying a white long haired fly whisk in his right hand and a thin flute like reed in his left. He is wearing a turban of light chrome and white which is wound in a manner that it has a conical top behind the head and one of the edges is left loose as a lerh that hangs over the back of the neck. A grey-white feather along with a deep green plume is stuck into the top of the turban of both the scouts. The second scout is shown wearing a white printed jama in a floral print with an elaborately worked cummerbund in onion pink which has a tulip like motif painted on the free end. He is shown wearing a striped pyjama and deep maroon shoes. The other free end is tucked into the cummerbund where a dagger has also been tied with thongs to the waist. Both the ends of the thongs seem to end in a buckle-like metallic golden clip that is visible at the centre of the belt. He is holding a pink, long-haired fly whisk at the right shoulder while in his right he too is holding a
long thin reed-like stick probably a flute or a hunting crop to ward off wild animals. He is wearing a pink and white striped turban with a bright yellow additional fold or kullah. He too is supporting a plume of deep green with an ornamental edging as well as a curled white-grey feather stuck into the turban at the top of the head. Both these scouts are differently attired in the sense that their jama are tied on the right while those of the others are tied across the left side of the chest.

The man on horseback has three attendants who are walking alongside. One of them is on the further side of the horse. He is wearing a white printed jama with a leaf pattern all over the foreground. The cummerbund is very ornate with a golden tree-like motif on a white background on the loose end that is suspended in front of the jama. There is a golden border to this loose end. He is wearing red shoes. He has been depicted wearing a blue and red printed turban with two bands of white tied to it. In his right hand he is shown holding a large peacock feathers whisk which has an elaborate handle.

Behind the horse is an attendant wearing a verdian green jama dyed with a leafy print in a lighter green. He is wearing an orange pyjami under the jama and brown shoes on his feet. he has been shown wearing a leather buckled belt at the wait around which is tied a cummerbund in yellow, which is printed in a red bodered print. He has a dagger tucked into the cummerbund and a sword in a red scabbard is suspended from the belt at his waist. The hilt of the sword has a golden tassle suspended from it. He has a black shield slung at the back which has a strap that goes across the soldier’s chest. His turban is very elaborate as he is wearing a green and red turrah at the top and a green printed cloth wrapped around the lower part of the head. The entire turban seems to be tied with a white length of cloth.

The royal person sitting astride the horse is wearing a brilliant red jama with a multi-colored and gilded print. He has his feet in golden slip on mojdi.
Clothing, Ornaments and Social Status

In South India, jewelry was designed to fulfill various ritualistic requirements of different communities. The size and shape of an ornament sometimes denoted the caste or creed of its owner. Some ornaments were meant to exhibit the marital status of women. The shape, design and size of a tali, or the equivalent of the mangalsutra or suhaag sutra of the North, varies according to the sectarian affiliations of its wearer. For example, Nattukotai Chettiar (merchant caste) ladies, belonging to the wealthy business community, wore talis which were twelve to fifteen centimetres long. The forked tali worn by Tamil women is shaped like Nandi pada (Nandi’s feet), and shows that they are the worshippers of Siva as Nandi is his carrier bull. The tali worn by the ladies of the Iyer community would depict a Siva-linga (phallic deity). Similarly, ladies belonging to the Iyengar Brahmin family, who are the worshippers of Vishnu, wear a tali which usually bears the Vaishnavite symbols, the chakra (circle) and sankh (conch).

These wedding necklaces of South Indian women also indicate caste and community. The Chettiar marriage necklace, known as kalata uru, consists of four distinctive pendants shaped like a hand called athanams. In Tamil, kala means neck and uru means bead. The hand-shaped pendants possibly represent the tiger’s paw as a mark of protection to its wearer. The central pendant usually bears the figure of the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi and is called the Lakshmi athanam. Such a necklace generally comprises thirty-four gold beads and different types of pendants strung together on twenty-one strands of turmeric-dyed thread twisted together. The necklace, kalata uru, is usually worn at the time of the wedding and then put aside as its weight makes it impossible for anyone to wear it daily. A woman may wear it again at her son’s wedding or to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of her husband.

Another type of necklace, the kasumala is composed of gold coins; it can be as much as a metre long and often has more than one hundred coins.
The figures of gods and goddesses are also found depicted here. Yet another type of necklace, a popular wedding gift to a lady by her close relatives, is the jasmine-bud necklace. About a metre long, it consists of one hundred gold flower buds.

The *burkha* have been worn by women in Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan since the beginning of the Muslim religion in 622 C.E. The Koran, the holy book of Islam, directs believers to cover themselves and be humble before God. Different societies and religious leaders have interpreted this command of the Koran in many different ways, often requiring both men and women to cover their heads as a sign of religious aspect. Some Muslim societies have required women to cover themselves more modestly than men, covering not only their heads but also most of their bodies and even their faces.

The chadar, also spelled *chador* or *chadoor*, is a multipurpose garment worn by many people in India since before the third century C.E. Indians and others living in countries of the Middle East continue to wear the chadar to this day. Though the size, shape, and color of the chadar vary somewhat in different cultures, it is basically a large scarf, about three yards long and one yard wide, or larger. Both men and women use the chadar as a shawl or wrap for protection from the weather, for modesty, and for religious purposes. Some chadars have decorative or fringed edges. The *chadar* is a common accessory in desert countries like Afghanistan, where it is often wrapped around the body, head, and face for protection from sand and dust storms. In less harsh weather, men usually wear the chadar around the shoulders, like a shawl. Women in Muslim societies are often required to cover themselves more modestly than men, and they wear the chadar over their heads as well, holding an end between their teeth when they wish to cover their faces. Some women wrap the chadar tightly around their neck and head to form a sort of headdress that may cover all or part of the face.

At the dawn of Indian civilization in 2500 B.C.E., women left their breasts bare. It was under Muslim rule, which lasted from 1500 to 1700 C.E., that women began to dress more modestly. The choli, a sewn garment that covered women's breasts, became popular as the Muslims rose in power. The choli is worn with a skirt or under a sari, a draped dress. Although Indian women wore unstitched garments from the beginning of Indian civilization, from the first invasion of the Muslims in about the tenth century some Indians began to wear stitched garments. The choli is such a garment. The first choli only covered a woman's breasts, leaving her back bare. The garment evolved into many different variations, the most common being a tight-fitting bodice with short or long sleeves that ended just below the breasts or just above the waist. Many other variations of the choli are worn throughout India today and include styles fastened with ties, versions with rounded necklines, and some that shape or flatten the breasts.

Plate: 74

Portrait of a young Noble

Ascribed to the Master at the court of Mandi, c. 1700 – 1725
26.5 (23.1) X 17.6 (14) cm, Acc no .85.55
Himachal Pradesh State Museum, Simla

The politics of dress emerges strongly as a statement when visualized in the dress form, manner of wearing and colour as well as fall of the material. The young noble above is wearing a white fitting angrakha which falls over the chest. The skirt of the angrakha has many gores to the

extent that the skirt stands out on the basis of its many gathers. The waist is bound in a black, white and gold cummerbund. The angrakha presents a neat silhouette whereby the waist up is stiff and straight and the dress below the cummerbund is blown out due to the many gathers. The edges of the pallav are in woven gold. The angrakha is teamed with a striped pyjami that is in yellow and black. His feet are in maroon mojadis with white and black embroidery on the upper face.

Thus, even if the lines of the dress are simple, it is the pristine white of the garment and the dagger tucked into the waist band besides the double stringed necklace of dark beads around his neck more than shout out his nobility. The dark turban and the beads around the neck are probably connotative of an aura of casual comfort teamed with aspirations of spirituality. But the dagger is a reminder of earthly perils. Also the absence of embellishment of any for singles out the individual of not belonging to the royal household.

Functional Clothing

Fashion in clothes has allowed wearers to express emotion or solidarity with other people for millennia. Modern Westerners have a wide choice available in the possible selection of their clothes.

An example serves to illustrate the point. A Hindu man living in Delhi might dress in a cotton kurta pajama (tunic and trousers). To most foreigners, he looks ‘Indian’ but if he wishes to attend a particularly auspicious Hindu ceremony, he may find his stitched clothes associated with impurity, and even with foreignness in certain traditional regional contexts. Then again, if he returns to his home village his family may rebuke him for deserting his caste dress. Other villagers may think he looks too modern (deserting local regional styles) or conversely too old-fashioned (he is dressed in cotton when they are dressed in synthetics). In other words there are a number of different criteria by which a person’s clothes may be judged.
Like other social phenomena, clothes are often de historicized, naturalized, converted to myth (cf. Barth 1970). Yet at the same time they are detachable, thereby denying the very permanence they sometimes seem to suggest. They are both part of us and superfluous to us. What this suggests is not that clothes have any particular meaning, but that their peculiar proximity to our bodies gives them a special potential for symbolic elaboration.

While India has a highly developed philosophy concerning the inseparability of spirit and matter, most cultures view clothes within this framework at least to some extent. In Europe and America people are often reluctant to buy secondhand clothes, as if the previous wearer somehow adheres to the cloth, yet precisely because of the proximity between people and clothes, pop fans will clamber on stage to touch the T-shirts of their heroes and heroines. We even try on new clothes in shops and ask the question: 'Is it really me? These incidents suggest that people interpret the ambiguous boundary between their biological and social selves at a number of different levels.

Changes in the styles worn by Indians reflected their contact with other peoples. Throughout the different regions of India, the changes in clothing styles can be linked to some contact with other cultures. For example, Indians knew how to sew long before the sixteenth century when the Moguls, or Muslims, invaded, and they had long adorned their wrapped garments with elaborate embroidery stitches. But when the Moguls took power over the region, the Moguls’ style of sewn clothing became popular among Indians. Sewn jackets and trousers were among the styles popularized by the Mogul leaders, although traditional wrapped clothing remained common.

Plate: 75

Portrait of a prince

Ascribed to the master at the court of Mandi
C 1700 – 1725, 31.5(19) X 20 (17.8) cm, Acc.no 2792
Government Museum And Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Every part of the dress and accessories of the royal personage are declared by his every stance. The turban has a golden braid tied with its folds. The angrakha though fine and white in colour has an interestingly tied and elaborate waist band that is in black and maroon stripes. The angrakha is tied in a right over left manner with a fan like protuberance as a tie-up. The fan has a golden edging. He is wearing a long necklace of double stringed black beads which fall beyond the waistband. Around his wrists he has bands of golden and black beads that end in a large black stone set in gold at the centre. The angrakha has a large flare and is teamed with a black and green striped pyjami.

The accessories include his sword which has a large golden hilt and the black scabbard which has a prominent golden tip. The mojadis that he is wearing are beautiful examples of leather work. These have pink toned leather insets and the entire camel skin forming the closed mojadi is dyed orange and
has several eyelets and decorative embroidery motifs on it. The mojadis end behind the heel in thin pointed tongues.

Clothing Types of India

Draped clothes

Probably the oldest and commonest form of dress in pre-colonial India consisted of various cloths draped around the body and held together by tucks and folds. Men’s clothes were often white, and either plain or with simple borders. They were usually made from cotton, but were sometimes of silk. The poorest men wore little more than a basic loincloth (langoti), but the longer waist-cloth (dhoti), which could be wrapped and tucked in various ways, was more common. The upper body was either left uncovered or draped with a shawl (chadar), depending on the season and occasion. The head was wrapped by some form of turban (pugri) which could be tied in a number of different regional and specialized ways. By the nineteenth century many men had added long tunics or shirts to their dhotis, and some were wearing whole outfits of stitched cloth.

Women’s draped dress appears to have been undifferentiated from men’s in early Vedic times, but the lower and upper cloths later gave way to the single length of draped clot, nowadays known as the sari. This transformation is thought to have taken place by the late Vedic period. The sari, still the most popular form of women’s dress in India today, was worn by being wrapped around the lower body with one end draped over the upper body. Later it was also manipulated to cover the head and sometimes the face. It was generally made from cotton or silk and decorated by dyeing, printing and/or embroidering. By the late nineteenth century many educated urban women and some rural women had added blouses and undershirts to their saris. The most striking feature of the dhoti, sari chadar and pugri was that they were worn entirely by draping and tucking, and their manufacture required neither tailoring nor stitching.
Stitched clothes

Contrary to the popular belief that stitched clothes were first brought to India in the medieval period by Muslims, there is in fact evidence that some Indian women were wearing stitched skirts (ghaghras), bodices (cholis) and head-cloths (odhnis) even as early as the eleventh century BC. Similarly, some Indian men, particularly in parts of northern and western India, were wearing stitched tunics and trousers many centuries before the Muslim conquest. The comparatively limited range of stitched clothes available in pre-medieval India was, however, greatly expanded during the Sultanate and Moghul periods when various types of trousers, robes and tunics gained in popularity. By the nineteenth century a long-sleeved outer robe (jama, angarkha) or tunic (kurta) worn with trousers (pyjamas) had become the acceptable outfit for an educated Indian man in public, if not in private. Muslim women generally wore a veil (dupatta), a long tunic (kamiz) with trousers (shalwar) or the wide flared skirt-like trouser (gharara). Following the Muslim conquest of northern India women gradually adopted such dress, eventually making it the regional style for parts of Northern India.

The distinction between draped and stitched clothing has often been treated as if it were a distinction between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' dress. Certainly some Hindus, accustomed to wearing draped clothes, opposed the introduction of tailored garments on the grounds that they were ritually defiling. Uncut, unstitched cloth was considered less permeable to pollution and was preferred for all ritual performances. Many of the Hindu men who were stitched clothes to work during the Moghul period would change back into draped garments before re-entering the sacred space of their own homes.

However, this practice does not confirm the notion that there were once clear-cut religious orders of clothing. There is no clear evidence of an ancient Hindu injunction against stitched clothes, and it therefore seems likely that certain Hindus used religious arguments as a means of preserving their

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favoured dress and preventing the widespread acceptance of stitched garments. Meanwhile certain Muslims used the plea of Islamic moral decency in their attempts to convert Hindus to stitched clothes. As we have seen stitched garments were already worn in India before the Muslim invasions, when they were not regarded as ‘Muslim dress’, which suggests that their designation as ‘Muslim’ was indeed a later interpretation which Hindus used as a justification for sartorial resistance. By the late nineteenth century many educated Hindu families regarded stitched clothes as superior to the comparatively scanty dhoti. While in religious contexts they saw them as defiling, in secular contexts they saw them as proof of educational advancement and sophistication.

This association of tailored garments with advancement and sophistication was to gain further importance with the arrival of European styles introduced principally by European traders, missionaries and colonial administrators. European dress differed from most forms of Indian dress in the way it was cut, stitched and shaped to the contours of the body. Gender differences were also strongly demarcated in European dress, with women’s skirts and dresses giving them a distinctive and exaggeratedly curvaceous outline in relation to the more linear forms of men’s dress.

The use of light-colored linen suits for the summer and lightweight woolen fabrics in the winter were examples of such adaptations by the British who made India their home. More radical was the invention of a new form of hat, specially designed in the 1840s to protect imperial heads from the torturous rays of the tropical sun. Made from the pith of the sola plant, this light but bulbous hat was initially called a sola tope (pith helmet), but its function soon got confused with its fabric and it became known to many as the solar tope. By the late nineteenth century it was worn fastidiously by European men in India and slightly less by the women and children, who often wore fancier versions. It was the distinctive nature of various forms of European headwear that inspired Indians to refer to Europeans as topi walas (hat-wearing people).
Two basic desires fuel the fashion industry—novelty and conformity. Nearly everyone likes to wear something new. That is why we sometimes buy clothes, not because an older garment has worn out, but simply because we want a change. At the same time, we do not want to look out of place, so we buy clothes that conform to some degree to the style worn by our associates. Over the centuries the clothing industry has catered to—and sometimes exploited—these desires for novelty and conformity.

For centuries kings and nobles set the standards of dress. In the 17th century, King Louis XIII of France decided to wear a wig to cover his baldness. Before long, European nobles were shaving their heads and wearing wigs—a style that lasted more than a century.

In the 19th century, women’s magazines brought fashion trends to the fore and even offered inexpensive patterns so that women could make their own clothes. In the 20th century, as movies and television gained popularity, stars became international idols and set trends in fashion. Popular musicians too sported radical styles, which many youths quickly imitated. Today, little has changed, as advertisers make effective use of fashion shows, glossy magazines, billboards, shop windows, and television advertisements to generate a demand for new clothes.

Social and technological changes played an even greater role in clothing the masses. In Western Europe and North America, people had more money to spend. In the 1850’s, women’s magazines appeared, and soon thereafter department stores began to offer ready-to-wear clothes in standard sizes. Also in the 19th century, Charles Frederick Worth introduced fashion shows, using live models to spark the interest of prospective clients.

Today young people have taken the place of the wealthy as the most ardent fashion enthusiasts. There is no doubt that following fashion can help one to improve one’s appearance and boost self-confidence. The right outfit
can minimize some physical flaws and even enhance your positive features. It can also have a bearing on how you are viewed by others.

But there is a dark side to the fashion world, one that cannot be ignored. Shoppers can become trapped in an endless cycle of replenishing their wardrobe. After all, the industry keeps churning out new styles. This is no accident, for fashion houses make more money when clothes become obsolete quickly. As designer Gabrielle Chanel put it, "fashion is made to become unfashionable." Thus, the unwary consumer might feel obligated to buy new clothes just to keep up to date.

There is also the danger of succumbing to the subtle pressure of advertising. Fashion companies spend millions of dollars promoting their products, often portraying a certain carefree life-style that those who wear their label supposedly enjoy. These messages can have a powerful impact. "Nothing is more traumatic for teenagers than not having the 'right brand' of shoes," says a schoolteacher in Spain.

Some groups use a certain style of clothing to identify themselves. What they wear may convey a rejection of society, a liberal life-style, or even violent or racist ideals. Although some of these styles may be outrageous or shocking, there is usually a high degree of conformity within the group. Even some who do not endorse the group's ideals may be attracted to the style. Those who adopt these trends of dress may give others the impression that they share and promote the group's core beliefs.

Fads usually come and go, some within a few months. They may originate with a popular musician or other trendsetter. A few fashions, though, become established styles. Blue jeans, for example, were popular among youthful protesters in the 1950's and 1960's. Now, however, they are worn in a variety of settings by people of various age groups.
The end of the 19th century and the advent of the 20th century brought changes both in male and female dress styles. The effects of the Second World War in particular led men to adopt western cuts of shirts and trousers and suits and ties. The pyjama, the dhoti, the kurta - be it the Lucknowi or the Punjabi kurta or the Pathani shirt and shalwar the loose tunic, the achkan and the sherwani continued as formal wear, sometimes topped with waistcoat and a chadar or shawl on the left shoulder, but increasingly men donned western suits for office as well as state and official functions. Shoes also were laced and buckled in the western style, but pump shoes and sandals continued to be worn with indigenous costumes. As trends came and went there were certain political and ideological pre-conditions attached to the wearing of headgear. Caps of different designs, either of plain cotton or embroidered, were worn by Hindu and Muslim men on festive occasions. The turbans were both status symbol religious adherence identifying adornments that were considered essential or optional as per the occasion. The status of the person wearing the turban was dictated by the colour, manner of wearing and adornments [like kalgi, kada or strings of pearls or precious stones] gave an idea of the wearer’s social standing, rank and economic class. The sola tupi or sun-hat of the British was worn by Bengali officials, who also dressed in western uniforms of khaki, white or navy blue in various capacities during and after the British rule in the country. The commoner was wont to wrap a short safa or head cloth around his head. The women had to veil themselves according to their social status and whether they were married or not as also whether they belonged to a particular caste or economic class.

Women's hairstyles have witnessed noticeable changes since the 1980s. Women traditionally made their long hair up in a coil or joora and girls wore braids and plaits, but now they took to varying their hairstyles. In various communities in India the wearing of hair long and unshorn was a strict religious edict while in others there were several political and social status attributes

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appended to the hair of men and women. Women especially had to follow certain social/ cultural diktats regarding the wearing of their hair and their status in life. In certain communities the widows were constrained to have their heads tonsured once their husbands had died. There were also certain other restrictions appended to the dressing and adorning of hair. It was considered bad among married women to leave their hair open in the evening, comb hair while sitting on a bed and to open up a freshly done plait in most societies.

In Bengal, sari in rural and urban areas was initially worn without a blouse or petticoat. The drape was knotted at the waist on the left side, folded back to the right to form an apron, then encircled around the back to emerge below the right arm. This end of the cloth was then thrown on the left shoulder, and when needed, would be used to cover the head as a sign of propriety in front of elders or when attending religious ceremonies. This style was adopted by all classes and came to be known as the Bengali style of sari wearing. The pleated sari or *kuchi* drape which has become standard dress for Bengali women possibly acquired social acceptability by the 19th century as drawings and photographs of that period reveal.

The *kuchi* style or pleated sari was not immediately popular among all classes of people. It was considered non-traditional, the style of modernity and was therefore, disapproved initially. Its continued use by the elitist classes, together with the overriding grace of the drape, gave the sari its grace.

**Dressing to change**

Indians are not alone in confusing modern with Western. Afghanistan's King Amanullah (great-uncle of ex-King Zahir Shah) tried in 1928 to make the masses Western. Whereas the tribal representatives this time were adorned in a variety of local attire, those who attended in 1928 were all buttoned uncomfortably into three-piece suits. It was the first time they had worn western clothes, but Amanullah insisted on it.
Underlying the sartorial difference are more significant social and political differences. Appearances matter but appearances can also be deceptive. Historically, China and Japan have demonstrated that modern clothes can camouflage medieval thinking.

The cardinal error that these well-meaning rulers made was to confuse modern with Western. Often, their westernization only compounded social imbalance by accentuating the gulf between outward appearance and inner responses. The resultant difficulties revealed that a sartorial revolution by itself achieves little without education, economic advance and a progressive outlook. One successful example was of an Asian monarch, Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who is never seen in anything but his kilt-like national robe, the kho.

Indian Politicians move from Khadi to Calvin Klein

Fashion has made inroads into the political arena too with politicians embarking upon image-building exercises. No longer is a regional garb donned just to please the electorate, but attention is paid to 'what looks good'.

Thus, today politicians are seen sporting designer clothes, Nike shoes and Calvin Klein sunglasses. The entry of personalities from the world of showbiz too has brought in an element of glamour and hi-fashion, hitherto absent in the political firmament of the country.

"It is always the overall impact of the campaigner that matters. And clothes are a part of it. If he is looking good, at least some, if not all, in the audience are definitely going to sit up and notice," says fashion diva Ritu Beri. Such image-building measures are not always adopted consciously but it is a fact that people always relate better to a more presentable candidate," says BJP media coordination incharge Amitabh Sinha.

Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, herself seems to be following the adage "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" by wearing outfits particularly in vogue in the region where she is campaigning. But this fashion consciousness
is not restricted to political leaders alone and has even bitten the ordinary party cadres. Ties in orange and green with a lotus in full bloom are available for the die hard BJP fans, so is a generous stock of silk sarees of both the artificial and Surat variety with the party’s colours and symbols printed all over.

During the election season, politicians, whichever party they belong to, have decided to “look good,” whether they “feel good” or not. They are making their own fashion statement, what with campaigning going live on television. Nike, Gucci and Lotto shoes, Rayban and Calvin Klein sunglasses and Rolex watches are going into the style making of politicians. Indian politicians have come a long way from the 50s, when the rough hewn khadi and white Nehru cap was the colour of politics. Khadi itself has made it to the designer’s table and wearing khadi today is a sign of class and wealth. Although some men still prefer the white kurta-pyjamas or, in the case of the Tamil Nadu politicians, starched white shirts and veshtis, the women have long ago discarded the signature white and blue bordered sari associated with the freedom struggle. Both Sonia Gandhi and her daughter Priyanka have been following the family traditions set by Indira Gandhi, of wearing the famous cottons and silks from the regions they visit. Thus the mother-daughter duo are sometimes in a Sambalpur cotton, a Gadwhal, a Pochampalli or a Chettinad depending on where they are campaigning that day.

Meanwhile various parties have adopted party colours in some form or other to set them apart. So you have the Telegu Desam men wearing canary yellow shirts, the Janata Dal (Secular) sporting green stoles, the Congress has its tricolour angavastrams and caps and the BJP its own saffron caps and shawls. In contrast to the smart dressers is the stark kurta-pyjama look of the Left party politicians in their ordinary Bata shoes. And there is also Laloo Prasad Yadav’s penchant for facing the TV camera in his vest or banian.
Fashion Designers and Fashion Statements