CULTURE IN THE VANITY BAG

Being an essay on clothing and adornment in passing and abiding India by

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

"The apparel proclaims the man."

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Culture in the Vanity Bag

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PREFACE

This essay on the various types of clothing in India was written some years ago, and was not published because I was busy with other works. For this reason the section dealing with the contemporary situation will not be found to be quite up-to-date. But as the book is mainly about the historical evolution of costumes and seeks to illustrate their relationship with the different cultures that have been seen in India, I hope this will not vitiate the general thesis of the book.

Some portions of the book were published at various times in the Statesman, Times of India and Hindustan Standard in India, and in the London Magazine in England. I am indebted to these papers for allowing me to incorporate them in the book.

Owing to my absence from India for nearly six years I was not able to read the proofs of the book. So some corrections which could have been made only by the author could not be carried out. I hope this defect will be overlooked.

To my friend Nagendra Bhattacharya I am indebted for the explanatory drawings without which some parts of the text would not have been fully intelligible and which I am sure embellish the book.

I wish to thank Mr. Luis S. R. Vas of Jaico Publishing House for the trouble he has taken to see this book through the press.

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Nirad C. Chaudhuri
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ERRATA

Page 4 line 12 read 'Newcastle' for 'New Castle'
Page 4 line 15 read 'garment' for 'garmet'
Page 5 line second from last read 'ville' for 'vilde'
Page 9 line 25 read 'measurement' for 'measurements'
Page 12 line fourth from last read 'easygoing' for 'easy going'
Page 13, line 7 from last, read 'ecology of clothing,' for 'ecology and clothing'

Page 15 last line, delete (1)
Page 19 line 5 from last, read 'curry' for 'carry'
Page 2, line 16, read 'Mongoloid' for 'Mangoloid'
Page 12, line 17, delete (1)
Page 24, line 5, read 'Aristophanes' for 'Aristohanes'
Page 25, line 7 from last, read 'Persepolis' for 'Perseplis'
Page 27, line 13, read 'male' for 'make'
Page 31, line 5, read 'that' for 'but'
Page 34, line 7, read 'vocation' for 'vacation'
Page 68, line 18, read 'hard' for 'nard'
Page 70, line 7, read 'veneris' for 'Veneris'
Page 82, line 11 from last, read 'are' for 'ar'
Page 106, line 5, read 'Browne' for 'Brown'
Page 112, line 22, read 'smart' for 'mart'
Page 116, line 24, read 'Mulliner' for 'Indian'
Page 118, line 6, read 'Stobart' for 'Stobut'
Culture in the Vanity Bag
INTRODUCTION

This book, I cannot emphasize too strongly, is not a work of research or scholarship. It is primarily the expression of my interest in clothing as a form of art and as an element in personal relations. I believe implicitly that a man who has lost interest in clothing and adornment has also lost interest in life. I need not say that to women, among whom I hope I shall find the great majority of readers, because I cannot conceive of a woman without the interest. This human interest by itself will explain my writing of the book even if it had no other intention, and the same interest has also made me capable of writing it by sharpening my observation of costumes and my curiosity about all their details, which otherwise I should perhaps have overlooked.

Those who will take up the book will also, I hope, do so from the same interest and read it in the spirit my friends listen to me. When the aperitifs go round, or coffee and liqueurs are brought in, my friends allow me to hold forth in virtual monologue, though to save my conscience I try to persuade myself that in this exchange the other side is inaudible only in the flesh and not in the spirit. But however that may be, they are most generous to me, for by giving me a hearing they enable me to write my books, which are only a somewhat finished form of my talking.

It is still more generous of them to feel amused. Those who do not like me or my views do indeed tell me that people listen to me with the object of laughing at me, instead of with me. I do not think that is wholly correct. But even if it were, I am not one of those high-placed and therefore extra-solemn countrymen of mine who cannot bear to be laughed at. I agree with the dictum of one of the greatest wits in English literature: "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?" I am always ready to make sport for everybody without even the countervailing right to laugh at somebody.

But not even the worst fool can guarantee that he will be uniformly entertaining at his own expense. So I give the reader full freedom to shut the book as soon as he feels bored. After that I would only expect him to open it from time to time to obtain information about Indian costumes if he is interested in
the subject, or to clear up any doubt which his own observation may have given rise to. In other words, so far as the book furnishes information, I should like him to use it as a Murray's Guide to India in respect of clothing. But I must also set down a caution: what I provide is not information as modern governments understand it. There is neither publicity 'hand-out' nor even bluebooks behind it. All the information I possess has been gathered in the course of a lifetime, in the process of living, though some reading has also been undertaken to eke out the living experience. So for all the absence of solidity in the book I shall ask the reader's indulgence in the words of Pope:

*In every work regard the writer's End<br>Since none can compass more than they intend.*

Nevertheless, I should be sailing under false colours and in addition carrying contraband if I did not tell the reader frankly that there is more in this book besides simple entertainment and elementary information. I am a man of theory, and naturally the essay will be found to be packed with inferences and deductions. But I am no more likely to be abashed about them by any rebuke from anybody than Sherlock Holmes was by Lestrade's. I believe I am a theorist of the right sort. That is to say, my mind is so constituted by nature and so formed by training that any intense and continuous bombardment of my conscious and subconscious self produces in me, through the mere impingement of the facts themselves, a sense and feeling of their inter-relation, and finally an image on my mental screen of the pattern of this inter-relation both in repose and in motion. My theories, as I suppose all scientific theories are, only the conscious setting down of a revealed pattern. I am thus only the recording instrument.

To be more particular, what in the case of clothing and adornment both deliberate observation and unavoidable and unavoidable daily contact have produced in me is the awareness that their varied forms hang together in a very complex system of affinities and oppositions—not symbiosis alone, but antibiosis as well—which exist both consciously and unconsciously and in their attractions and repulsions make an organized world of clothing. This self-revelation of clothing has made me feel that the study
INTRODUCTION

of this expression of the culture of a people can be as legitimate a science as zoology or botany. What I am going to offer is thus a morphological, functional, and ecological study of Indian clothing and adornment, with this important reservation that in the existing state of our knowledge of the subject it can not be anything but an incomplete and tentative essay.

There is another aspect of this self-revealed picture of Indian clothing which as it dawned on me struck me even more forcibly. As soon as the general pattern and lines of evolution of Indian clothing had become clear to me in themselves I could also see that these had repeated within their limits the whole pattern of the evolution of human life and culture in the country. This means that the evolution of clothing in India has been only a part of the historical evolution of the peoples of India, possessing similar features, following similar lines, and producing similar results. To be even more explicit, clothing and adornment were and continue to be as much an expression of the nature of things Indian, rerum Indicarum natura as any other human activity, say, politics, social and economic life, culture as embodied in literature or art could be.

Therefore clothing and adornment exist and have evolved in obedience to what I regard as the general laws of the historical evolution of the peoples of India. I have set down and discussed many of these in my previous books, and here I would single out only three of the broadest:

1. All cultural movements come into India from outside, making the country a museum or warehouse of cultures.

2. These movements never combine to coalesce into one civilization, but remain distinct, existing side by side, sometimes in unquiet and unbalanced autonomy, but oftener in conflict.

3. All cultures lose their original power and beauty in time, and continue as survivals which, as a rule, are weedy but indestructible.

In my study of Indian history I had found these laws operating in the ethnic, social, political, economic, and cultural evolution of my country, and it only needed an excursion into the world of clothing to see them again at work in a special field of culture.

This leads me to my concluding remark that clothing and
adornment in India are much deeper waters than what these are elsewhere, especially in the West. I dare-say even in the West clothing is a part of the cultural evolution and a manifestation of culture. But since there are no rival families of clothes or cultures to create trouble, people there do not perceive how deep even their waters must be. Judging by the apparent harmony they feel too inclined to think that clothing is only still water rippling to passing breezes. In India even this appearance is not possible. Therefore with the all too obvious anarchy and unrest before me I have been compelled by the discomfort inflicted by both to seek their cause, and to find peace if in anything else at least in understanding.
PART ONE

ORDERS AND TAXONOMY OF CLOTHING

(This part has five chapters:

1. A Motley World
2. Natural Orders of Clothing
3. Affiliations and Adaptations
4. Two Worlds of Adornment
5. Jewellery and Clothing).
Chapter 1

A MOTLEY WORLD

Every visitor is struck by the immense variety of costumes in India. It seems to be endless, and is not accounted for by the size of the country, continental as it is. China, the United States, even the multi-racial Soviet Union, all of which are larger, present no such spectacle. Europe has been ruined by its insensate national rivalries, but in clothing at least there is a genuine European community. Even the Americans and the Russians, the two peoples who have raised hatred between human groups to a pitch of implacability never before seen in the history of the world—even these wear the same kind of clothing. But it is a special feature of human life in India that there is in it full, or virtually full, group and individual autonomy in respect of clothes.

This impression, which is created in the first instance by the country as a whole, is oppressively heightened by the big cities. Within a few square miles they not only reproduce a large range of all the variations in costume to be found in the entire subcontinent, but also make them infinitely more confused and bewildering. That is to say, if in regard to clothing the cities are microcosms of the country, they are also very disorderly microcosms. They prove quite decisively that whatever might happen in the sphere of government, in matters of dress at all events anarchy is a workable concept, with no harmful effect on survival. Perhaps even the theorists of anarchy would have found in it too much of a good thing.

In all these cities there is an aggregation, more or less complete, of all the costumes worn in the country, whatever might be their provenance or cultural affiliation. Naturally, in some the range of specimens is less wide than in others. For example, Madras probably has the fewest variations, Calcutta more, and Delhi, despite the predominance of the Punjabi costume, the most.

Those who have not seen this motley world with their own eyes in flesh and blood can have no conception of what it looks like, and words even at their most vivid are but dull and faint.
So all that I can attempt to do is to convey just an intellectual notion of the picture presented, and that too of only a section, a detail — namely, the costumes for the lower limbs of my country-women, and such of these as I can see at any time in a place like Delhi, without taking any pains to seek them out. Let me take them in their natural genera:

1. The European

Of this group I can see, taking them in the order of ascending amplitude, jeans (not yet undies, which are still sported in the streets by foreign women resolved on flaunting their diffluent nudity in the Hindu world, which is like taking whitewashed coal to New Castle), slacks, skirts, and frocks. Occasionally, I also see the European petticoat in the streets, but that is not common, for its public appearance is due to hurry or to a passing negligence, though it is often the only nether garment indoors.

II. The Muslim

In this group there is, first, the well-known salwar; then the tight Pajama which till lately was worn by old and old-fashioned Muslim women but has now been adopted by extra-smart young girls; next comes the gharrara, a very pretty garment, which like the salwar is a divided piece, but so spread out and frilled below that it looks like a flounced skirt. One can see it in all its glory by lingering and loitering near about the gates of the residence of the High Commissioner for Pakistan in New Delhi, a risky proceedings though.

III. The Hindu

Sub-group A. This is made up of all the varieties of the sari, worn either in the modern manner or in the traditional styles, of which the most important are the Bengali, Hindustani, Gujarati, Marathi, and Tamil.

Sub-group B. This is comprised of sewn garments like the very full and flowing Rajasthan skirt and the straight Tamil skirt.

I am not including in this enumeration the clothes of the aboriginal women, nor the sports clothing affected by women from Westernized homes, nor the uniforms of the woman police, girl guides, and the girls of the National Cadet Corps, all of which I can also see.
This will be considered as enough in the way of variety. But the more important thing is that these costumes, though present in the cities, are never seen in them in their purity. A man coming from the natural habitat of a particular costume will notice unexpected and jarring modifications which might make him incapable of recognizing it as the garment for which it passes. But the curious thing is that these departures from the norms are due, not so much to syncretism, that is, the assimilation of one Indian costume to another, as to the impact of Western clothing. The interaction between the Indian and the European costume is immensely more powerful than that which exists up to a point among the Indian forms. And it is this which has made the motley clothes in the cities much more motley than what they would have been if they had evolved by themselves.

The influence of the West on clothing in India is seen most obviously, of course, in the presence everywhere of the European suit, the masculine garment pur sang. But far more significant is the visible stamp of Westernization on all city clothing of the native types. This Westernization is of two kinds: first, that in which a Western garment has been added to the Indian costume and has become a part of it; and the second, that in which there have been mutations of Indian garments on Western lines. The blend is not always clearcut. But I shall give a few examples which illustrate the mixture typically.

The European garment which is most widely seen in India and has been most thoroughly acclimatized is the shirt. It has penetrated even into the countryside. It is worn with every species of male garment for the lower limbs in India and by very young boys with nothing else at all. Sometimes it seems as if adult persons were also wearing it in the same innocent and childlike fashion. But this is a wrong impression, due to the fact that in such cases the lower piece is a pair of drawers too short to reach below the shirt ends. This can be easily checked by dropping something before a man so clad, and stooping to pick it up.

The other accompaniments to the shirt have now to be mentioned. Among sewn clothes it is used with trousers, always tucked in; with shorts, tucked in or hanging loose ad libitum; with the Western pyjama (adjunct of the sleeping suit), which is seen in public places in India and is a form of tenue de vite, always hanging loose; and also hanging loose, with all forms of
the Indian trouser-like garment: namely, the common Indian Pajama (which incidentally means 'garment for the legs,' and can be Latinized with an affectation of zoological nomenclature as *Pajama pajama vulgaris*), the churidar pajama (*pajama constrictor*), and the salwar (*Pajama punjabensis*) when worn by a man, it being a bi-sexual garment. Among unsewn clothing the shirt is worn over the dhoti as well as over the lungi or sarong, of course always hanging loose. It is often kept unfastened at the neck and sleeves, and if it is of the detached collar type, the collar is not only not worn, it is not even made.

In my boyhood the European dress-shirt in its stiff version was by itself a recognized formal wear for men, and one much admired and respected. Wealthy people went to visit and even to parties in these shirts, looking very imposing with their starched fronts, gold or diamond studs and links, sometimes a gold chain, and a very fine crinkled dhoti as diaphanous as the finest Muslin, and also patent leather pumps with bows. One of my school-fellows in Calcutta used to come to class every day in this dress, and he heightened his importance by taking snuff off and on from an ivory or enamelled *tabatiere*, which (since he was quite rotund in the middle) made him look like Napoleon. With these shirts too the collar was never worn.

In the last few years the bush-shirt in all its varieties has become a serious rival to the shirt. But it has made its rapid headway and become popular among all classes of my countrymen without offering any serious challenge to an established synthesis in clothing. It also belongs to the family *Camisidae*, and is only a more versatile shirt, with just that novelty and Americanism in it which enables the wearer to believe that he is moving with the times and is progressive. In reality, in India it is continuing the firm, epiphytic hold that the shirt has taken already on our costumes.

The coat is another European garment commonly seen in the great Indian cities. It is, of course, widely used as a part of the European suit or of a suit which is a nationalized adaptation of the European, but here I am speaking of it only as an adjunct to purely Indian nether-garments. The combination has become somewhat rare nowadays, though the coat is still worn with certain types of the pajama. On the other hand, in the last decades
of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, it was regularly worn with the dhoti.

When so used it was a component of the most formal wear of a well-dressed man. It was put on to go over a shirt or shirt-like shift, which in its turn was sometimes tucked under the dhoti and sometimes allowed to hang loose below the coat-tails. In Bengal we dispensed with the shirt-collar when it was detachable, and we never wore a tie. But we placed a shawl on the coat, the more embroidered the better, and the shawl was arranged symmetrically on the shoulders after being folded into a neat demi-hexagon with a V-shaped opening in the middle. Moreover, a gold chain, often very massive, was added to the coat (not to the waist-coat as in the English style), and the Bengali gentleman looked most impressive in this — his most formal dress at the turn of the century, more impressive than even in his dress-shirt.

When, however, the coat was worn informally in Bengal, as it usually was by young people, it was put on without the use of linen underneath. We just enclosed our bare, disrobed bodies in it, only pulling out the folds of the dhoti which hang in front, and wrapping them round the neck like a cravat. I myself wore the coat in this manner very often when I was young.

In Madras people wore a tie even when they put on the coat over the dhoti. The elaboration was not obligatory, but it was usual for formal occasions. For instance, the advocates of the High Court in Madras and others, too, were seen in a costume which, taken in the foot-to-head order, consisted of the following: bare feet; the dhoti on the lower limbs; the shirt, tie, and coat on the torso; vermillion or other caste mark on the forehead; and an immaculate turban on the head. As these advocates with their keen and normally handsome, forensic faces had a severe intellectual expression, it seemed as if the great Shankara or Ramanuja had gone into fancy dress to serve the British Raj.

I shall now consider the other aspect of the impact of the West on Indian clothing, namely, the modification of traditional garments under foreign influence. I think I can illustrate this most vividly by taking the dress of women, which in India is recognized to be far more conservative than that of men. In this respect our women, even the most Anglicized, offer a notable
contrast to all other women, and more especially to those of the Near East and Far East today. But my feeling is that this traditionalism is more extrinsic than intrinsic, a matter of form than of the spirit.

Of course, nowadays many more Hindu girls are seen in European clothes than at any time in the past. Still, I do not attach much importance to this fact. The persons so clad are very few in number compared with those who wear Indian clothing. They are also girls who are at school in convents and other missionary establishments, which were run originally for Eurasians and Indian Christians but are now enjoying a passing vogue with a particular class of Hindus. These schools perpetuate half-castes traits and values, together with the notorious Eurasian accent and vocabulary of the English language. I think their popularity with the non-Christians of our country is a very temporary fashion.

What I had really in mind when I said that our women were conservative in form rather than in spirit was their extraordinary capacity to absorb Western influences in their dress in a far more subtle and penetrating manner. Indeed, on this score, they have a remarkable achievement to their credit: they have succeeded in putting new wine in old bottles without visibly cracking them. But, alas! it is not the Western visitor to India, but we alone who can realize, because of our familiarity with the bouquet and taste of the old wine, how much of their inmost sartorial dharma, the nātura naturans of costume, these women are sacrificing. I shall try to demonstrate this by analysing the latest evolutionary trends in a number of common Indian feminine garments.

Let me begin with the kamiz (cameeze in Anglo-Indian English), which is worn above the salwar, and then has the dupatta or scarf thrown over it. This famous triad is regarded by many Western and even Hindu aesthetes as the most graceful woman’s costume in India if not in the world. The word kamiz is supposed to have come into the Indian languages from Portuguese, which in its turn is said to have taken it over from Arabic. I am inclined to think that we got it directly from Arabic instead of at one remove through Portuguese. But I also take note of the possibility that classical Arabic may have borrowed it from Latin, for though the word in its Arabic form is found in the Quran
itself, the word *camisia* which has the same meaning occurs in pre-Islamic Latin works. Some maintain, however, that the Romans themselves may have adopted it from an older form of Arabic, through the Idumaeans.

But whatever the origin of the word, there is no doubt about the origin of the garment. It is Islamic, and it came in with the Muslim invaders, to be adopted even by the Hindus of the northwestern parts of India. Though it continued to be worn in its standard form for centuries without any alterations in its cut, in the last ten years or so its appearance has become very unstable. It is exhibiting continual fluctuations. Thus at times it looks almost like a corset without straps or suspenders, but creating an impression, perhaps unfounded, of boning; sometimes it has the cut of a laced surcoat, which European women put on in the middle ages; but I also see it in forms in which it is hardly distinguishable from a frock, and even a dressing gown and housecoat, reaching almost to the ankles. These side-to-side and up-and-down contractions and expansions are wholly arbitrary, but, of course, we know where the disturbing winds are coming from.

The salwar, on the other hand, is showing only a shrinking tendency. It is admired as a very graceful apparel, and so it is with its deep longitudinal folds. It is an ample garment for ample figures, and its beauty depends on its very amplitude. Those who pay for the material required by it in its classical form know what that means. The average hip measurements of those for whom the salwar is natural wear, is — to give a necessarily impressionistic but by no means inaccurate estimate — fifty inches, though in first-rate figures it is much more. (Their husbands, incidentally, like them to be like luxuriously upholstered, deep club chairs.)

Now, the salwar to be a genuine salwar must be capable of accommodating two such persons, and I can test that on every clothes-line on adjacent roofs. Even such a garment has been frightened by the abominable jeans into an attempt to slim itself. In the last few years I have been noticing salwars which ought to be called salwarettes, and which if they are not quite like jeans, are perilously like the trousers of the teddy boys.

The third component of the ensemble, the dupatta or scarf, has undergone a more revolutionary transmogrification. It was, above all, a shield of modesty, and therefore not only was it
made of heavy material, it was also thrown over the head like a nun's hood and over the bust like a cape or tucker. It gave to its wearers the grave look of a religieuse, and to those who were beautiful almost the grace of the famous Virgin of the Annunciation of Rheims. These heads and shoulders can be seen in Amrit Shergil's paintings. But the dupatta no longer covers anything. It has shrunk into a vestigial wisp, which just floats on the shoulders and throws hardly a veil of gossamer on an unbelievable ostentation.

To give only one other illustration of the disturbing effect of the Western impact on our feminine costume, and one which will be the least expected: for it is the effect on the sari, which is justly looked upon as the most stable and typical article of an Indian woman's clothing. It is the garment of all garments which makes her look most Indian, and to which, as is widely known, she is even more devoted than to her husband, great and unquestionable as the conjugal devotion is. Even this sari is stumbling. I have been following its evolution, rather involution, ever since I became capable of reflexion, and I have been taking note of a progressive de-Hinduization of a supremely Hindu garment.

In its traditional designs and materials, as also in the manner of wearing it, it had, and still has, in the regions where the tradition of costume was and remains stable, an immense range of variation. Those who want to form an adequate idea of this should not stare at modernistic Indian women, nor go into the sari shops of the big cities; they should, if they can do nothing else, visit only the textile gallery of the Indian Museum in Calcutta, and that should serve reveal the difference between genuine style and pastiche. But I am afraid, nowadays, it has become virtually impossible to see the traditional ways of wearing the sari without taking infinitely greater trouble, because that can be done only by travelling in the countryside over the whole length and breadth of the land.

In the cities the sari is rapidly approaching an all-India norm, though the process is still far from being complete, except among Westernized Hindu women. This is due to Occidental influences. How far down it should reach, how close it should cling to the body, how much of it should be used for obscuring the head, face, and bust presented no problems in the past. Cus-
tom had decided all these questions. Now, however, the problems have not only emerged, they are also being solved in the light of the fashions of London and Paris.

It would be interesting to work this out more thoroughly, and appraise the influence, direct or indirect, of Bond Street and Rue du Faubours Saint Honore' on the dress of Indian women. Some years ago, speaking before the girls of the most fashionable women's college in Delhi, I showed them a photograph of a gown, a creation of Parisian haute couture by Jean Patou, and asked them to consider which way the current was flowing, — from the sari to the gown, or vice versa. I incline to the second opinion.

I did not hand the photograph to the girls, for fear of putting ideas in their head. Already, to my thinking, the sari had shrunk enough. This can be demonstrated by exact measurements. I have a sari at home which is about one hundred and thirty years old. It is 24 feet in length, and weighs 1 lb. 8 oz. My wife's wedding sari of gold brocade, bought about thirty-five years ago, is over 17 feet long, and is 1 lb. 8 oz. in weight. A pretty neighbour of mine, who was married just before we got our national independence, was given two fine saris at her wedding. The first, originally belonging to her mother, was bought around 1917 when South Indian saris were still maintaining their standard length. So it is 24 feet long and weighs 1 lb. 4 oz. Even her second sari, bought at the time of her marriage, is over 17 feet in length, like my wife's and weighs 1 lb. But her new saris, all of which conform to the latest fashions, are from 15 to 16 feet in length, and go to scale at only 8 oz.

Even this weight, many ultra-modern Indian women find it too heavy to carry on their shoulders, though the greater part of it has necessarily to be carried below the waist, and the shoulders are broad enough. So, even in the streets, or perhaps specially in them, they take off the end that rests on the shoulder and walk along throwing it back to slip off, all the time.
Chapter 2

NATURAL ORDERS OF CLOTHING

Is there any possibility that this tropical jungle of clothing will one day become less wild and be transformed into — I do not say the formal garden that the world of Western costumes is, but at least into what geographers describe as parkland? None whatever, to my thinking, so far as practice is concerned. But this is not to say that the human mind cannot master the confusion in order to introduce some sort of tidiness into its conception of Indian costumes. On the contrary, I feel that it is remarkably easy to lay bare the system which underlies the apparent anarchy, and the obvious, all too obvious, aesthetic madness.

India presents the same paradox in every sphere and aspect of life. It is a country of infinite variety without any fundamental complexity. Though it proliferates diversities in such numbers that the variations seem disproportionate even to the vastness of the country, it also packs these within a relatively narrow range of basic types, which then in turn are disproportionately few. Most foreigners exaggerate the diversity of India because the very eye they have for concrete details makes them see so many of them, and so distinctly, that their capacity to sort them out becomes benumbed, and they fail to distinguish the casual and irrelevant differences from those that matter. On the other hand, those Indians who profess to be intellectual, see neither the details nor the basic pattern, but impose their secondhand cliches on the reality.

In point of fact it is possible to arrange the varied costumes of India into groups of basic types, and then trace their affiliations. But in order to succeed in such an attempt the approach to the task must be revised. Too many people take the easy going line that in the world of clothing fashion bloweth where it listeth, and therefore nothing is lost, on the contrary much peace of mind gained, by giving unto fashion the things that are fashion's, and to art the things that are art's. This
attitude, which rests on the assumption that different types of clothing are the products of individual taste and even caprice, must be given up in favour of an alternative working hypothesis that they are as organic as variations are in animal or plant life, which should be obvious to all and admitted by all.

Secondly, the survey has to be carried out mainly in the countryside of India, not in the big cities, where the hybrids, as I have already pointed out, are so numerous and indeterminate that owing to their existence it becomes impossible to isolate the basic and stable types. Furthermore, some additional effort is called for to see as much of the entire country as possible, so that an idea can be formed of all geographical distribution of the different kinds of clothing.

Thirdly, there should not be any tendency to take a Noah’s Ark view of the types of costumes, as if each one of them was created by itself and stood unrelated to the others. On the contrary, the student of costume will have to make room, if he is a fundamentalist, for the evolutionist. He will have to make the same kind of effort in his field as a zoologist or botanist makes in his, through which they have both reduced the diversities in the animal and plant kingdoms, which are immensely greater, to a coherent system.

I cannot say that I have made such a study. The history of costume in India remains to be written, although a number of books have appeared recently. I hope some day an adequate history will be written. In the meanwhile, all that I can attempt is to offer a very tentative outline, with full consciousness of the gaps and uncertainties in it. But I trust I have not gone wrong, nor will mislead anybody, as to the broad features and sequences.

I shall begin by setting out in brief the taxonomy and ecology and clothing in India, taking the costumes as they are today and leaving the historical origins and affiliations to be considered later. It should also be understood that for the purpose of this classification I am basing myself on the essential elements of the different types of costumes and completely ignoring the subsidiary garments which are often adventitious and comparatively recent.
ORDER I: Mongoloid costumes

Though this is the first group of clothing I am going to mention, I must explain that beyond noting its existence I shall have no further occasion to discuss it. The group is comprised by the costumes of the Mongoloid peoples living in the Himalayan regions from the farthest east to the farthest west and in the hilly tracts of Assam.

Their clothes range from the extremely scanty apparel of the Garos and the Nagas to the relatively elaborate dress of the Khasis and the Lepchas. The more primitive of these tribes have, as their basic costume, pieces of loom-woven cloth, one of which is thrown round the shoulders, and the other, the main piece, wrapped round the waist. The clothing of the more civilized among the Mongoloids of India is akin to the Tibetan and has almost certainly been derived from the latter.

The reason for not discussing these costumes in greater detail is that they have not interacted with those of India proper, except that two of the Mongoloid tribes have been influenced by the Bengali Hindu costume. These are the Manipuris and the Assamese properly so-called, i.e., the Ahom people, and this infiltration of the Hindu dress is due to the extension of Hinduism and more especially Vaishnavism through the river valleys. The male costume of the Khasis appear also to have been adopted from the Bengalis, but the women of this tribe wear their own characteristic dress.

I might add at this point that one garment which is in wide use among the Mongoloids of south-east Asia, though not those of India, is worn by a large number of people who are not Mongoloid in the eastern parts of the country. It is the lungi or sarong, which the Muslims of East Bengal, especially the Muslim peasants, use as formal wear, and which some Hindus, too, put on in an affectation of Islamic ways or to reduce the strain of keeping the dhoti in its place when worn in the Aryan manner.

ORDER II: Aboriginal costumes

This group contains so few differentiated costumes that at first sight one would be inclined to call it a species rather than an order, family, or even genus. But it is of great importance,
because it is the group constituted by the simplest and most basic costumes of the country, with a very wide distribution and quite possibly the largest number of individual wearers. This group of clothes is also the lowest common factor in dress among the main culture complexes of India, being worn by the aboriginals, Hindus and Muslims alike.

The typical article of costume in this group consists really of one piece of cotton cloth, anything between eight to fifteen feet in length and thirty to forty-five inches in width. With a slight difference in the design of the borders, it is worn by both men and women. Men wrap its middle section round the waist, pass the left-hand section between the legs and tuck it behind, while the right-hand portion is sometimes tied round the waist and sometimes folded and hung in front. The women wrap a little more than the left half of it round the lower limbs, without tucking the end, so that they seem to be in a very simple skirt, and they throw the other half on the shoulders and the bust, leaving the back virtually exposed.

This simple costume is the normal dress of all the aboriginal peoples of the Central Indian plateau and the Deccan, who are outside the pale of Hindu society. Within this society it is worn by the lower classes of Bengal and the South, and in Bengal it is also the costume of the Muslim peasant. A very interesting fact is that till recently Bengali women of even the highest castes and the wealthiest families wore the sari in this rudimentary fashion and as their sole piece of covering of the body, though with them the material was fine cotton or silk, both at times very expensive.

ORDER III: Aryan costumes

It is possible to regard the costumes of this group as only an elaborate form of those of Order II, for within this group also the main garment for both men and women is a long piece of cloth. But historically and culturally, the two groups are quite independent, and the similarities that exist between them are analogous, not homologous, though it is possible that the two groups have interacted up to a certain point.

The single piece of cloth which is the basic garment in the costumes of this group is known as the dhoti when worn by men, and as the sari when used by women. (1) The dhoti is worn
roughly in the same fashion as the cloth of the aboriginal man, but it is longer and wider, and is worn with so many folds, gathers, and tucks that it gives the impression of much fuller draping. More especially, the gathers and folds in front are heavier and hang lower.

The dhoti draped in this way is the standard clothing for all Hindus in northern India with the exception of those of the Punjab, and for the Brahmans of the South. The style of wearing it varies only in minor details from region to region, though an accumulation of these may produce the illusion of substantial differences. The most easily perceived dissimilarity is that which exists between the Bengali and the Hindustani styles. The Bengalis wear the dhoti in a very free and flowing manner, letting it hang down to the ankles, while in upper India it is draped more closely and tightly, hardly going lower than the middle point between the knees and the ankles. Moreover, outside Bengal the folds in front are taken up again and tucked on the left side of the waist, making a third tuck, but the Bengalis do this only occasionally, and generally they allow the folds to hang down to the feet.

In some regions of India the single long piece of cloth if it is of cotton material is called ‘dhoti’ even when worn by women, the word ‘sari’ being reserved for the silken piece. Etymologically, dhoti means washable.

The sari, being only the feminine counterpart of the dhoti, has the same distribution, and is also distinguished from the aboriginal woman’s cloth by roughly the same kind of gathers and tucks. A section of about four feet of its length is gathered in front and tucked in at the middle point of the front waist line, and this constitutes the main feature of the Hindu manner of wearing the sari. All over northern India women wrap it over the lower limbs like a skirt, but in South India Brahmmin women tuck the left end at the back like their menfolk, though modern women are giving it up. To allow for all the gathers and tucks with which it is worn the sari has to be a much longer piece than the dhoti, and it varies from seventeen feet to twenty-four feet and even twenty-eight feet at times in length.
SIMPLIFIED AND DEGENERATE FORMS OF ORDER II AND III.

All over India are to be found certain very simple and rudimentary forms of clothing which are worn by the labouring population, sometimes due to poverty but most often for convenience of work. It is not easy to classify them, for they might be placed either in Order II or Order III. But let me first describe them.

The most scanty of these has been described by the first Mogul Emperor of India, Babur. Speaking of the people of Hindustan and their clothing he wrote in his fascinating memoirs: "Peasants and people of low standing go about naked. They tie on a thing called languta [it is still so called], a decency-clout which hangs two spans below the navel. From the tie of this pendant decency-clout, another clout is passed between the thighs and made fast behind." There seems to be a slight inaccuracy here, unless the manner of wearing it has changed since Babur saw it. The clout as I have seen it is made up of one piece of cloth, not two.

Babur saw it in the sixteenth century. I saw it every day in my young days, and it is still to be seen in the countryside. Usually, the children of the peasants, cattle-grazers, and all types of labourers wear this thing. But it is also put on by grown up people when they work in or with water, mud, or rubbish. It has become somewhat rare in upper India in these days, but Babur's statement shows that it was commonly worn there in the past, and in the Mogul miniatures labourers are represented in it. In Bengal and other coastal regions with heavy rainfall it is still quite common.

Ordinarily, however, even for work in the fields peasants and labourers do not clothe themselves so exiguously. They put on a short piece of cloth or even their usual dhoti, trussed closely up to the middle of the thighs. These two types of clothing, though worn by the same class of people, create wholly different impressions: the clout seems to be nudity touched up, whereas the trussed dhoti appears to be vestment abbreviated.

The costumes of Order II and III belong to one large class: that of unsewn or draped costumes, standing in complete contrast to the other class of sewn or fitted costumes. The distinc-
tion between the two is absolutely fundamental to any discussion of clothing in India, perhaps not less fundamental than the distinction between the invertebrates and vertebrates in zoology. This will come out as I proceed. For the moment I have to describe the different types of sewn costumes current in India.

ORDER IV: Nomadic costumes

This group is constituted by what may almost certainly be regarded as the first and earlier of any sewn costumes worn by a particular ethnic group permanently settled in India. Nevertheless, today its distinctiveness can be established only with references to feminine clothes, because the corresponding masculine forms have either disappeared or become more or less indeterminate. But in spite of this incompleteness the individuality of these garments is very striking, and there can be no doubt about the conclusion that they have an independent status and derivation.

The first of these costumes is a harmonious whole from head to foot, and is made up of the following pieces: a very full skirt with deep and ample gathers, curving outwards; a closely fitted bodice, which is the real choli and not the counterfeit one which is seen worn by fashionable women; over the choli there is something like a waistcoat, and nowadays even a blouse or a kamiz; a scarf or cotton shawl placed like a veil on the head, wound round the body, and allowed to hang at the back. The ensemble has a linear unity and rhythm of surprising beauty and dynamism, and when one adds to it the bright colours of the materials used and the bold designs, one gets the impression of a costume with a very strong individuality. As it happens, the coiffure and ornaments of the women, and even their gait and figure, perfectly match it.

The main area of distribution is Rajputana, with the adjacent regions of Kathiawar to the west and Delhi to the east. It is also found among the Hindus living in the Himalayan hills. In Hindustan proper it is worn only by the Jats, Chamar, and other low castes. But in Rajputana and the hills it is used by upper class women as well.

Nowadays the menfolk of those who wear this feminine costume are seen either in the Hindu dhoti or the tight or
churidar pajama. I shall risk the guess that the original male
dress of this group was the tight pajama, with a closely fitting
cotton tunic, a type of costume still worn by men in Kathiawar.

South India, too, has its skirt, which is obviously uncon-
ected with the one just described, and has an independent
origin. This skirt makes a complete costume with a tightly fitting
bodice. This dress also has no male counterpart. At present
the skirt-and-bodice ensemble is worn mostly by young girls in
and from the Tamil country, and certain other parts of the South.

ORDER V: Muslim clothing

This group of more complete and elaborate sewn costumes,
with related male and female forms, is made up of what remains
in contemporary India of the original costumes of the Muslim
conquerors and rulers. At one time it was a very rich, varied,
and gorgeous group, but it has now shrunk to two forms for
men, and two for women.

The main formal garments for men in this type of costume
is now the sherwani or achkan, which in its extant forms looks
like a frock-coat below and a military jacket above. Its high
collar is even provided with hook-and-eyes for fastening neatly.
But consistently with the general practice in contemporary India,
where almost every garment is worn incorrectly or untidily, the
high collar of the sherwani is most often not only not fastened,
it is even pressed down to make an open neck. The informal
counterpart of the sherwani is a kurta or kamiz. It is worn in the
cold season and sometimes in other seasons as well in combi-
nation with a garment like the waistcoat, put on, of course, over
and not under it. The lower garments for both the sherwani
and the kamiz are, for informal wear the loose pajama and for
both formal and informal wear the tight pajama.

This male costume is worn by the Muslims of India, and
by the Hindus of the Punjab, the Sikhs, also the Islamized
Hindus of Hindustan. It is also worn by some Bengalis and
South Indians who want to carry favour with the present north
Indian ruling class. The costume has also been prescribed as
the formal dress of the diplomatic personnel of the present
Government of India, with the requirement that the sherwani is
to be in black. This, unless one goes deeply into the reasonº
for its adoption, appears to be an unnecessary departure from universal diplomatic practice.

The corresponding female costume is the salwar-kamiz-dupatta ensemble, and its variant with the gharara, about which I have already said something. This dress is worn by Muslim women, and by the Sikh and Hindu women of and from the Punjab. Quite recently some girls from Bengal and other parts of India have begun to wear it in flashy imitation and servile admiration of the physically dashing and alluring Punjabi women. But since they do not have either the good looks, or the tall figures, or the Middle Eastern manners and expression of their models they do not appear to any advantage in it.

**ORDER VI: European group**

This group is formed by the standard European costumes, both male and female, and their innumerable modifications in India. All the garments of the clothing of this group are well known, and some of the adaptations have been described by me. It is only as male attire that this kind of clothes has importance in this country. But one aspect of its adoption must be noted. Among the upper classes in India European children's clothes are universally worn by both boys and girls up to adolescence. Young people of the poorer classes also are adopting them when the means of their parents permit that. The boys when they get used to this dress hardly ever go back to the Hindu dhoti. Even my sons have not.
Chapter 3

AFFILIATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

The classification of the Indian costumes which I have just set out should, without the addition of another word of explanation, suggest their historical affiliation, and I have already inserted the key words which indicate them. What has to be done now is to elaborate the hints.

It should be obvious that the groups of clothing, called Natural Orders by me, correspond more or less exactly to the main ethnic groups described in my essay on the peoples of India (The Continent of Circe). In other words, each type of clothing belongs to a particular culture complex, which amounts to saying that all the Orders of costumes have been deposited successively by the ethnic and cultural history of the country.

I have already said that the last two groups of costumes, i.e., the Orders V and VI were brought in respectively by the Muslims and the British during the periods of their rule in India and that Order I, like the Mangoloid peoples who wear them, stands apart. It remains then to consider the historical affiliations of the Orders II, III, and IV, and of the intermediate forms.

I have no manner of doubt that the costumes of Order II are descended from the original clothing of the pre-Aryan aboriginals of India. Sanskrit literature contains many references of them. Unfortunately, they are rarely very clear or detailed. Nevertheless enough is said to warrant the conclusion that all the aboriginals of the country did not wear the same kind of clothing, just as they were not also at the same level even of primitive culture. The forest-dwelling food-gatherers must have had scantier clothing than the hunting folk, and from the very earliest times India might have been fairly heterogeneous in dress as in other respects. It was, however, the hunters who were the principal pre-settled non-Aryan people vis-a-vis the Aryans. So I shall consider only their clothes, as also the clothing of the aboriginals who were reduced to servitude and converted into the untouchable servants of the Aryan community.
I think the clothing of both these groups, namely, the free hunters and unfree servants, were very much alike what their descendants wear today. But it seems possible that the backtuck of the present-day aboriginals was taken over at some later stage from the Aryans, and that initially the aboriginal men wore their single piece of cloth tied round the waist like a skirt. There is also evidence that the hunters at times, if not always, dyed their cloth red, while the Aryans invariably wore theirs in white. There is a description in a Sanskrit story of an aged aboriginal hunter who was in white in imitation of the Aryan practice.

But some aboriginals appear also to have worn alternative clothing of the sewn type. There are allusions to such clothes in Sanskrit literature, as well as representations in ancient Indian paintings. I have referred in my previous book to the daughter of a Hunter King who comes for an audience with an Aryan King. (I) Her dress is described as a long robe reaching down to the ankles, and worn with a red veil. I am puzzled by this description, for I have not read any other like it. The paintings on their part represent women who seem clearly to be of low status in a skirt and bodice, which are very much like the Tamil garments seen today. The two types must be connected in some way.

To come now to the costumes of Order III, which are the typical clothes of modern Hindus all over India. I feel certain that these costumes are the offspring of the dress in which the Aryans entered India, and that they remain basically true to the original, though naturally there have been many small modifications. This conclusion is supported by a number of considerations and, in the first instance, by the fact that in their essential elements the clothes of modern Hindus are identical with those which are prescribed as correct for religious purposes by their sacred texts.

According to these prescriptions, the correct Hindu dress must be unsewn. Next, it must have two essential garments. A Hindu must be, whether male or female, a person of two garments. These are the dhoti or sari for the lower limbs, and a scarf or shawl for the upper part of the body. In Sanskrit the two pieces are called Vastra and Utariya respectively.
AFFILIATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

In addition, there are strict injunctions about the manner of wearing the lower garment. All Hindu treatises on sacred law, whenever they concern themselves with dress and most of them do, expressly lay down that besides being dvivastra, a man of two garments, a Hindu must also be trikachchha, a man of three tucks, and the places at which these are to be put are the back on the alignment of the spine, navel, and the left side of the waist. In all these details the modern Hindu dress conforms to the prescription in the sacred books.

That, however, is not all. The injunctions are enforced by quasi-religious sanctions, which have become part and parcel of mechanically obeyed customs. No Hindu can take part in any religious ceremony without being in two unsewn pieces. Till recently both the bride and the bridegroom had to take off any sewn clothing they were wearing, before the marriage rites could begin. For religious rites this is, of course, even now obligatory. Furthermore, a Hindu could not take part in them without being with three tucks, because to be without them was to be impure and demonic. As one of the Dharma Sastras, books of sacred law, puts it: “To be without the tucks and without a scarf is equivalent to being naked, and no ritual prescribed in the Vedas or the Dharma Sastras can be performed by a naked person.”

This astonishing emphasis on what might be regarded as trivial details or at best customary ways of putting on clothing, could not have existed if the Hindu costume was nothing more than costume, which, of course, it was not and still is not. Long ago this dress with the typical modes of wearing it, had become a supra-utilitarian cultural expression, and this again could not have happened if this dress had not been a part of the Aryan heritage, which the Hindus as the Aryan community in India looked upon as the fons et origo of all their life and civilization. Therefore they tried to preserve it, and cherished it with an amazing constancy amounting to fanaticism.

The method of doing this is also deeply significant for it is the typical manner of Hindu self-preservation. Many people commit the mistake of thinking that the Hindu mind is always floating in nubes. It does not do so in all things. You may indeed call Hindu speculation woolly or abstruse; you may also laugh at the Hindu craze for systematization—their habit of
prescribing all non-occult activities in multiples of four—for instance, four Vedas, four castes, four arms of policy, four limbs of military forces, eight aspects of Vedic studies, sixteen methods of sexual intercourse, sixty-four arts, and so on. These are childish, and Aristophanes might have written a Super-Clouds on this weakness. But the strength of Hinduism, as I can never repeat often enough, has never been in intellectual effort. Spiritually and emotionally, its intuitive exultations are tremendously powerful. On the mundane and practical plane, the forte of Hinduism is its capacity to shape and perpetuate habits without condenscending to give reasons for them, or to provide these habits with the support of ideas and ideals.

I shall illustrate this even at the risk of descending to coarseness, because it is in such details, bizarre details, that the power of Hinduism to form and control the trivial habits of its followers is most vividly illustrated. I have already said something about the three tucks, their indispensability for religious rites. This has as its corollary in reverse the injunction that the tucks or at least one of them must be taken off when performing an unclean act, though it might not be called for by the practical purpose of the action.

For instance, a man in dhoti can easily urinate without taking off any of the tucks, but a Hindu is not allowed to do so. He must take off the tuck at the back, the very tuck which is most unnecessary to take off, and if he does not he is threatened with drastic religious sanctions. I quote the threat in its original Sanskrit first:

Amukta-kachchhako bhutva prasravayati yo narah,
Vame pitri-mukhe dadyat, daksine devata-mukhe.

which means this: a man who urinates without taking off his back tuck sends the urine into the mouth of the departed ancestors if the flow is to the left, and into the mouth of the gods if the flow is to the right.

The material point is not how many people know about this sanction and are frightened by it, but how many do take off the tuck even today out of a fear which has sunk below the horizon of consciousness. I would point out that if Hinduism has survived so long that is due to this unsleeping and Argus-eyed vigilance. The Westernized Hindus who are ruling us to-
day and chattering about modernizing the rest of the Hindus, or rather all Hindus including themselves, do not realize what puppets they are and in the hands of what a puppet-master!

Even if the religious sanctions behind the Hindu costumes had not suggested that they were descended from the original Aryan costume, the conclusion would have been forced on us by a comparative study of the features they present. The basic Hindu dress is in the first place a draped and not a fitted costume, and next it is constituted by two essential pieces. So far as we know, these are also the features of the earliest costumes of the peoples who spoke the Indo-European languages, especially the Greeks and the Romans, possibly also the Celts and the Germans. The classical parallels are striking and also easy to detect: the Peplos and chlamys or the chiton and himation of the Greeks, and the tunic and toga of the Romans or the stola and palla (with the tunica interior) of the Roman women. Although the chiton and the tunic were partially sewn they were in their essential nature draped garments and both the Greek and the Roman dress were two-piece costumes.

I wish I could establish the same unambiguous parallelism between the Hindu costume and the ancient Persian, because of all the Aryan peoples the Hindus were most closely related to the Iranians, and also because the Aryans must have come to India after living for some time in Persia. But the adoption of the Scythian type of costume by the Persians, whenever that might have taken place, has effaced the similarities between the two costumes in the same manner as the adoption of Zoroastrianism has obscured the parallelism between the religions of the two peoples.

But in spite of what later evidence shows I feel that during the early Achaemenid period the Persians wore some kind of draped costume. The archers of the famous friezes of Susa and Persepolis are shown in what looks like a draped costume of one heavy piece of cloth, or perhaps two. It might be made up of a heavy dhoti and shawl, wrapped round the upper and lower limbs, and I have no difficulty in imagining that when the Aryans came to India they resembled these archers in their outward appearance, though they might not have worn the Assyrian type of beard.
In the light of the affiliations I have tried to establish, and which I think are reasonably certain, the costumes of Order II are the most primitive that India has and those of Order III are typical of the country’s most massive and deeply rooted culture, which above every other is called the civilization of India, that is, the ancient Hindu civilization. As regards the crude intermediate forms, the clout is so elemental and so devoid of cultural associations that it is really not necessary to decide where it should be placed. But the slightly more ample working clothes that the peasants and artisans of India wear seem to me to be a simplified version of the costumes of Order III, though I would not quarrel with anyone if he thought that in some parts of the country they were to be placed within Order II. At this level the aboriginal and the Aryan clothing may have intermingled up to a point.

There are other examples of this intermingling. I have already spoken of the possibility that the back-tuck of the present-day aboriginals may have been borrowed from the Aryan costumes, and I have also referred to the fact that in Bengal even high-caste women wore their sari in the aboriginal and not the Aryan manner, and many do so even today. I shall now give one more example of the interaction, this time of the dropping of the Aryan back-tuck by the undoubted descendants of the Aryans. In South India Hindus belonging to castes other than Brahmin wear their dhoti without the tuck at the back, although they have the tuck and the folds in front. If I remember correctly, even Brahmins when unmarried wear the dhoti in the same way. This mode is recognized as Hindu throughout the South, though in north India it is not.

How so essential a feature of Hindu clothing as the back-tuck came to be omitted among undisputed Hindus is an interesting question. In the case of the young unmarried Brahmins it is possible to see in it an indication of an incomplete status, that is, they have not yet reached the man’s estate: the distinction between the two ways of putting on the dhoti being somewhat like that which existed among the Romans between the toga praetexta and the toga virilis. But this particular way of putting it on could not have been hit upon as a mark of inferior status unless it had existed among people who were looked upon as
inferiors. I would offer the explanation that the mode was taken over from the non-Aryan primitives and imposed by analogy as a token of defective status on unmarried Brahmins and all Hindus of non-Brahmin castes.

I have yet to consider the affiliations of the costumes of Order IV. About them it is not possible to feel the same certainty as in the case of the other Orders, especially on account of the absence of definite male forms. But their general characteristics point one way—that they are the survivals of the clothes of a nomadic or semi-nomadic people whose original habitat must have been steppes or grassland.

If my idea that the tight pajama and the tunic are the true make garments of this group is at all correct this inference would be very much strengthened, for this particular costume is essentially a riding habit. Anyhow I would assume that these clothes were brought into India by the nomads and semi-nomads who invaded the country in many waves from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., namely, the Sakas, Kushanas, Huns, and other associated peoples. I would even narrow down the affiliations by connecting these costumes mainly with the Huns and their satellites, who virtually destroyed the Gupta empire and settled in large numbers in Rajputana and the neighbouring regions.

These attributions are in some cases definite, in others probable. But it should be understood that after being introduced into a tropical country the clothing of the invading peoples who brought new cultures into India could not remain what it was in their original homes, and it had necessarily to undergo many changes. On the other hand, it is equally true that however much the clothes might have been modified by the influence of the climate and the interaction of the different types of costumes, not a single type has lost its individuality and distinctiveness.

This is particularly true of the Hindu costume. If only the dhoti and the scarf are taken into account the dress has remained what it was two thousand five hundred years ago, and probably earlier. The gigantic male figures of the Maurya period of Indian sculpture look very much as my parent generation looked like in the villages, and even as I myself look,
though on a miniature scale, in the summer in Delhi.

It would be interesting, however, to trace the changes through the ages, the changes which have converted identities into affiliations. But the earlier phases of this history are still obscure. So in regard to the history of Hindu clothes, I shall set down what seems to have happened. In respect of the Muslim and European clothes we know what actually happened.

By the fourth century B.C. the original Aryan dress, whatever it might have been, had become fully adapted to a hot country. For both men and women the lower piece had become very light, and the scarf even more so. As a result, not only could the outlines and modelling of the body, be clearly felt, a substantial part of the body could even be seen, that is to say, remained uncovered.

But after this extreme simplification had taken place there set in at some uncertain date a counter-movement which added various types of sewn garments to the basic Hindu costume of two unsewn pieces. By the end of the eighteenth century a bodice or blouse seems to have become a component of the dress of all Hindu women in northern India. It did not in Bengal to judge by later practice, but it is mentioned in old Bengali literature. Along with this garment for women, a sewn tunic was adopted by the men, who wore it with the dhoti. This was very common among the poorer Hindus who worked for the Muslims but who could not afford the full Muslim costume, which all high-ranking Hindu functionaries of the Muslims always wore.

It is natural to attribute these additions to the Muslim influence, but there is reason to believe that some sort of sewn clothing was adopted long before the Muslim conquest of India. There are references to the women's bodice in Sanskrit literature, where it is called kanchulika, a feminine diminutive of kanchuka—which means either a close-fitting robe worn by the servants of the king's household or an armour. The earlier Hindu covering for the breasts was a simple strip of cotton or silk, tied at the back and called stanamsuka,—'cloth for the breasts.' Representations of these are to be found in the frescoes of Sigiriya in Ceylon. I am inclined to think that the sewn bodice for the women and the sewn tunic for the men were taken over from the costumes of the nomadic peoples.
Muslim rule in India took the adoption of sewn clothes a step further. However, it was only during British rule that these were finally incorporated in the normal Hindu dress for everyday wear. At first all kinds of European garments were tried out with the dhoti, including even overcoats, especially in the ulster version, but the garment which in the end was completely assimilated was, as I have said, the shirt. But for formal wear the only sewn garment which is now recognized as proper for being worn with the dhoti and as being in complete harmony with it, is a sort of tunic adapted from the Muslim kamiz. It is made of fine cotton, silk, or even woollen material.

This mingling of sewn and unsewn garments was evolved in Bengal after much trial and error, and it has now spread to other parts of India, and, with slight regional variations, is now the standard Hindu dress.

Clothing of Order IV does not seem to have changed at all. At all events, this is the case with the women’s costume, unless the adoption of a kamiz as an alternative for the choli is regarded as a departure from the traditional style. This, however, is a very minor change which has made no perceptible difference to the shape and lines of the costume. As to men’s garments within this group nothing definite can be said because the original male costumes are uncertain.

The Muslim costumes (Order V) have, on the contrary, gone through many transformations since they were brought into the country. The final result of this process has been to reduce their immense range in variation to the few surviving forms, which I have already described. But before this atrophy set in, the costumes had gone through a most interesting adaptive evolution. For the first three hundred years after their introduction, unfortunately, the documentation is very inadequate. But with the coming of the Moguls and the rise of the Indo-Persian school of painting the whole scene is lighted up, and we can trace the modifications from reign to reign.

The paintings show that before Akbar the Muslim ruling classes in India wore clothes which were of a purely Persian or Turkish type. Both Babur and Humayun are depicted in a costume which differ in no way from those of their contemporaries in Iran and Turan. But with Akbar a change becomes perceptible, the costumes are seen to respond to the climate or perhaps
to specific Indian traditions of clothing, though what exactly they were it is difficult to say. Anyone, from that time onwards, the main robe began to be lighter, and also to take a shape which was somewhat like a woman’s gown in Europe. This trend continued to the middle of the eighteenth century, by which date the robe became almost diaphanous.

But by the beginning of the next century, the nineteenth, and obviously under the influence of European clothing, the Muslim costume took another turn, and that towards becoming stiffer in cut and heavier in material. Finally, this trend was stabilized in a three-piece costume, which became the standard formal dress for Indian officials and others who wanted to have dealings with the new British rulers. It was even prescribed as the levee dress by the British Government for certain title-holders. It consisted of a robe called chapkan, worn with a gown called choga, combined with trousers in the European style. In formal wear it was always in black. The lawyers also wore it.

But in unofficial society the achkan or sherwani continued to be worn over the pajama by Muslims of good position, as well as by the Islamized Hindus of upper India. This dress was lighter than the officially prescribed dress, but it was heavier than the old Muslim costume, and much less beautiful. However, when the Muslim nobility wore it they gave back to it some of its old beauty and splendour by having it made either in silk or very fine Kashmir wool, with loom-woven or embroidered designs.

I have said enough about the transformations of the European garments, and would only refer back to that description. I now pass on to consider the tradition of personal adornment by means of clothing and ornaments.
Chapter 4

TWO WORLDS OF ADORNMENT

HAVING described the different kinds of clothing in India and looked into their affiliations, I shall now consider the psychological basis of dressing and personal adornment, that is to say, the impulses and motivations which inspire and control both. I hope I need not remind anyone but clothing was never, in no age and with no people, a simple affair of ensuring protection against the weather and climate. Perhaps the positive amplification of this statement, that it always had extra-utilitarian urges behind it, the principal among which was the desire to heighten sexual attraction, will also be familiar.

In India, however, the motivation of adornment developed along its special lines. In the French language the words le monde (especially when qualified as le beau monde or le grand monde) and demi-monde, together with their derivatives, mondain, mondaine, demi-mondaine, which stand for the denizens of the two worlds, have all connotations of sophistication. Both are assumed to possess the quality. But in the Hindu world it is different. Here the monde with the mondains and mondaines it contained, had to be more or less homely, in a good sense though, for sophistication was the reproach of the demi-monde. It follows from this that within the perimeter of Hindu society, as distinguished from the demi-monde, adornment of the person ceased long ago to be an inter-sexual affair. Indeed it became as nearly as possible wholly asexual.

This will sound incredible to the people of the West, but it is indubitable, being of course, the result of the separation of the sexes in social life. Amongst us, women, even when they come out and do not observe the purdah, do not have free and natural social intercourse with men. At their freest they congregate together in the sight of men as a sort of radio-active element, and therefore the sophisticated motive of being well-dressed for the sake of giving aesthetic or emotional satisfaction to men does not exist in their mind. On the other hand, in
wedlock the access to the body is so untrammeled that artificial attractions are wholly superfluous. Thus, for our women fine clothes and jewellery were and still are almost wholly the means of asserting the worldly positions of themselves, their husbands, and their families, and it could hardly be otherwise. In short, these are to them what money, houses, and property in general are to the men.

In feminine social life the topic of clothes and ornaments always dominates the conversation, and even highly educated and Westernized women do not hesitate to feel one another's saris and to ask their price. Severe principals of women's colleges take a very human interest in the clothes of the women lecturers who are young and still marriageable, and among the latter, of course, this is the only topic which makes common-rooms vivacious.

I hope women of the West, some of whom have put the question to me, will now understand why our women do not feel the slightest embarrassment in being grossly overdressed. With them it is an essential mode of self-assertion and even self-protection. Zoologists speak of three forms of bird display; the epigamic, in which the sexual urge is the main impulse; the aposmatic, which is a form of psychological warfare, in which sounds, movements, and display or adornment have a warning significance for other birds; and the diversionary, by which birds draw away an enemy from their young. There is no doubt that in the true and honest Hindu tradition of display, women's clothing is aposmatic.

The same tradition, accompanied by the same outlook on life, regulates the wearing of ornaments and jewellery by our women. In point of fact, their use is the earlier form of self-assertive adornment, of the aposmatic or intimidatory display. The cult of clothes and the perfervid devotion that our women are showing to it, are recent growths. I have seen both gaining ground step by step in my own life. This is due to non-Hindu influences, both European and Islamic. The Hindu has no great respect for clothing. In the first place, he does not like too much artificial integument on the body, a peculiarity of taste about which I shall have to say something later. Next, not only does he consider clothing to be unsound investment on account of
The method of putting on the dhoti:
(1) Adjusting the two ends (2) Putting in the front tuck (3) Putting in the back tuck (often the third stage is taken before the second) (4) A man in dhoti seen from behind (5) A man in dhoti and chader (scarf) (6) A modern formal Bengali costume consisting of a tunic, scarf, and dhoti.
its perishability, he does not also rate it high as an instrument of intimidation.

But in Hindu society, as soon as one turns from adornment grafted on the acquisitive urge to adornment with a relevance to the sex relationship, however refined, one passes into a wholly different world, the demi-monde. In Athens wives were only household drudges and the bearers of legitimate children, and the citizens went to the hetaira for cultured society and conversation. The status of the Hindu wife was not quite that in ancient India or even in later times, it was more like the Roman matron's. But art, most definitely, was not her line, nor was there too much softness or sensibility in sex life. Our most authoritative erotic treatises seem to disapprove of the para-erotic languor in wives, while expecting a hypertrophied form of it in maids, and they recommend corn-grinding, scrubbing, and similar back-breaking household work as anti-erotic and bracing specifics.

The famous verse in Kalidasa in which a king describes his dead queen as a wife, a counsellor, a friend, and a favourite disciple in private in the gentle arts—a delicate but obviously erotic hint—does not to my thinking invalidate this view, for it seems to me that in this combination we have the ideal of a man who was torn between the Brahmanic outlook on life and the urban aesthetic concept, which in ancient India was probably derived from foreign sources, Persian and West Asiatic.

So in that society, when a citizen wanted aesthetic satisfaction out of a woman or even romantic love, he went to a courtesan, who was exactly like the hetaira. Hindu pornography (Oh no, not pornography, for in ancient India this very human subject was as much of an intellectual discipline as sociology is in America, and it never became pornography as some American sociology tends to be)—our pornography stressed the indispensability of education, accomplishments, and sophistication in the women of that profession, which was as legitimate and honourable as a jurisconsult's. By virtue of her 'culture' the courtesan was often the friend of the king's daughters.

In a famous Sanskrit novel, written most probably in the seventh century after Christ, the mother of a beautiful young courtesan describes how she had brought up her daughter; giving strict attention to her diet and health—for a professional
person had to be both healthy herself and wholesome for others—
providing lessons not only in music, dancing, acting, painting,
and erotics, as might be considered essential, but also in gram-
mar, logic, and astronomy; and sending out the girl as richly
dressed as possible to festivals on holy days so that she might
command a high fee. But the foolish, headstrong, and unnatural
girl, the mother complained, was neglecting the vacation of an
honest harlot, and was giving her favours for love to an im-
pecunious young Brahmin who had only his good looks to recom-
mend him.

In the same novel is to be found the most interesting state-
ment that if the lover of a courtesan was a dependent she had
the right to go to the parent or a guardian for her dues, and if
he was dishonest she could go to a court. (In Calcutta of my
young days, the great zamindars were always in intimate colli-
sion with their managers when the latter made ample budgetary
provision for the sons on this head, and one of the wealthiest
and most respected of them, when his son had reached the man’s
estate, called his manager and asked him to look for a nice
girl who would not be too mercenary.) The novel also records
that no authority, political or civic, had the right to demand of
a courtesan that she should disclose the names of those from
whom she derived her income, which rather reminds one of the
right claimed by the newspapers in these days to keep the sources
of their information secret.

The Muslim conquest, which largely destroyed the Hindu
aristocracy and upper classes, necessarily brought down Hindu
harlotry to a lower plane, by doing away with many of its finer
points. Since the Muslim could have any blend of sensuality
and refinement in the harem itself, he did not care much about the
sublimation of the brothel. Nevertheless, the old tradition per-
sisted and it has never quite disappeared. Even a few years ago,
when the civic authorities of Delhi, in their lower middle-class,
canting, and puritanical manner, removed the prostitutes of the
city from their old street, they demonstrated in a body before
the parliament building and claimed to be providers of music
and other entertainment.

It follows from this tradition that very smart or piquant
dress in Hindu society has its special associations. Thus the
lower classes, if they see a showily and suggestively dressed wo-
man, draw the natural conclusion that she must be fair prey. I shall relate two incidents which made me feel this association very strongly. One day, some years ago, when the new gauze-like saris had just come into vogue, I saw two gorgeously dressed Punjabi young women going in a tonga near the Lahore Gate of Delhi. People gaped at them from the pavement, and I heard a man just behind me saying to his companion: "Randi hogi," ---"Must be whores."

The other incident was a row in my house. The sweeper woman who came to clean it was always in such dirty clothes that one day my senior servant told her to change into cleaner things. At once there was an explosion, and the woman walked out in a terrific temper. We were completely stumped. But in a little while her husband came in to speak to us on her behalf. No honest sweeper or Bhangi woman, he declared, put on any finery; that was done only by those among them who were whores; and no one who did not want a sweeper woman to be a whore would ask her to dress up. We were aghast, but at least understood what enormity we had committed.

I do not think I could give a more characteristic illustration to clinch my argument. But I must also say that the association is not wholly a subjective reaction of the men. There is also something in the women themselves to evoke it. The tradition unconsciously influences them, and as soon as a Hindu woman dresses with the object of being attractive to men, it does not matter how orthodox or respectable she is, she takes on a subtly meretricious air. If in addition there is coquetry, even the natural and innocent coquetry of a young woman, things are made infinitely worse. In Hindu society there is no innocent association around coquetry. In Bengali the only word which describes coquettish behaviour is not in polite use, and it is an exact equivalent of the French word putinerie. Therefore, even when a Hindu woman has the licentiousness of a Messalina, she prefers, in order to avoid making herself cheap, to wear the looks of a governess, with only an intense hauteur on her face.
Chapter 5

JEWELLERY AND CLOTHES

The division of the personal adornment of Hindu women into a _mondaine_ and a _demi-mondaine_ style did not mean that ostentation could not be present in the first. That would have been inconceivable, given the Hindu mental habits in the first instance and the Hindu organs of sense after that. In one of the stories of Henry James two Americans—a brother and a sister—who have become Europeans and are back in America with a vague idea of sponging on their rich kinsmen, hold a colloquy in the following style:

Brother: "My dear sister, the inhabitants are charming."
Sister: "In what style?"
B.: "In a style of their own. How shall I describe it. It's primitive; it's patriarchal; it's the _ton_ of the golden age."
S.: "And have they nothing golden but their _ton_? Are there not symptoms of wealth?"
B.: "I should say there was wealth without symptoms. A plain, homely way of life, nothing for show, and very little for—what shall I call it?—for the senses: but a great _aisance_, and a lot of money, out of sight . . ." and so on.

This good old New England style of possessing wealth would not have done at all in the world of our women, and to a point with our men either. For one thing, the Hindu sense organs are so enfeebled by too much glare, heat, and noise that they cannot take in at best more than half of the sense phenomena presented to them, and so there must always be, if there is to be any effect at all, an overdose. Secondly, the Hindu _monde_ did not think ostentation morally wrong, provided there was no titillation in a special sense in it. The result was the presence of a good deal of magnificence even in workaday presence, and even within the fold of Dharma (the Hindu ethical system). The tradition continues. At cocktail parties in New Delhi, for instance, I often observe Western women looking at the magnificent Indian ladies with a puzzled expression, as if they were won-
dering whether they were not seeing a mirage of the ranks of duchesses, marchionesses, and countesses at a coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey.

They do not quite understand it, and if I do, I shall be the last Hindu to criticize the ostentation. The charity comes from understanding, and I shall make Occidentals share it. In considering personal adornment, its philosophy, theory, and practice, a distinction must be made between the two means of display, namely, jewellery and clothing. So far as one can judge from representations in ancient Indian sculpture, jewellery seems to have been the major element in adornment in that age, though clothing was most certainly not neglected. But it was so flimsy that it could not be the heavy artillery of adornment which jewellery was. This trend obviously remained strong down to my young days.

At that time, even in wealthy homes, especially in the villages, women remained satisfied with two or three expensive saris, which they did not mind wearing all through their sari-wearing life, that is, until widowhood, after which no finery was permitted. However, they were compensated for this moderation with ornaments, which were mostly in solid gold. One might say that as in currency of old, in Hindu society adornment was based on the gold standards. So I would describe that first.

In Bengali Hindu society, about which I can speak from first-hand experience and knowledge, a woman who wore only 1 lb. of gold (though solid and 22 carats fine) on her person on formal occasions had a respectability which was of the average order. To be of consequence, she had to carry at least 100 tolas or 2.57 lb. or 1.16 kilogramme. Thus the ideal was to fuse the body with bullion in a new kind of Sheffield plate, living plate so to speak. As a result, a Bengali girl when provided with a full complement of bridal ornaments had the following:

Head — A tiara, with a chain connecting it to the chignon along the line of hair-parting; three hairpins with large rosette heads and gold comb for the chignon; at least three sets of earrings and a pair of gold ear-pieces to cover the upper surface of the ears; when the nose was pierced, a pendant, often of pearl, hanging from the nasal septum, and in the hole on one side of the nostrils a floret of dia-
mond or alternatively a large ring, somewhat like a refined bull's nose-ring, secured to the ear by a chain.

*Throat, neck, and arms* — A collar of hinged gold plaques or rows of pearls; a necklace set with stones; a long chain of the type called *sautoir* in French, worn in ample loops. Armlets and bangles for the upper arms; at least three sets of ornaments for the wrists — thin bangles, solid or hollow thick bangles, and bracelets in the European style. Rings for the fingers; rosettes secured with chains for the upper parts of the hands.

*Below the belt* — The frontier of gold in Hindu society was fixed at the waist, which was at times provided with a gold chain. The metal had a sacred status and therefore it could not be worn on the lower limbs. Hence silver ornaments for the feet, to wit, — anklets, either plain like enormous bangles or fitted with bells and jingles; rosettes for the upper parts of the feet, with chains securing them to toe-rings. The young Bengali husband waiting for his wife-sweetheart with desperate impatience at bedtime, always knew his own tinkle. There is a very famous Bengali poem on the theme.

My father was not wealthy. Even so my sister who was married in 1916, had most of these ornaments, and if some were not given that was only because they had then gone out of fashion.

There was a weighty economic reason for the superior status that was given to gold and jewellery as adornment in comparison with clothes, as I have already explained. These were a standby for the family in a financial crisis, for the banks and loan-offices considered gold to be the best security. Besides, till recently women in Hindu society could not inherit property, and, in any case, they could not alienate real property. So their ornaments were often their only resource, a sort of marriage settlement, and never knowing what the next turn of the wheel of fortune might bring, they clung to their gold as if it was their life-belt.

Of course, there were rivalries among the women over gold as over clothing. But the rivalry for gold was different from the rivalry in saris, and of a more exalted kind. For one thing, competition in ornaments could be squashed by mere weight and volume. At the worst a very nasty woman would come up,
handle the ornaments—in those days women, in a friendly or unfriendly way, were given to handling one another’s ornaments—and say with an air of innocence, “Are these gold?” That would be the only outlet for malice open to her, because the weight and volume would be obvious. But only she would lose by that kind of meanness. The bystanders would titter, and the proud wearer, conscious of the treasure trove on her person, would reply, “Oh no, they are of brass.”

Besides, gold always raised the women to a higher level of mental life, and it did so in all their passions, noble or base, perhaps because it was a nobler substance than cloth. They never showed that pettiness over it which they showed over saris, about which I shall say something presently. When they felt magnanimous about gold, their magnanimity would become altogether supra-mundane. They would give the gold to a husband, son, or even relative in trouble, to be sold or mortgaged, and never say a word or take credit. I have found with surprise how little in such cases they remain capable of even feeling their loss.

On the other hand, when they wanted to keep it, they would be terribly hard in an un-arguing, undemonstrative, and silent way. In this they became correspondingly sub-mundane, like those mythical creatures which guard treasures in subterranean caverns. But they did not look like deformed gnomes, dwarfs, or leprechauns. When these women acquired the love of gold, they did so fairly early in life, and the most impassioned of them were always beautiful, perhaps through subtle correlation in nature which makes tigers and cobras so exquisite to look at.

This love of gold would drive out the love of husband and child from their heart, make the mere idea of a lover a dirty smear, and turn them into chrysal enhantine statues with a demoniac soul. Their husbands could easily feel like the young man in the Arabian Nights who had married a vampire, that they were made of some cold precious metal, and that their black tresses were silk floss steeped in melting snow. No one has described such a creature with more terrible insight than Tagore in one of his short stories.

The events are set in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when young men in Bengal had just acquired the idea
of romantic love from English literature. As the story has it, it was the case of a young Bengali who had been at a university and then, as if that was not softening enough, had married a beautiful girl. So the good old tradition of managing wives by beating them had to go by the board. The modern young man tried to get the love of his wife for love, and failing in that tried clothes and jewellery in an unending stream. Still, he had no better luck, for the wife took the presents in her own way.

After some time he was faced with bankruptcy in business if he could not meet some heavy commitments. So he went to his wife, but instead of taking away her jewellery in a matter-of-fact, husbandly way he shamefacedly mumbled a few words, at which his wife only started at him with complete absence of response. Deeply wounded in the modern manner, he went off to Calcutta to raise money by some other means.

The wife took counsel of a cousin of hers, who was employed in the husband’s business, and was thoroughly frightened by him. He had designs of his own, persuaded her to run away with the ornaments with him to her father’s house. They left by boat, but she did not take her jewellery in a box; she put on every piece so that nobody might be able to take anything away without first killing her. The two never reached their destination, nor did they come back.

The husband had put his affairs in order, but when he returned he found his wife missing, and was stunned by sorrow. He waited day after day, week after week, on the off-chance of her coming back. One rainy night he heard steps coming up from the river and ornaments jingling, and then a knock at the front door. He rushed down and opened it, but there was no one. The next night he left the front door open, and heard the same sounds, coming up the spiral stairs, along the passage, but whatever had come stopped before the closed door of the bedroom. When he opened it, again he saw nothing.

On the third night he sent away his servants and left all doors open. The jingle was heard again, it moved on, and at last something entered his room. Moon beams, streaming through the window, lighted it up. It was a skeleton.

On each one of its bones was an ornament, flashing in gold and diamond. It had rings on eight of its phalanges, a rosette
on each metacarpus, bangles on the carpi, an armlet on each humerus, collar on the clavicle, tiara on the cranium. All these jewels were loose, but not one slipped from its bone. But the most terrible thing was that among all those bones there were two living eyes, with dark pupils, shadowy lids, a liquid brilliance, and a steady, firm, and tranquil glance: the same eyes as those into which he had looked on the night of the wedding in a pavilion lit with a hundred lights, to the accompaniment of music from the oboe.

The young man’s blood froze in his veins. He tried to close his eyes to escape from the terror, he could not. The skeleton raised a hand to backon to him; the diamonds on it flashed and gave out sparks. Then it turned and walked out. The ornaments jingled again, and rattled against the bones. He followed it like a puppet. Down they went together, until the skeleton walked on to the river, and he splashed into the water.

That was the Hindu love of gold, as it existed in the heart of women, at its absolute. In spite of its icy calm it was insatiate and fierce enough to come up from the underworld to claim its sacrificial beast, the husband. But it had a sunny form also, and that was when it lay within the fold of Dharma—in affectione maritale and sub patria potestate, to put the matter in terms familiar to the Western reader.

It must not be forgotten that adornment has a semi-sacred, semi-sacerdotal character in connexion with Hindu marriages, which are regarded as sacraments for the married persons. Therefore at the wedding ceremony, at the beginning of the marriage service, the uncle or the elder brother who gives away the bride says in resounding Sanskrit:

_Enam kanyam salamkaram_
_vaso-yug' achchhaditam_
_tubhyam aham sampradade._

—which translated means: “This maiden, adorned with ornaments, and robed in a twin apparel, do I give unto you.”

And the bridegroom replies:

_Grihnam_

—“I accept.”
It was said to me, and I also replied in that manner. And my bride was resplendent in jewels and gold brocade. That is the _one_ day,—_un di fetice eterea_, in our poor denuded lives: the glory and the sanctity of a coronation descend on every head.

The gold standard has gone out of world currency. One of our Finance Ministers after independence tried to take it out of the life of our women also. I do not know how far he has succeeded. But my prayer is that the old tradition may continue in spite of the gold thieves of the so-called Indian Socialistic State. At least the gold will remain somewhere, instead of vanishing into nowhere.

I turn now to consider adornment by means of clothing, which so far as women are concerned really stands for the sari. The motive of self-assertion and acquiring worldly importance explains the extraordinary craze our women now have for saris. They go on buying them regularly even when they cannot and do not wear a fraction of their stock. They are the hoarders of clothes, corresponding to the male hoarders of money. In the class to which I belong, that is, the so-called middle-income group in India, no women would consider herself respectable unless she had something like one hundred fine saris, in addition to a score or so for everyday wear.

Of course, it is hard on the purse, but who minds? Not the women certainly, and let it be said not even the men. They have been made pliable by a hoary and sacred tradition. Our Dharma Sastras or books of sacred law enjoin unstinted liberality to women. For instance, the most authoritative and venerable of them, the Code of Manu, lays down:

"Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law for their own wel-
fare... The houses on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely as if destroyed by magic. Hence men who seek their own welfare should always honour women on holidays and festivals with orna-
ments, clothes, and food."

_Manu Samhita_: Ch. III, vv. 5, 58, 59 (Buhler’s translation)

But the men also give willingly and enthusiastically, at least the more reasonable and less miserly of them, for their own
prestige and position, too, depend upon the clothes of their womenfolk.

The tensions that the competition in saris generate are strong and numerous. There is among our womenfolk a perpetual, keen-sighted, keen-scented, and prick-eared, rivalry over clothes. Relatives visiting one another go straight to the bedrooms, open the wardrobes and trunks, and try to find out how many new saris have been acquired since the last examination, or how many there are in all. It is somewhat like the system inspection which modern nations are trying to introduce in order to control nuclear weapons. If on inspection the pile appears to be lower than hers, the visitor goes back with a happy expression, if on the other hand it seems higher, with severe mortification, with fresh resolve to rest are the parity.

In the joint family which is still the normal form of the Hindu family, squabbles, sometimes silent, sometimes whispered, sometimes loud, are always going on. Sisters-in-law are particularly at loggerheads. As an example of silent but deadly squabbles one might refer to the habit these sisters-in-law had in the old days of slitting up one another’s saris when hung out to be dried or aired. Even now in these households a man has to be very cunning in distributing his gifts. Woe betide the man who gives to a sister without first propitiating the wife, or for that matter to the wife without first disarming the mother’s jealousy. The psychological stability of these women is always precarious, and there is nothing from the absurdly ridiculous to the awfully tragic which they cannot do when suddenly thrown off their balance.

A thousand-nights-and-one-night of anecdotes can be made out of the illustrations of this tragi-comedy, but I shall give only four. The first is amusing. A highly educated modern woman related to me had a fine stock of saris. When in 1941 the war with Japan broke out and people began to run away from Calcutta, she did not go, for she was brave. But she sent away trunkfuls of her saris and other clothes to the house of a relative in the country, as if they were the paintings in the National Gallery or the Louvre, or the stained glass of Chartres.

The second story, which I had from a Bengali lady, who was the principal of a girls’ school, takes the love of display to
the plane of deep pathos, almost anguish. I was saying to her that I hated the new habit the girls were acquiring of going to school dressed like nautch-girls. She agreed, but went on to say:

"Mr. Chaudhuri, when I was principal I always discouraged this. But at times cases come up, in which it is hard to decide what to do. I once had a girl in my school who was always coming to class in her most expensive Benares saris. I told her not to a number of times, but she would not listen. Then, one day, I called her to my room and gave her a severe warning. She burst into tears, and asked me between her sobs: "Where shall I then wear my saris, to whom shall I show them?" When I asked her what she meant by that she added: "We are asked nowhere, nobody comes to our house." Then I remembered that she was from a declasse family. You know what I mean. After that I could not find it in my heart to forbid her to wear her saris."

I go back now by about seventy years. The story concerns a cousin of mine, my mother's sister's daughter, at whose wedding my mother was present, and it was she who told me about it. My cousin's father had bought for her a gold Benares sari, as was customary at weddings. But his second wife, my aunt being dead, took a step-motherly attitude over it. She said that she would take it herself, because it was too fine for the girl, and that if it was taken back from her—she had already seized it—she would take poison.

It is the habit of our women, when they want to spite or coerce their husbands to go and lie down in their bed, covering themselves up from head to foot with a sheet or a shawl. Oh! how one wishes it was their shroud! But no husband is hard enough to bear the hiding of so much embonpoint, and they yield. My cousin's step-mother did that, clutching the sari in her hand. My uncle implored her, and as the eavesdropping women saw even clasped her feet, saying that such conduct on her part would blacken his face for ever. But the women of adamant never yielded, and so my maternal uncle (also the bride's) had to buy another sari for her trousseau with his money.

My last anecdote is of a tragedy of recent happening and so ghastly that it is hard to find a parallel to it even in the cruel world which man is given to creating for himself. A young man
in an ordinary job, who had not been married a long time, had promised his wife a new sari on the next pay day. But as it happened, just before that his father wrote to him to say that he was in great trouble and wanted a loan of two hundred rupees. The young man said that he must send this money, for his father had never before asked him for a pice, which, of course was a rare thing for a Hindu father to do, because the fathers treat the income of their sons as their own on the supposition that the expenses of their bringing up and education were loans.

The wife asked him: "What about my sari?" The young man replied that it must wait for another month, and repeated his argument. The wife said nothing, and the husband thought that she was reconciled to the postponement. But when he came back from office he found her dead, she had taken poison and committed suicide.
PART TWO

CONFLICTS AND CONCEPTS

(There are four chapters in this part:

1. The First Battle of Clothes: Muslim Period
2. The Second Battle of Clothes: British Period
3. The Causes of the Conflict
4. Aesthetic Concepts and Their Expression)
Chapter 1

THE FIRST BATTLE OF CLOTHES:
MUSLIM PERIOD

All the different types of clothing described in the first part of the book have existed side by side in India, and will in all probability continue to do so. However, the most significant thing in their history is not that they have co-existed, nor for that matter that they have partially overlapped and intermingled, but that they have always stood in irreconcilable and unbridgeable antithesis, complete in theory and substantially so in practice. In short, just as there is no Indian nation, there is no Indian dress.

This would have been surprising if the opposition between the costumes had persisted after a cultural synthesis had been brought about. But in India that, too, has never been seen, in spite of all that has been said by conventional historians. The country became a museum of diverse cultures fairly early in its history, and it has been growing into a bigger and a more varied museum from age to age. Clothing simply takes its natural and assigned place in the gallery built for it by the historical process. It has obeyed the general law observed in every aspect of the evolution of the peoples of India, that an element of discord and heterogeneity once introduced into their life never disappears afterwards.

But the conflict between the different kinds of clothing has not manifested itself in the same way in every epoch. Down to the Muslim conquest the clothing of the peoples of different racial origins remained distinct and separate, they were even invested with cultural loyalties of which the wearers were perfectly conscious, and foreigners sojourning in the country wore their own costumes. But these differences never broke out in open conflicts. Each kind of clothing was not only permitted and tolerated, it was even thought desirable that it would be used by its proper wearers.

Nothing could be more natural, because with the Hindus in a dominant position, there was no room for any conflict. It
has to be noted that the Hindu civilization was not only the highest civilization in the country, it was the only civilization, and it had irresistible political power behind it. Therefore the peck order among the costumes was predetermined. Over and above, the Hindus were not a people given to proselytizing. They did not want to transmit their culture to those who were not theirs by birth or in any case by a legal fiction of birth. If anything, they were positively in favour of withholding their way of life from non-Hindus. The farthest they were prepared to go towards opening the doors of their closed society was to overlook the alien origins of any people who wanted to graft themselves on the Hindu stock, provided they did it very slowly through the agency of the over-elastic and ever-expanding caste system. So they could not be aggressive about their own clothing: nobody threatened it and they threatened nobody else's clothes. It was a commonwealth of costumes regulated as it were by a Lex on the one hand, and a Jus Gentium on the other.

It is this commonwealth which faces us in ancient Indian art, so far as it reflects clothing. All Hindus are shown in Hindu clothes, and all foreigners in recognizable foreign costumes. The earliest representation of a man in a sewn garment that I have seen is a figure in relief on the raking of Bharhut Stupa, probably going back to the second century B.C. The man is in a tunic, but not the Greek chiton, and he has a short straight sword of the Roman type, though it might be the standard Greek sword of the leaf-blade pattern, for the weapon is shown in its scabbard and the exact shape of the blade cannot be made out. Another representation of a sewn costume is found in the famous headless statue of Kanishka, and it is the Scythian costume. The paintings of Ajanta also show foreigners in their own clothes, and the representation of the Persians is very realistic.

But this equilibrium was destroyed at one stroke by the Muslim conquest at the end of the twelfth century. For the first time a rival family of civilized clothing was established within the country, and in a position of decided advantage over Hindu clothes. The new costumes were in themselves elaborate and beautiful, and what was more important, they were now the clothing of the ruling order. Even if this was not enough to give rise to a battle of clothes, the Muslims were not a people
who fought shy of quarrels. They were what the Hindus were not, proselytizers and very aggressive proselytizers at that.

They were not ashamed of this aggressiveness, because they had created an open society to which everybody could gain admittance by simply accepting their faith and all that it stood for, and after that he was accepted as an equal. They saw nothing wrong in wishing others, or even forcing them, to adopt their way of life. They considered it superior to all others, and were ready to share that superiority with all, in which they stood in stark contrast with the Hindus who not only thought that they were superior to all other men, but also wanted to have the prerogative of superiority reserved for themselves.

But however one might look at the matter, the new rulers of India were militant proselytizers, and that created a challenge for the Hindus, no less in regard to clothing than in regard to religion. The Muslims would impose their costumes not only on those Hindus who were converted to their faith, but also on those others who, remaining Hindu, were ready to serve them. The threat to Hindu clothing was very real, how real it can now be assessed by recalling what happened in the Punjab, the entrance hall of the invasions. There the Hindu costume disappeared even among Hindu women, and down to this day the Hindu women of the Punjab, though they might be in Delhi, Calcutta, or Bombay, regard the Islamic salwar and kamiz as their natural dress.

This made the Hindus militant in their turn, and they became ready to defend their clothing with every means within their power. In actual fact, the feud between the two orders of clothing had begun much earlier than the time of the final Muslim conquest. It was created by the Muslim invasions of India which were repeated from time to time over nearly five hundred years from the early part of the eighth century onwards, and which generated a fierce hatred for the Muslims among the Hindus. Alberuni, the great Muslim scholar who lived in the court of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni and is the greatest authority on Hindu beliefs and customs of his age, was already aware of this hatred. As he writes: “In all manners and usages they the Hindus differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs.”
Alberuni illustrates the Hindu hatred of Muslim clothes with a striking anecdote. There was once a Hindu king; he says, whose father was killed by some raiders from an adjoining country. When he grew up to manhood and learned about this, he marched into the land of the raiders and after he had sated his thirst for revenge by slaughtering as many of his enemies as he could, he made the survivors put on the Muslim costume, which, Alberuni explains, “was meant as an ignominous punishment for them.” Alberuni’s comment on this episode is worth recalling: “When I heard of it,” he writes, “I felt thankful that he was gracious enough not to compel us to Indianize ourselves and to adopt the Hindu dress and manners.” Nothing could reveal more clearly the difference between the Hindu outlook and the Muslim.

The Muslim conquest, when it was completed, only made the hatred worse, more venomous, by depriving the Hindus of their power of retaliation and driving them to take their resistance to the social hinterland, where the Muslims could not reach them. Thus it was that the Hindus put quasi-religious sanctions behind their clothes in the centuries immediately following the Muslim conquest, and made precisely those features of their costume obligatory to which the Muslims objected most. The battle of clothing between the Hindus and the Muslims was joined on two connected issues, both fundamental features of Hindu clothing: namely, the wearing of unsewn clothes and its natural result, a partial exposure of the body. The Muslims considered these inelegant, improper, and immodest, whereas the Hindus made sewn clothing unclean, not only for religious purposes, but also for family life.

Certainly, the Hindu attitude would have been absolutely uncompromising if it were not for practical considerations. Though the Hindus did succeed in organizing themselves as an independent, and in basic matters a self-sufficient society, parallel to the Muslim, they could not sever all political and economic relations with the ruling order without sacrificing their worldly prospects at the higher levels. If they had carried their non-co-operation with the Muslims to that extreme point many Hindus, out of mere worldly ambitions would have gone over to Islam, as some of them did. Hindu society guarded itself against this injury by
adopting a solution which has become the fixed pattern of their dealings and behaviour in connexion with foreign rulers.

The solution is the simplest conceivable. Yield to *force majeure* up to the limit to which it is powerful; give unto the Mlechchha, the unclean foreigner, the things that are the Mlechchhas, and unto Dharma the things that are Dharma’s; do everything that your interest compels you to do with deliberate opportunism. There is no shame in that. But never on any account offer the loyalty of your heart to anything non-Hindu.

So those Hindus who sought worldly advancement by working for the Muslims were allowed not only to do so, but even to put on the Muslim costume. The only condition was that it should be worn only for such work, and never in personal life. The compromise worked, and the Hindus who put on the Muslim costume for public appearance scrupulously put them off when going into the inner house, and for religious observances they would not even dream of wearing anything but orthodox Hindu clothes.

The arrangement was so successful that it spread from the courts to general urban life, and then even to the villages. I have read a touching account of the continuance of this two-way behaviour in a Bengal village in Bishop Heber’s *Journal*. I say touching because the incident illustrates the effort of a Hindu family, once great but afterwards fallen on hard days, to maintain appearances in both the worlds.

The Bishop, who was one of the finest and noblest Englishmen who ever came to India, was going on a journey by boat to the upper provinces from Calcutta in 1824, and after a few days he reached a decayed village in lower Bengal. This place, according to his information, was the seat of a Bengali nobleman who was the grandson of a Raja who had sided with the British in the war with Siraj-ud-daula. As he was making his way to the village from the house-boat he saw “two very fine intelligent-looking boys . . . naked, all but their waist-cloths; like the other peasants; they had, however, the Brahminical string over their shoulders.” Heber and another Englishman who was with him were very much struck by their manner, pleasing countenance, and comparatively fair complexion.

They were told that the Raja did indeed live in the village, and were directed to the palace. On reaching it they saw that
the cloisters of the outer court were roofless and desolate, covered with wild ivy and jungle. The ruined building reminded Heber partly of Conway Castle, partly of Bolton Abbey, and there the same two boys who were the sons of the Raja, came forward to welcome him and his friend. As they were led to the inner part of the palace through the ruins, Heber saw a broken cannon and some mutilated inscriptions lying on the ground, and as evening closed in the howls of jackals, who seemed to him to be the natural lords of the place, began to be heard all around.

Passing into one of the halls Heber found the Raja waiting to receive him in what state he could command. He sat on the usual musnud, a bed covered with brocade cloth or muslin, on which he had laid a few trinkets like a gold watch, a betel-box, and rose-water sprinklers. Two old armchairs were placed opposite the Raja’s seat for Heber and his companion, and the naked domestics were ranged behind, with their hands respectfully folded.

As to the nobleman himself, here is Heber’s description of him: “A fat shortish man, of about forty-five, of rather fair complexion, but with no other clothes than his waist-cloth and Brahminical string, and only distinguished from his vassals by having his forehead marked all over with alternate stripes of chalk, vermillion, and gold leaf.”

But when later in the evening, the boys went to pay their return visit to the Bishop in his boat they had “completely transformed themselves into eastern beaux, by the addition of white muslin dresses, and turbans of gold brocade.” As he reflected on these incidents Heber wondered whether it was all due to poverty which he had first suspected or to the simplicity of Hindu life of which he had heard so much. He could not be sure.

But beyond this compromise a line was drawn. In fact, Hindu society was ready to tolerate a little more—even a parodying of the ruler’s dress for the sake of worldly consequence. Hinduism forgives every transgression of Hindu standards out of opportunism, but no adherence to any non-Hindu value from conviction. So, if a Hindu showed signs, either through his opinions or his behaviour, that he was acquiring new loyalties or even remaining Hindu, widening his personal life by adding non-Hindu qualities, mental or external, he was without any compunction thrown outside the pale, whoever he might be, and no less
a Hindu than Raja Ram Mohun Roy was excommunicated in this manner, though he is rightly looked upon as the creator of the modern Indian mind.

He was born in a very orthodox Brahmin family, but studied Islamic philosophy and theology early in life, and became monotheistic in his views, which would not have been a great offence in itself unless he had tried to propagate the monotheism through his writings. He substantially added to his offence by doing something which was more heretical and outrageous in Hindu eyes—by associating with Muslims and Europeans, and by adopting the Muslim manner of living, including the Muslim dress.

Later he learned English, became a rationalist, and even a Utilitarian, though remaining a Deist. Finally, he founded a new monotheistic sect within Hinduism. In all this he was always taking his stand on the Hindu revealed scriptures, yet in Calcutta society he was branded not only as a heretic, but as an outcaste. In the polemical writings of his opponents he was even called a Chandala, the lowest of the untouchables. His own mother repudiated him, and sued him in courts of law in order to harass him.

This persecution was due, not to his opinions alone. Perhaps if he had been more orthodox in his ways, his heterodoxy in doctrine would have been forgiven, and he would have been treated leniently. But Ram Mohun Roy was not the man to compromise even on externals. When a certain person came to his prayer-hall in informal clothes, probably the scanty Hindu costume, he rebuked him and admonished him to come to the house of God in proper clothing, by which he meant the full Muslim costume, which he himself always wore. Thus in his case the conflict of religions had its complement in a conflict of clothes, which in India was only natural,
Chapter 2

THE SECOND BATTLE OF CLOTHES:
BRITISH PERIOD

Thus the Hindus were not confronted with a new problem when with the establishment of British rule another set of foreign clothes were brought into the country. A pattern of elastic defence had already been evolved, tried out, and found to be successful. They had only to re-apply it, and that they did. I am able to illustrate this revision of tactics in a very interesting manner by quoting from a letter of protest published in 1825 in a Bengali newspaper of Calcutta, which was the mouthpiece of the orthodox.

The correspondent began by saying that when going to have his morning bath in the river he had noticed boys riding, walking, or being driven on the strand, who were dressed exactly like English boys but were darker; that after asking their servants and some of the boys themselves who they were he had learnt with extreme surprise that they were the sons of the rich Bengali Babus of the city; and that he had been greatly puzzled thereby. Then he commented:

"I am unable to understand why they were in English clothes. If it is said that the costume is fine in itself, I shall reply that for Bengali boys 'it is in no wise superior to the Hindustani costume. However that may be, if these boys wear the costume as children they will regard it as proper and comfortable, and when they grow up they will continue to wear it. Then, if as fine, strapping young fellows they went into the zenana, their womenfolk might not be frightened, knowing them to be the mock sahibs of the family, but surely outsiders spying them there would spread tales that sahibs had been in the zenana of so and so. This was bound to give rise to scandal about these families."

1 The entry of a male foreigner, however eminent he might be, was a disgrace for a Hindu or Muslim zenana. So when King Edward VII came to India as Prince of Wales in 1876 and wished to visit a Hindu
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The point about the loss of reputation of the zenana was novel, but added to the old notion of the impurity of foreign clothing, it was effective. So, when the wealthy and conservative Hindus of Calcutta put on European clothing either for business or fashion, they were very scrupulous in putting them off before going into the inner apartments, in fact even the inner courtyard, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the family deities and the women. Down to the thirties of this century, in the old families of Calcutta, I saw these clothes kept in a dressing-room, furnished in the Western style and with even wardrobes made in England, and this dressing-room was usually adjacent to the master's living-room in the outer house. Those who were not rich enough to provide segregation of such high quality for their European clothes kept them in a small alcove in the men's apartments.

But though strictly observed in many Hindu homes the arrangement began to break down fairly early, and from 1900 onwards it was in steady decline. The reason for this was that the impetus for wearing the new foreign costume was not coming, as in the case of the Muslim, from the ruling order, the British; it came from the Hindus themselves. Both the aspects of this situation has to be considered in some detail.

The British community of India, whether official or commercial, so far from compelling the Hindus to put on their clothes, disliked—almost hated, their doing so. Of course, they were in agreement with the Muslims in considering the Hindu costume strictly so called as improper, grossly so, and even as indecent, but from another point of view they regarded the wearing of their clothing by the natives as hardly less indecent. The Englishman in India was somewhat of a Hindu in these matters. He considered his way of life superior to every other, except for sensual enjoyment, but was wholly opposed to sharing its higher or more respectable features with anybody who was not to the manner born.

family, no notability of Calcutta would come forward with an invitation. A lawyer of Calcutta High Court was bold enough to do so, and the Prince was received like a bridegroom by his hostess. But the most popular Bengali poet of the time wrote a lampoon on the incident, and a scurrilous farce, which the police had to forbid, was staged on the Bengali stage.
Thus the British ruling and commercial classes in India solved the difficult problem of safeguarding decorum and preventing the blacks from outraging their clothing, by prescribing the Muslim costume for those Hindus with whom they had to deal, and most of these, especially in the higher ranks of employment, adopted or rather continued to wear that costume. There were, however, other Hindus in an independent position who would put on English clothes, and by so doing they drew on themselves all the snobbery and contempt of the British community in India.

This was a stronger form of the dislike the Englishman in India felt for our writing in the English language. There never was a time during the plenitude of British rule in India when the local English did not insult us for doing so. It would seem natural that in the interest of their own empire they would welcome all trends towards Westernization among the Hindus, but this was the last thing they were prepared to do. They were violently repelled by English in our mouths, and even more violently by English clothes on our backs.

But as I have said, just as there were some Hindus who would write English there were also those who were determined to wear English clothes, encouragement or no encouragement from the local English. This internal urge came from the glimpses these Hindus had already obtained of the fuller, richer, and more living civilization of the West, which appeared to contain a promise of release for them from the prison of their hidebound and primitive existence. It was also helped by the general attitude of Hindu society towards British rule during the first hundred years of its existence. The Hindus then had no pre-existing antipathy for the British as they had for the Muslims. On the contrary, in the first phase of British rule, they were grateful to their new rulers for having rescued them from Muslim oppression, and from political anarchy. So it was easier for them, or at all events those of them who had enough vitality to turn to new ways, to adopt Western clothing, among many other things from the West.

The attempt at taking over the English costume—it should be kept in mind that I am speaking here only of the adoption of English clothes as a whole and as normal daily wear by Hindu men, and not of the influence which Western clothing had on the
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traditional clothing of the Hindus—passed through three successive stages. The very first was assertive and ostentatious to the point of extravagance, as indeed was natural. Young people affected these clothes as one expression of their preference for Western ways, the other manifestations of which were—speaking and writing English; quoting Shakespeare or Milton whenever there was any opening; airing rationalism and contempt for Hindu image worship; eating beef; and drinking until dead drunk. There is a famous scene in a Bengali play about one of these revolutionaries, who passed under the name of “Young Bengal” long before people had heard of the Young Turks. It shows the young man lying in a ditch, who as soon as the English sergeant’s dark lantern is turned on him, wakes up and begins to recite: “Hail holy light, offspring of Heav’n first-born . . . .”

This apache phase, if I might characterize it so, passed away in about three decades, and another was ushered in. This was due to the emergence of a new type of Westernization,—solid, grave, more educated, and backed by considerable wealth earned either in law or in government service in the highest posts open to Indians. This phase of Westernization created a standard of living which was dazzlingly high by the traditional Hindu standards.

Its exponents were those Bengali Hindus who had received education in England, mostly at Oxford or Cambridge, and had joined either the Indian Civil Service or the Bar. They had to break away from their own society in any case, because it considered them to have lost caste by crossing the sea and eating beef and other forbidden food in England. So for some decades they formed a special caste in the high-caste part of Bengali society—“the England-returned” caste, whose members married largely among themselves and also increased their strength by absorbing all the young men who went abroad in greater numbers and entered the new order after their return. It was only after 1910 that this caste began to be re-absorbed in the general body of Bengali Hindu society, though they still remained an Anglicized élite.

These men could afford an out and out European manner of living. They lived in the so-called European quarters, furnished their houses in the European style, employed Muslim or
Christian servants trained to keep European houses, ate English food or what they regarded as such, and wore English clothes, awake and asleep. If good living was the weakest aspect of their Westernization, clothing and dressing up were the strongest. As I have written in my autobiography, "there were no set of people better posted about the appropriate times and occasions for the different kinds of English clothes, and a wrong tie or hat was likely to give rise to more trouble among them than in the best English society." There is a striking description of one of them in a frock-coat and top hat, spending his caterpillar days in London, in a story by Kipling. Looking at some of them in photographs, many people would not have distinguished them, except by the cast of their faces, from a man of the smartest set in London at the turn of the century—say, a Lulu Harcourt or a Neil Primrose, which is saying a good deal.

But such painstaking finesses could not last long. The climate, weather, tradition, in short, all things external make Hindu society naturally Laodician and casual. The strength of Hinduism lies in its unblamable inertia, not in its temporary and accidental spurts of energy. This particular manifestation of Westernization was our response to the aggressive theoretical imperialism of the English people in the nineties. In something like ten years both began to decline. The Hindu wholehoggers in respect of dress—or, to define them in more refined language, the champions of an integral Westernization, retreated to make room for those who were only capable of a more diffused and even debased adoption of the European dress. This ushered in the third phase.

From 1910, and more perceptibly from the end of the first World War, more and more Indians who had put on the Muslim dress for work in offices, for business, and for social intercourse, especially with the English in India, began to put on the full English dress. This wider use had its effect on the religious taboo on foreign clothing, which could no longer be maintained. English clothes secured the right of entry into the inner house, and became an alternative costume for the Hindus for certain special purposes. The convention on which this was based was roughly this: that it would be permissible to put on English clothes for business, official duties, and inter-racial intercourse,
but in personal and social life only the formal Hindu dress should be put on. This was particularly the case in Bengali Hindu society. In the Punjab the English costume was worn, after it had replaced the Muslim costume with some people, in private life as well. But this example from the Punjab was not very significant, because the people of that region were always outside the limits of Hindu society strictly considered as such. Even the Punjabi Hindu, not to speak of the Sikh, was more Islamic than Hindu.

I have next to consider another aspect of the battle of clothes in the British period, in which the main question was another issue. How far our traditional clothing or habits of wearing it were to be modified in the light of notions of propriety and decorum derived from the West?—was the question which arose in an insistent form. This in actual fact raised one practical question—Should the Hindus go on keeping the upper parts of the body bare or were they to cover it with sewn garments?

Already, the Muslim disapproval of the bare body had done a good deal to persuade the Hindu to cover himself more fully, and to consider that it was discourtesy to appear before people who deserved respect without doing so. This notion of propriety was active in the Tagore family. When Rabindranath Tagore as a boy appeared before his father in the dhoti and without covering his head, he was sent back to put on the full Muslim costume. But the idea was strong only among the urban and Islamized Hindus of northern India. In the rural areas in Hindustan and over the rest of India, the Hindus kept themselves unencumbered with upper garments, that is, remained bare-bodied, except for the formal purpose of associating with the Muslim ruling order.

But with the coming of British rule, the practice of covering the body became more general; in fact, to remain bare-bodied except when being comfortable in summer in private, became more or less rare. Nowadays, unless they have to put off sewn garments for a special purpose, the Hindus, both men and women, wear one or more garments for the upper part of the body. These are either of the European type or evolved from some pre-existing Indian apparel. In addition, the women have made the petticoat an integral part of their dress.
But in Bengal the sari as the sole garment for women was not ousted quickly or easily. The battle between it and the dress they habitually wear today lasted over seventy years. The history of this struggle is worth recalling in detail.

A very good starting point is furnished by a description of Bengali women in their old dress by Fanny Parkes, a charming English woman who came to India at the time of Lord Amherst (1823-28). She had been to a party at the house of a rich Bengali in Calcutta, talked with the women, and in her journal she wrote about them and their dress. Here is the description of their manner of wearing the sari:

"On beholding their attire I was no longer surprised that no other men than their husbands were permitted to enter the zenana. The dress consisted of one long strip of Benares gauze of thin texture, with a gold border, passing twice round the limbs, with the end thrown over the shoulder. The dress was rather transparent, almost useless as a veil."

There was not the slightest exaggeration in this description. I have myself seen great ladies dressed like this. In Bengali society of olden days the higher the status of the man or woman the thinner was the dhoti or the sari. In our boyhood my brothers and I were always made to put on the semi-transparent Simlai dhoti for festivals or weddings. It was as positive a mark of our aristocratic bringing up and way of life as was our very fine rice.

This custom enabled the fashionable women of Calcutta, unfortunately not of East Bengal from where I come, to make up in a manner that would be quite pointless for the women of the West, for the method was to paint the beindds with the scarlet dye of lac. This produced the effect of a pink Petticoat. From this fashion, again, the Bengali language got the proverb, "Scratching up a complexion," which referred to the habit these women had of scratching themselves hard in order to work up a bloom and show-through if a visitor arrived when they had not made up.

But soon after Fanny Parkes saw the thin saris the puritanical outcry began. In 1835 the Bengali newspaper Samachar Darpan, edited by the missionaries of Serampore, published a
letter on the subject from a Hindu who made an impassioned appeal to the Bengali Hindus to put their women in more adequate and opaque clothing, as was customary with the Muslims and Hindus of upper India. As he quaintly put it, “Forsooth, is it possible for the women to have the same respectability with their fashion of putting on very fine saris, which shows up the whole body, as in a sari and scarf which properly covers it up?”

It seems that at about the same time or a little later the Maharaja of Burdwan, who was the richest nobleman in Bengal, struck a blow for morality by refusing to see people who came to visit him in thin dhotis. It is reported that he even refused to take nazir, the formal presentation of money when seeing important people, from such persons. But it should be remembered that the Burdwan family was of Punjabi origin, and by caste Khatri.

Obviously, these appeals were wholly ignored, for a Bengali newspaper published the following editorial in 1851:

“The practice whose abandonment we have urged many times, the practice against which our correspondents have written many letters in which they have requested the public to give it up, putting forward many reasons for doing so, but the practice from which even now the people of this country are not feeling any revulsion, is the wearing of dhotis and saris which are so fine that they obliterate the distinction between being clad and unclad. . . . It is only in Bengal that men and women think of putting on fine dhotis and saris, and to meet this demand these things are being manufactured at Dacca, Chandrakona, and Santipur. The clothing made at these places is making the males and females of Bengal lechers and lecheresses.”

This also produced no effect. The uniform failure of such appeals only proved that moral vapourings are powerless against fashions, as indeed we are seeing again in India today. What was needed before any impression could be made on the habits of dressing of the people of Bengal was a new, virile conception of culture with an intense conviction and even fanaticism behind it. This came through the Brahmo movement of religious and moral reform, which began to make its influence felt from 1860 onwards.
Taking its stand on the totality of moral ideas of Protestant, puritanical, non-conformist, evangelical, and Victorian England, the movement succeeded in about twenty years in converting the progressive and thinking part of the Bengali gentry to heavy clothing, if not to the same degree to monotheism. It was the wife of Satyendra Nath Tagore, the first Indian member of the Indian Civil Service and brother of the Poet, who introduced the new way of wearing the sari in Bengal. It was really an adaptation of the Gujarati (Parsi) manner with the addition of European adjuncts. So far as the sari itself was concerned, the new fashion of wearing it was a reversion to the Aryan manner, which had fallen into disuse in Bengal. That does not mean, however, that it was not challenged by the old school in the province.

In actual fact, the struggle went on almost till the end of the first World War. Thus in the first decade of the twentieth century, in Bengali Hindu society taken as a whole, the women were seen in two types of clothing: the old and scanty Bengali dress and the new Aryan-European costume. The Brahmos did not tolerate levity in regard to morals. Therefore they poured humourless wrath and contempt on the upholders of the old tradition. But the conservative Hindu Bengalis, being both hard-boiled and blasé, cracked jokes, and so far as the match of jokes was played, had the best of the quarrel.

I remember one of the witticisms from the days of my boyhood. An old relative of mine, who had the reputation of being not only religious, but even saintly, was one day given the opportunity to watch the undressing, of course up to a point, of some of the modern girls of those times. Such privileges belong to people of grandfatherly age. He watched the process with great interest, and when the undressing went on for a much longer time than he had any idea of, he slapped his thigh, sent forth a guffaw, and then perpetrated an epigram in Bengali which I reproduce here in a French translation: "Morbleu!" he cried out, "Plus ça dévêt, plus c'est la même vêtue!"

The amusement which seems so attractive in the simple and rustic patriarch that my relative was, took a grosser form among the orthodox Bengalis of Calcutta, whose strongest point was a low and salacious buffoonery. Therefore their ridicule of the
dress of the reformed Brahmó women was of a very Calcutta type, and I shall give an illustration of this, which was a skit published in a Bengali magazine of humour, published at the end of the last century or a little later.

A Hindu family was disturbed on a Sunday morning by the singing of hymns in the house of a Brahmó neighbour, and were wondering what it was all about. Of course, it was the usual weekly prayer meeting, which was sometimes held privately. But the writer improved on the occasion. He made a member of the Hindu family go out to reconnoitre and on his return give the following explanation: the daughter-in-law of the Brahmós had gone the previous night to answer a minor necessity but being unable to manage her heavy clothing she had wetted it, and so a purification rite was on. All orthodox Calcutta, I am sure, had their sides split with laughter at the brilliant and subtle joke.

But alas! Calcutta in all that it is most Calcutta has always been the home of lost or even rotten causes, and the manner of wearing the sari, so dear to its citizens, disappeared totally by 1920. In fact, the change of attitude in Bengali society was so thorough that in the period that followed we could hardly even refer to the old struggle without offending propriety. Thus it happened that in 1937, at a literary gathering in Patna over which I presided, we had a very awkward experience when my historian friend Brajendra Nath Banerji was reading a paper on the revolution in clothing in Bengal.

My friend set forth the problem and began to illustrate it with citations from the contemporaneous Bengali Press. As he read on we noticed a hardening of expression on the part of our highly respectable audience, and when he quoted the extract about the ‘males and females’ of Bengal becoming ‘lechers and lecheresses’ the faces became so stern that I on my friend’s right side and another literary man on his left pulled hard at his kurta. The historian looked from side to side, and hemmed. Then he suddenly awoke to the meaning of the tugging and got so confused that instead of going on to the end of the citation where all the improper details he was compelled to give would have been neatly tied up in an unexceptionable didacticism, he stopped short at the next sentence. This unfortunately opened
up an even more lurid vista, for he read out: "And of the people who wear these fine dhotis and saris is there aught that remains invisible?" Then he sat down. We were frozen with horror.
Chapter 3

THE CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

I must now make an effort to discover and understand the causes of these maladjustments, antipathies, and conflicts. The dislike which the wearers of one kind of clothing feel towards another is not, of course, anything special to India. One recalls the dissatisfaction of the Macedonian soldiers when their great and beloved leader Alexander put on the Persian costume from political motives. But in my country the battle of clothes has been more continuous and bitter than anywhere else, and what is more important it has never ended in a complete victory or complete defeat for any side. Therefore it has been all the more unsettling. It is these features, even more than the fact of the conflict, which call for an explanation.

Whenever there is any quarrel over dress the first argument that the sides put forward is the moral one, and the second is generally climatic. “Our costume is more decorous and suited to the country,” one of the parties would say, and the formula would come back exactly echoed from the other side. I am inclined to reject the moral argument as totally inapplicable to any basic situation in respect of clothing, and to regard it as a sort of afterthought, though I would admit that the revulsion on moral grounds may be a sincere emotional reaction and may even be justified by appearances. On the other hand, I admit the climatic argument only partially. But both the arguments deserve to be examined seriously.

There is no doubt that the Hindu costume in its original, pure form lent itself to be misjudged on the score of morals. It was not the Muslims and the British alone who thought that it was immodest and indecorous, the great majority of the educated Hindus of northern India do so even today. Furthermore, apart from what the costume is in itself, the poets have altogether given away any case that could be made out for it. They describe the female body so exhaustively and with such a profusion of detail that the reader is forced to conclude that these
women wore nothing or else the poets had sari-piercing eyes. Ancient Indian sculpture and painting, as everybody knows, did not undo the work of the poets.

Yet that was not all. The poets,—and in Sanskrit literature prose romances are included in poetry or kavya,—were very fond of one conceit. I have read that Homer makes Athena divest herself of her peplus by a single gesture, our poets make the sari slip off through a simple conditioned reflex. One of the favourite themes in the old Bengali poets is the behaviour of the women when, from their balconies and windows, they are watching a handsome prince passing along the street below. Even Tagore has a poem on it, though he treats it in a chaste manner and makes an allegory out of it.

On these occasions the women are made to pass remarks of unrestrained freedom, gaiety, and admiration for the prince, with equally outspoken disgust for their husbands—remarks of a native flavour which cannot be reproduced in any European language without transforming their amorous hard into smutty filth. But the physical result is easy to describe. Their saris loosened themselves from their waists.

If that was the mood of Sanskrit and Bengali profane literature, the semi-sacred and heroic epics made things no better. They are full of stories of the temptations of the great sages by the jealous gods. The tales are edificatory, but not in the manner of Christian hagiography, nor of the Buddhist, for the sages or Rishis, instead of coming through the cruel ordeals with souls saved and only bodies tortured and lacerated, always succumbed body and soul to the temptresses, the celestial courtiers; and invariably the cause of the fall was a mischievous frolic between the sari and the wind, made possible by the nature of the garment.

Shakuntala, the heroine of the famous play, was born out of such an escapade, and when describing her parentage to King Dushyanta, her companion began: "And in the vernal season, in the midst of his austerities the sage beheld her maddening charms . . . .", but she stopped short at that from bashfulness and modesty.

So, it may be said that the Hindu costumes stood condemned morally out of the mouth of their poets and wearers. The Muslim in Bengal was well enough versed in Hindu mythology to be able
to quote the scriptures like the Evil One, and one day in a river steamer I was witness to the discomfiture of a Brahmin pundit in my party at the hands of the Muslim serang or skipper of the vessel. The Muslims spared neither our gods nor our clothing.

But even apart from the hyperboles and conceits of the poets, the Hindu dress could be described as inadequate by Muslim standards, or by any standards. The formula zonam solvere had no symbolic or ritualistic significance among us, as it had in Roman society. It was the easiest action imaginable. In contrast, the Muslim costume for women with its elaborate izars and izar-bands, trousers and girdles, was a defence of modesty and honour, because it offered formidable impediments in the way of undressing.

As it happens, I can illustrate this point with a very telling anecdote from the later days of the Mogul Empire. Emperor Jahandar Shah, a grandson of Aurangzeb, had as his favourite mistress a dancing girl named Lal Kumari, and during the usual civil wars which preceded successions in that dynasty and Jahandar's own succession, she was separated from him after a chance defeat. As she was trying to reach Lahore for safety, a ruffianly general of one of the other claimants fell upon her. He wanted to dishonour her, but took such a long time in fumbling among the many cords and pearl tassels of her girdle that before he could pull the right one the Imperial Guard arrived and rescued her. One shudders to think what would have happened to a Hindu princess in such a predicament.

Even in dancing, an art which is basically erotic, the Muslim costume stands for unimpeachable decorum. In 1823 Amelia Heber, the Bishop's wife, went to an exhibition of Indian ballet in the north Indian or Muslim style in the house of a rich Bengali of Calcutta, and she gave the following account of the performance:

"I never saw public dancing in England so free from everything approaching to indecency. Their dress was modesty itself, nothing but their faces, feet, and hands, being exposed to view."

In shattering contrast, in Sanskrit poetry, dancing seems to be only an excuse for erotic suggestion. In one of Kalidasa's plays a princess or a vassal chief's daughter appears before King
Agnimitra to sing with appropriate gestures, but even before she has begun to do so, the King cries out in ecstasy: "Oh! how faultless is she in the particular beauty of each limb! To wit,

Wide her eyes, the face an autumnal moon;
Arms enchased to the modell’d shoulder-slopes;
Firm, high, restrained yet the breasts; polished flanks;
Hand’s span waist, mons Veneris though unspanned;
Curved the toes and feet; Oh, the Maestro’s style,
as in his very mind corporeal made!

These are, of course, the commonplace imagery of Sanskrit poetry. The Sanskrit poets did not employ sniggering euphemisms and figurative language. Their erotic flights were always straight and strong cocktails, designed to go to the head.

However that may be, morally they have put the Hindu costume in a most embarrassing position. When your greatest poets have exercised every ingenuity to wring the last drop of erotic juice from your clothing, you cannot turn upon the Muslim or European critics to accuse them of unfairness. Some Hindus, especially those of northern India, have felt this weakness all along, and they have even, as I have already said, acquired some of the foreign prejudice against keeping the body bare. But even with these Hindus covering the body is only a question of good manners, of the externals of behaviour, having no connexion with moral ideals or conduct. They would never concede that the Hindu costume, even the original Hindu women’s costume which enables Kalidasa’s king to be so circumstantial, was intrinsically immoral. On the contrary, all Hindus have a very strong feeling that it is the Muslim feminine costume which is more suggestively sensual, in spite of the full covering that it provides.

For instance, the dancing and dancing girls whose dress and deportment were considered so decorous by a bishop’s wife, were singled out to us in our moral teaching in childhood as the lowest symbols of the depravity of the old and unreformed Hindu society of Bengal. I shall also make an honest confession about my moral prejudice against the Muslim costume for women, consisting of the salwar and kamiz. I do not think that anybody can charge me with having any bias against Islam as a way of life and religion, but even I feel distressed when I see Bengali Hindu
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girls in salwar and kamiz, and I get rid of this feeling only by curling my lips in contempt and ceasing to think of them as Bengali girls. If I had a daughter I would certainly never have allowed her to put on this dress, and I have incited others against it.

In the women’s schools and colleges in Delhi they insist on the girls being in salwar for games and physical exercise. A friend had objection to this for a girl of the family, and I told him to defy the college authorities. The principal then threatened that she would fine the girl heavily for every day on which she appeared in sari instead of in salwar. We paid no attention to this either, after deciding that if necessary we would take the matter to a law court. Of course, nothing happened at all.

All Hindus may not assert themselves in this way, but they dislike the salwar, and the reason is simple. To the Hindus the costume is associated with the Islamic concept of womanhood, which is repulsive to them. The erotic treatises, Sanskrit profane literature, and ancient Indian sculpture have obscured the fact that the truly Brahmanic concept of womanhood is very European, nearer to that of the Spartans, Romans, and Germans than that of the Semitic peoples, which is almost self-evident in the epics and the books of sacred law. The Hindu clothing, too, is similar to the early European, as I have pointed out. Nowhere from Ireland to Bengal, as long as the old cultural traditions remained living, did a woman of Aryan origins ever put on a trouser-like garment. The costume and the moral outlook thus became correlated. To give a rather broad hint about the correlation of clothing with moral notions: among the wearers of the skirt and sari an upward movement of the forearms and hands is the indecent gesture, whereas among the wearers of salwar and trouser-like garments the indecency would be indicated by a downward gesture.

Thus, in spite of the apparent insufficiency of the sari, a Hindu will never admit that in wearing it his women stand on a lower moral plane than a Mlechchha, or unclean foreign woman in her sewn costume, no more indeed than a Spartan would have thought that a Barbarian woman with all the load of her clothing and ornaments was purer than his naked girl, doing gymnastics.

This leads me to what I suppose is the correct formulation of the relationship between morals and clothing. We do not wear any set of clothes because by previous intellectual analysis we
have found them to be modest, but we look upon a particular kind of clothing as moral and modest because we are used to wearing it. In other words, the moral connexion is a secondary relationship, a matter of association of ideas.

The cultural loyalty of the Hindus to their own clothing is so deep-seated that I am unable to think of any time in which it will lose the power to send its call to all Hindu hearts and to take them back to the loin-cloth. Whatever a Hindu might be airing in the way of opinion, and however de-Hinduized he might consider himself to be as the self-deluding victim of his own palaver, he is always subject to unexpected fits of enlightenment in which all his new acquisitions, whether ideas or material things, including clothing, appear like unholy vanities. Perhaps it will be thought that I am alluding to Mahatma Gandhi. No, for he never ceased to be the simplest of Hindus. He needed no recall to Hinduism. I shall illustrate the point I am trying to make by the example of a Westernized and high-placed Punjabi Hindu, because the appeal of the Hindu way of life is normally at its feeblest among the Hindus of the Punjab.

This man was returning from a visit to England late in life, and he had with him the usually overstocked wardrobe of European clothes which a wealthy Punjabi used to possess in British days. When he was nearing Bombay the call came to him. He threw overboard all his foreign clothing, wrote out a deed of gift to his sons, and became a hermit. I think he is still living somewhere in the Himalayan foothills on a small pittance.

I pass on to the climatic influence on clothing. In comparison with the moral consideration I attach far greater importance to it. Nevertheless, that concession, too, has to be qualified substantially. It seems that the climate and weather operate decisively on clothing only in the earliest stages of the formation of costumes, but that after it has once been given a fixed form and has set in its mould, further basic changes become impossible even if the people in question migrate to a wholly different climatic region. After the formation of its pattern, clothing remains capable of rejecting all changes which are not in keeping with its nature, and remains susceptible to minor changes only.

Nothing illustrates this better than the behaviour of the English in India in regard to dress. There was no costume which
was more unsuited to the Indian climate than theirs. It was not simply that they were themselves uncomfortable in the clothes: if these latter could be supposed to have consciousness they would have been even more miserable. In the Indian climate and weather English clothes lost their firmness of structure, the colour simply faded away, the hang became limp and awry, and there was a general transformation towards the shabby which nothing could arrest. The English male costume in cotton or silk material, in spite of all that was done to evolve suits for the tropics, never looked quite the same thing. It appeared as if it had become half-caste, sometimes respectable and sometimes not.

Every Englishman had an instinctive feeling that any adaptation to the climate would reduce the elegance of his original clothing. So, when he had any aesthetic sense, he stuck to his old clothes. Even in a tropical jungle the English magistrate without a second countryman or countrywoman as company would dress for dinner. The more hostile the environment was to his clothes, and the greater the discomfort in continuing to wear them, the more bounden in duty and decency did he feel to wear these.

This brings me up against the basic cultural attributes of clothing, as distinct from its utility. Like language and other features of life which distinguish one human group from another, it is a part of the national personality, it is one expression among others of a distinctive culture. Therefore no one can change his clothes until there has been, in part or whole, a transfer of cultural allegiance. I am reminded here of an incident connected with Newman's going over to the Roman Church. The emissary whom Cardinal Wiseman sent to find out how matters stood brought the glad news that the conversion was imminent. He had observed that Newman had given up his black trousers for grey ones.

Once this is admitted to be true there should be no difficulty in seeing why in India the different groups of costumes remain separate, and even why they are always in conflict. India, I cannot repeat often enough, is not a country in which a fusion of cultures resulting in the appearance of a composite culture, has ever taken place. Therefore all the cultures which have made their way into this vast warehouse of culture have always retain-
ed their separate character, and when they have lost their distinctiveness, even their militant self-consciousness, they have also ceased to be civilizations. So, in each successive age, India has presented a very curious spectacle—that of a dominant culture co-existing with a number of obsolete ones, which have retained enough vitality to live on, but not so much of it as to be able to absorb or be absorbed in the new civilization. Clothing is an essential part of any civilization, and therefore in India it could hardly be expected to have a history which was inconsistent with the general cultural history of the country.
Chapter 4

AESTHETIC CONCEPTS AND THEIR
EXPRESSION

But the cultural conflict that the feud between the different types of costume has been in India is not due solely to moral notions or loyalties to rival ways of life. These are indeed in the forefront of the emotional consciousness of those who quarrel, but there are other predispositions, not only in the background but actually below the level of consciousness altogether, which do not seem to me to be less powerful, though they have given rise to a latent opposition rather than to open clashes.

These are abstract in character. There are, I am convinced deeply felt and compulsive aesthetic prepossessions which guide and control the creation and wearing of clothing as a form of artistic expression. It is difficult to say whether these exist beforehand and shape the different forms of clothing or whether they are themselves generated by a particular form when it has imposed itself on a group of human beings. However that may be, there can be no room for doubt that every fully evolved family of clothing has its implicit aesthetics, which never relaxes its hold. It remains capable throughout of exercising its selectivity on the choices of clothes open to any people. Not all people can wear all kinds of dress, or have the same kind of personal adornment.

I can best illustrate this by taking the two groups of costumes between which the hostility was and is the greatest in India, namely, the Hindu and the Muslim. It seems to me that both of these have distinctive, and contrasted, ideas of beauty in the human form behind them. I have wondered why it has not occurred to art critics that the Hindu concept of a beautiful body is static, whereas that of the Muslim is dynamic. This antithesis in India is an even more exaggerated form of the striking opposition that exists between the High Renaissance and Baroque art in Europe. In all Hindu literature, Sanskrit or modern, the analogies and similes for the body and limbs are inert, solid objects, such as
golden goblets for the breasts, plantain trees for the thighs, the round earth for the hips, the great Banyan for girth, and so on. In men the chest is likened to a great pair of doors, the figure to a tall Sal tree, the shoulders to the hump of a bull.

On the contrary, the Muslim analogies are to objects in motion or in unstable equilibrium. Even English authors writing about Muslims convey this impression, as Doughty does in his description of the Bedouin girl. But the most interesting description of this kind which I have read is to be found in the Arabian Nights. In the story in question a princess did not rise to welcome a prince, which surprised the latter. But when later she did get up he found that if she had given an impression of discourtesy it was only because she had difficulty in moving on account of the weight of her posterior parts, which were suspended to a very lithe and frail frame. He then noticed what a benediction her dimpled behinds were, for when she walked they trembled from their very nature, quivering like curds in a Bedouin’s porringer or quince jelly in a platter perfumed with the aromatic gum-benjamin.

From this, as soon as he thinks at all of the matter, it becomes obvious that all possible exposure is natural in those who hold a static, tactile, or plastic view of the body, and all possible covering in those who hold the dynamic view. If anyone feels inclined to doubt this I would ask him to recall the difference between High Renaissance and Baroque art, to which I have already referred. The Cinquecentissmi not only preferred the nude as the highest and noblest representation of the human body, they also gave drapery, when they made use of it, an independent plastic form which was either without any relationship with the body, or a complementary setting for its exposed parts.

On the contrary, the nudes, with a small number of exceptions, are the weakest part of Baroque painting, specially of its

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1 The contrast between the static Hindu and the dynamic Muslim attitude is seen even in amorous behaviour. A Hindu coquette will stand still leaning against a door-frame, with her hands locked above her head and eyes fixed on the vanishing point of the horizon; whereas a Muslim girl with young men about will run, jump, or frisk, casting sidelong glances like Parthian shafts. A young girl stole the heart of the stern and puritanical Aurangzeb by jumping up to pluck a mango, a pretext of course.
northern expression, and the costumes its glory. Recall Rembrandt, Hals, Metsu, Terborch, or Van Dyck; or any of them.

The opposition is due to the obvious reason that a modelled and plastic body has its beauty least obscured when it is most exposed, while the disharmonies of too much embonpoint are always softened and made imperceptible by delicate and flowing clothing, especially when the body is in motion. In such costumes the dynamism comes through with the most pleasant effect. I have had opportunities for observing this in Delhi at all times and in every place.

Most women who come from the so-called U.P. (United Provinces in British times and Uttar Pradesh after independence), which is really the ancient Aryavarta, are of the statuesque type, and they dress in the Hindu manner. They have a very special gait, which is a perfect accompaniment to their figure, so that when they walk they seem to be drawn along the street by an invisible string.

On the other hand, the Punjabi women with their dynamic Middle-Eastern figure and air, would look unbecoming and inartistic in anything except their own costume. Their swinging gait in long strides is perfectly matched to the salvar, and therefore when as matrons they get obese and take to the sari, both in the Hindu manner, they look unutterable frights, as if they were porpoises which had lost their dive, the only graceful thing about them, and begun to waddle like ducks. As long as they retain their figure these bodies are seen at their best in movement.

There is a close correlation between them and their proper clothes. The Punjabi women have very generously distributed masses of fleshy and adipose tissues which often have independent suspension. Thus these do not always vibrate with one another and in tune with the fundamental frequency, and the discordant motions, unless cut off, create a very unsettling and inharmonious effect. That is precisely what is averted by their clothes.

In this costume, in which the adaptation between the normal body and the artificial integument is perfect, the women have a filter which never allows jarring vibrations to pass through. The spectator thus sees only two motions, accompanied as in music by what in the absence of a better term I would call their harmonics, which are consistent with the fundamental frequency
of vibration. The first motion is a side to side, oscillating motion, and the second a vertical undulatory motion. This means that the Punjabi feminine body is seen at its best from behind, and that is also how the Punjabi man love best to gape at their women. When they see one of them approaching from the front, a hard and tense stare appears in their eyes, and there is in it only an expectation and no enjoyment; but as soon as the woman has passed them and they have, according to their invariable habit, made a right-about turn to look at her from the back, the eyes soften and a soft sigh escapes from their bosom.

The two forms of exhibiting the body are naturally mutually exclusive. Just as a person in the Muslim costume will never beat any in the Hindu for statuesque beauty, in the same way no wearer of the Hindu feminine costume will approach the wearers of the Muslim dress in beauty of movement. Once you have freed yourself from moral prejudice or prepossessions, the women who wear the Islamic dress will appear as beautiful to you as trees in a wind.

I am sure I have written enough to show that as an outside spectator I can sincerely admire the beauty of the Muslim costumes. My moral bias comes into play only when I see them worn by the Hindus, and I do not consider that I am wrong in feeling it. All human beings, if they are genuine, make and present a consistent whole in which even such externals as clothing have to fit in. Islamic clothing without Islam does not look convincing. To be frank, I have seen few human beings who appear weaker, falser, and more unattractive than the Hindustani Hindu spouting Urdu poetry and sporting Mussalman clothing. It would be most unfair to appraise the absolute value and beauty of the Muslim costumes by these wretched Hindu caricatures.

I would go further and say that on its own aesthetic assumptions Muslim clothing in its heyday achieved a beauty hardly surpassed in the history of costume. The Muslims seem to have introduced a new conception of magnificence into apparel, and therefore the silk merchants of the sooks of Baghdad and Cairo stood, not so much for commerce, as for culture. This was forcibly brought home to me by a remark made by a Kashmiri shawl merchant more than thirty years ago in Calcutta. I asked him whether he dealt in shawls, but he replied
decisively: "No, Jenab," and then he added: "I only make a
livelihood." He would not call the traffic in the things in which
he did business a relationship with the truc shawl, about which
these merchants have many poetic conceits.

The magnificence spread outside the Muslim world, as the
lines quoted in my prefatory good resolution indicated. The
splendour of the Renaissance costume, I fancy, was inspired by
the grandeur of the Islamic ones, as it was sustained by the rich
stuffs from the East. By the end of the sixteenth century the
gorgeousness seems to have been completely assimilated by the
European clothes, and after that a counter-movement appears
to have begun which subdued the richness of the colours and
textures, until by the beginning of the nineteenth century the
European spirit had reasserted itself to make clothing the man-
made extension of the fur of arctic or cold-climate wild animals.

Two mistakes are often made by non-Muslims in judging
Muslim clothing on purely aesthetic grounds. In the first place,
it is considered to be over-ornate, as too gaudy for real beauty.
Next, it is rated as feeble in its masculine forms owing to a seep-
ing into it of the sensuality which is the greatest weakness of
the Muslim character. Both the opinions are wrong. The first
rests on an exclusive concept of beauty, and the second on late
associations which are very different from those of the earlier
Muslim clothing, I should like to say a few words on each point.

There is no question but that the Islamic costumes have a
suggestion of grandiloquence. They are not based on the Greek
principle of simplicity in art, nor on the Chinese and Japanese
principle of understatement and inuendo. These clothes, no more
than any other manifestation of Islamic art, are not able to say:
"If everything is expressed, what remains to be imagined?"—
which is the warning question of Japanese art. That kind of
restraint is made impossible by certain climates and atmospheres.
In the Middle-Eastern air every art form has to be explicit and
assertive. If for that reason the Islamic costumes have to be
rejected they would share the bin with the great mosques and
shrines of Isfahan and Meshed decorated with coloured enamelled
tiles, with the carpets and rugs, with the pottery, and also
with the poetry. The main question is how they assert themselves,
and they do so with unerring taste in every detail of line, colour,
and texture.
As to the mark of sensual degeneracy, that made its appearance in India only from the middle of the eighteenth century. It was contemporaneous with the speaking of Urdu or Hindustani at the Mogul court, where in its best days nothing but Persian could be spoken. As in many other things, so in clothing the first signs of decadence appeared in the reign of the effete Mogul Emperor Muhammad Shah, who is traditionally known as the Rangila or gay monarch because he was always steeped in debauchery. His only achievement was that he remained alive and reigning for twenty-nine years after having seen about ten of his near relatives murdered or killed in battle in the course of fratricidal strifes.

But the reign of this monarch was only the starting point of the decadence, which reached its climax in the court of the degenerate Nawabs of Oude at Lucknow. There all forms of artistic expression became coated over with the fungus that grows on everything rotting. Even by the standards of Lucknow a lower depth was reached during the reign of the last Nawab, the despicable Wazid Ali Shah, who was deposed by Dalhousie. In a gallery in Lucknow, I have been told, there was a portrait of this prince showing him in a very transparent muslin dress. It exhibited such an ambiguity in the pectoral region that in order not to offend the late Victorian sensibilities of the Memsahibs, a thick curtain used to be drawn across it when they visited the gallery. A good deal of undeserved and unnecessary compassion is now being wasted on this worthless Nawab. It is because he was deposed by a British Governor-General, this being the easiest means of ensuring canonization in modern India.

In its best days there was nothing overdone even in the Rococo manner in the Muslim costume. The men’s clothes were neither effeminate nor sensual in feeling, just as they were not also barbaric in their gorgeousness. The combination of magnificence, purity, and strength lasted among the Muslims of India down to the epoch of the sons of Aurangzeb, perhaps even a little later. All Muslim clothing before the decay set in stands in the company of their great architecture, painting, calligraphy, and other handicrafts. The clothes are strong and beautiful at the same time, like the damascene swords which the rulers wore and used. There are in the Red Fort of Delhi two such swords,
one belonging to Shah Jahan and the other to Aurangzeb. They recall to me the beauty of the Mogul costume.

The Hindu clothes on their part achieved the highest conceivable beauty on their assumptions. I wonder if any Muslim will put on record as sincere an admiration for our costumes as I have done for his. That is unlikely, for like the monotheism of Islam, the Muslim taste in clothing is also exclusive. But the Hindu aesthetics behind it is composite, and therefore it has greater catholicity. The Hindu approach to dress considered as an art, not the expression of an ethos, is governed by a dual idea: that personal adornment through clothing ought to be a combination of the highest and the most refined beauty of the nude with that of clothing and ornaments. It fused what are regarded as incompatibles, and it did so with glorious success.

It follows from this that the Hindu costumes were at their most beautiful when there were no sewn garments incorporated with them. The later Hindu clothes with these additions are not ungraceful, but they are not the same thing. Their appeal is different, and the moods and feelings they give rise to are far removed from those that their originals inspired. The impact of the Hindu costume must have been overwhelming when worn in the pure form even by the relatively lowly. Let me recall the description of the woman door-keeper in the palace of King Sudraka in the Sanskrit romance Kadambari: In one aspect of her appearance she provokes fear; in the other, respect; and in both admiration. With her sword hanging on the left side she is like a sandal tree with a snake clinging to it, with her cane she suggests the dark forests of the Vindhyas; but in her white robe which is as dazzling as the plumage of the swan or the clouds of the Indian autumn, and with her breasts coated all over with cream-coloured sandal paste, she is the very embodiment of royal command or the image of the presiding goddess of the kingdom.

But on account of its dual aesthetics Hindu clothing in its original form suffered from two handicaps. Its effect depended as much on the body of the wearer as on the quality of the raiment, and not all men and women could boast of perfect figures. For this reason it is in sculpture and painting that Hindu clothing is seen at its most beautiful.

The other handicap was that it lent itself to be misjudged

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on the score of morals, and I have not tried to hide that the Hindus themselves have done a good deal to give a handle to such criticism. Yet it is a mistake to say that all the representations of Hindu clothes in art, or all the literary descriptions of them, are voluptuous or erotic in suggestion. Unfortunately, however, it is this aspect which is most noticed, and the Gandhian Hindus of today are not above selling this eroticism to foreigners. Still, it has to be pointed out that there is another expression of Hindu clothing which is chaste, noble, and spiritual, and which for these qualities attains an unearthly purity.

Even Sanskrit poetry, in which the descriptions of clothing usually are erotic in suggestion can suddenly go over to a crepuscular pathos that will not permit the intrusion of any conflicting sensation, as in the famous description of the goddess Rati, lamenting her dead husband, the Hindu god of love:

And with breasts greyed by her clinging to earth,
Wailed she, in the dust her coiled tresses trailing.

It is, however, in sculpture and painting that the treatment of clothing is most de-carnalized, if I may use such a word. In actual fact, it is given a pure aesthetic beauty on the one hand and a serene spirituality on the other. Though voluptuousness is not absent, it is never dominant as in literature.

The manner of representing the clothing of the divine or religious figures is always strong, noble, and pure. This becomes all the more remarkable when one remembers that in most of the rendering the clothing is often and as a rule semi-transparent and always modelled to the body. Nevertheless it does not rouse any sensual feeling. Even if these figures were completely nude—and some Jaina figures are so—theirs would be a nudity which has been associated only with the blessed in Paradise.

It is of great interest to follow the spiritual ascent of Hindu clothing from age to age, and from region to region. The sanctified expression had already made its appearance in the Gandhara and Mathura schools of sculpture, but had not become fully manifest. Its completeness was reached in the so-called Gupta age, the period of the classical Hindu civilization. Few creations in the way of sculpture have rivalled the pure simplicity of the combination between body and raiment that is to be seen,
in the pieces from Sarnath, unless it were the sculpture of the Old Kingdom of Egypt. A gentle beatitude surrounds all the works of this school like an invisible halo.

Then followed another stage, in which an exalted synthesis of strength and nobility was achieved, and if it rose to splendour that too was not overwhelming or disturbing. On the contrary it had an ineffable calm. The sculpture of Elephanta, Ellora, and Mahavallipuram stands for this expression. In the caves of Ajanta painting is added to sculpture. Even in Orissa, before the voluptuous simper became cloying, heroic images were made which are to be included in this group.

In these figures the human body was given that amount of drapery which seems to etherealize clothing and make it fit for the superman or for the gods. Though the ideal appearance is captured, it does not strike the beholder with paralysing awe. These divinities there, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, are not Olympians who look on mankind only with irony and disdain. There is neither coldness nor aloofness in them, there is only compassion. Yet it is not the compassion of the powerful for the weak and the heavy laden, but the compassion of equals, for other equals who are seized with a passing faintness. Both Hindu and Buddhist images are sometimes given a raised hand symbolizing reassurance, which men expect from their divine supporters. Even when the figures of sculpture are not so represented they give the same reassurance without the gesture, through their expression alone. They seem to say, “Shed weak fears and the weaker pretence of suffering. Look at us and remember the majesty of the human condition.” How one wishes that all mankind were clothed as they are. It was impossible to apply to this clothing the famous antithesis: “Take no thought for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the body more than raiment?”

One should have thought that nothing was lacking after this. As it happened, there was, and it was sweetness to be added to the majesty, and sweetness of a comparable order. It came, but strange as it might seem not in India, the homeland of the religions. It came in distant Java, across the seas. The starkness of the Indian physical environment stands in the way of everything except the two opposed poles of earthly squalor and unearthly majesty.
But in the more equable climate of the Indian archipelago the grandeur could be clothed with sweetness. And perhaps there was in it a distinct appropriateness, because the contribution came from the people of those islands. All simple and primitive peoples when they come in contact with a new and high spiritual message from a civilized society, blossom out in sweetness, which is as unexpected as the flowering of a cactus. Think of Anglo-Saxon piety, especially in Northumbria, or of German mysticism. The sculpture of Java takes its place by their side.

Anyhow, in Java a pervasive sweetness was infused into the majesty that went out from India, and nothing of the strength was lost. Of this achievement, I shall give only one example, even at the risk of being unfair to the whole range of the sculpture. It is that of the women at the fountain at Boro Budur. Even the grotesque elephant-headed god Ganesa becomes as enchanting as a putto in Renaissance painting.

But in these stones from India and Java the clothing presents only its lines and texture, and seems to be sighing for its lost colours. For the element of hue we have to go to the farthest limits of China. In the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun Huang in Kansu were found paintings on silk of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, in which the colours of the clothing are as ethereal as the lines and folds are in sculpture. Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot brought away a very large number of them, and, of those that Stein brought away, one half is in Delhi and the other half in London. I have seen both.

Whoever wants to form a notion of the colours of the Hindu costumes should see these paintings. Certainly, there was infused into them a good deal of the Chinese sense of colour, but that does not make these clothes less Hindu, because the finest silk stuffs for India were imported from China, and went under the name of Chinamsuka, Chinese cloth, in Sanskrit.

All this beauty of clothing is, of course, manifested in art, but I cannot believe that it belonged only to art. A great part of it must have existed also in life, if not at its most idealistic, at least as something very close to the ideal. That glory has passed away for ever from our life.
PART THREE

THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

(This part contains five chapters)

1. Battle Becomes Squabble

2. Decline and Fall of Clothing

3. Le Beau Monde

4. A Rootless Fashion

5. A Voice Crying in the Wilderness)
Chapter 1

BATTLE BECOMES SQUABBLE

Is the battle of clothes, which has been fought out from age to age in India, fated to be everlasting? Perhaps it could be hoped that with the end of political subjection, which we have been in the habit of holding responsible for all our failures, there would be a synthesis of costumes as one aspect of a more harmonious phase of our existence. This has not come about. An ever-distracted people are having to endure the same, oh no! worse, distractions. But how could it be otherwise?—one is driven sadly to comment. Politics supplies the most easily available motive power for the collective actions of mankind, and culture the most tardily generated. So, when a people have failed to create a new sense of national unity in the country in a most dismal manner and have even enfeebled what existed under foreign rule, they cannot be expected to bring about a Gleichschaltung in dress.

Yet this is not the real paradox in the latest phase of the history of costume in India. The grotesque fact is that the battle of clothes is being carried on without interruption, with the present ruling order in the position of the former foreign rulers, Muslim and British, and discriminating in the same insulting way against the most ancient and beautiful costumes of the country. Especially, the bureaucratic and managerial wings of the ruling order are inflicting slights on Hindu clothing as any Muslim or Englishman did.

But the battle of clothing in its current phase is of a low quality. Just as the governance of the country by the present Indian ruling order, which I call Brown Colonialism, is a caricature of British imperialism, the conflict of clothes is also nothing better than degenerate aping, without any ideal or principle behind it. Therefore I have suggested in the title to this chapter that the old battle has become only a squabble. What that is due to will be explained in its proper place. For the moment let me describe the existing situation.

It is common knowledge that in the British days the Hindu
costume was the mark of an inferior citizen. When I was young the public conveniences of Calcutta were always segregated: there used to be, on one side, a set of them meant for us, the natives of the country, and, on the other, another set for ‘Europeans.’ When the Corporation of Calcutta became completely Indianized at the end of 1924, the signboard “Europeans Only” was changed to “Gentlemen in European Dress,” to avoid giving offence to racial sensitiveness. But the discrimination by costume remained, though the Hindu dhoti was no practical bar to using the European type of the urinals.

The same kind of discrimination was practised on the railways. In order to enable Eurasians of small means to travel in relative comfort some third and intermediate class compartments were marked “For Europeans Only.” Normally, this meant people in the European costume, for the ‘Europeans’ who needed this concession were indistinguishable from true Indians by any physical characteristic. So the story goes that one day a Bengali in dhoti got into one of these compartments and refused to leave when asked by the ‘Europeans’ to do so. The latter then went to the guard to have the non-European intruder thrown out, but when the man in authority arrived he found the Bengali with his suitcase half-open, and he himself halfway through the process of putting on a pair of trousers. “What are you doing?” asked the amazed guard. “I am becoming a European,” replied the nimble-witted Bengali.

The present Government of India, or at all events the men who act for it in regulating deportment and dress in public places, behave in the same manner and insult us if we are in Hindu clothing. Of this I can give a very striking example. Some years ago two Indians were refused admission to the dining hall of the Asoka Hotel in New Delhi because they were in dhoti. This hotel is owned by the Government of India, and is intended for foreigners and also for Indians of the parvenu class. It was named after the great Buddhist Emperor with the apparent object of luring Indophil Westerners, but under the rules in force at the time of the incident, it would have excluded Buddha himself, even as he was represented by the European Greeks in Gandhara sculpture.

The reason given for the exclusion was that in the hotel no
one wearing a dhoti was permitted to go into a room in which
dancing was allowed, because this Hindu garment was lacking
in that degree of decency which is called for by such highbrow
manifestations of Western culture as fox-trot, tango, and even
Rock-'n'-Roll or Twist. One of the Indians explained that he had no intention to dance. But the manager remained
firm. His behaviour on that occasion was in the best tradition
of the management of London Hotels which used to refuse ad-
mission to coloured persons.

I have no sympathy for those Indians who wish to dance in
hotels and yet stick to the dhoti. But I have no admiration
either for those other Indians who dance in trousers worn with
the buttoned up coat. I have seen this performance in rather
exclusive places, and I have not been impressed. On the contrary,
the spectacle of middle-aged officials or businessmen holding on
to Indian matrons coeval with themselves as if they were life-
belts is somewhat comic. At times I even find something posi-
tively unpleasant in the ogling and smirking by means of which
the partners try to furnish an accompaniment in the Western
inter-sexual manner to their pitching and rolling. But then I am
looked upon by such people as a reactionary.

The incident did not, however, end within the walls of the
hotel. It was raised in the Indian parliament, and the Home
Minister of India gave the emphatic assurance that there could
be no question of any discrimination against Hindu clothing
anywhere in India. I think that the ban on the dhoti is no lon-
ger enforced. But the hostility persists passively.

Neither the discriminators, nor those who are discriminated
against, try to find out how such incidents can happen. They
have no perception of the deep waters in which they are moving,
and are therefore ready to look upon these as unfortunate acci-
dents due either to mistaken zeal or lack of intelligence in under-
lings. That most definitely they are not, for they are created
by the very nature of things in certain historical situations in
India.

I am going to explain what that means, but before I begin
I should warn the reader that the first explanation that I shall
offer will only raise a second question, the next explanation a
third, and so on, until it will seem that a Chinese puzzle of ques-
tions and answers is being dangled before him. But the behaviour is so complex in its origins and exhibitions that this elaboration cannot be avoided.

Now, it has been seen in the course of Indian history that whenever a foreign imperial Power is exhausted and indigenous rulers take its place, the inter-imperial regimes not only continue the system of government and spirit of the old order, but also imitate its behaviour, showing the same likes and dislikes. I pointed this out rather emphatically in my autobiography, in which I wrote as follows: “In these intervals there have been seen in India only a futile pursuit of the political concepts of the preceding foreign rulers, inefficient manipulation of the political machinery left by them and, above all, an egregious aping of their arrogance and airs.”

After the passing away of the Mogul Empire these tendencies were strongly exhibited by the Marathas, who were notoriously imitative in every thing but their Hindu imperialism. They even went to the length of maintaining harems. The Peshwa himself had his, and the lower ranks followed his example so far as they could. After the debacle of the third battle of Panipat, in which almost all the Maratha military aristocracy perished, the victorious Afghans found in their camp thousands of women, among whom were ‘rose-limbed’ slaves, which showed that the Maratha commanders and even subordinate officers had bought slave girls from the northern hill regions, who were sold regularly in the bazaars of Delhi and Lahore.

Of course, in India today neither the politicians nor the officials keep harems—that is inhibited by their new moral conventions, and in any case by the expense, as also by the absence of a British precedent. But in all other things these people copy the British, and most faithfully and sedulously in those very things for which they criticized their former rulers most severely before independence.

Let me give some examples: there is the same top-heavy administration, crushing military expenditure, use of the public funds in the interest of a small privileged class, routine employment of shooting and gassing to suppress political agitation, imprisonment without trial, obstinate defence of permanent officials, cheap sneers and taunts for the parliamentary opposition, and the notorious snobbery in conduct. There is the same dis-
tinction, normally unbridgeable, between the superior officials, called Gazetted Officers, and the other employees of the Government who have a status which might be described as that of civilian N.C.O.-s, the same segregation by streets and districts, and the same disparity in pay. The politicians who never before ate anything but plain Hindu food in the plain Hindu manner cannot eat their cauliflower now, when they occupy the Government Houses, except under the name of 'cauliflower au gratin'. Seeing all these things I often say that above every fluttering national flag in India today I see its 'idea' in the Platonic sense—a transcendent al Union Jack.

So, the discrimination against Hindu clothes which our new rulers are practising quietly and almost unconsciously, is one aspect among many of their imitations of British ways. But if it is so, it will at once be asked why the antipathy is not being displayed in the name of the proper clothes of the former foreign rulers—that is, the European costume, which neither the politicians nor the high officials nowadays wear.

This is ruled out by the political associations of those clothes. They had become identified, especially in their complete and correct forms, with imperialism. Among self-respecting Indians the emotional revulsion from European clothing was caused by two kinds of behaviour. In the first place, the English in India never disguised their contempt for those Indians who wore their clothes, as indeed I have said already. That made sensitive Indians unwilling to wear them. On the other hand, those Indians who adopted these and were treated like the jackdaw in borrowed plumes by the British, were not chastened by the pecking of the peacocks. They went on showing their arrogance towards those Indians who wore only Hindu clothes. This in its turn made the common people hate English clothing all the more.

Another question arises at this point, and on the face of it the question is an unexpected and at the same time a challenging one. If the present rulers of India will not put on European clothing on account of their political associations or will do so only after degrading them by way of revenge—what that degradation is will be explained later—how does it happen that they have not gone back to their own clothes, Hindu clothes, but have adopted instead the costume of a previous set of foreign
rulers even more hated than the British, namely, the Muslims?

The question has undoubted force, for the Hindu is a good hater of all things un-Hindu and there is nothing else un-Hindu which he has hated more intensely than the Muslim and his way of life. The Islamic State of Pakistan knows well enough how keen the edge of that hatred is. Yet alongside of it we saw the spectacle of good and true Hindus holding high positions in the present Government of India, for example, Babu Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the Republic of India, who formerly wore nothing except the dhoti, going about in Muslim clothes. How was it made possible?

The immediate answer is that in certain parts of India, notably the Punjab and Hindustan, the Hindus were so crushed by the Muslim conquest that they could just save their religion and social organization, but could not save their culture and its external features. Clothing, language, script were some of the things over which they had to accept compromises. So many Hindus took to wearing the Muslim costume, speaking Urdu, and writing in the Arabic script, and by doing all these things they gradually lost the sense, not only of the uncleanliness of these things from the Hindu point of view, but even of the unnaturalness. This was particularly true of the Punjab. I have seen Hindus belonging to such a strict sect as the Arya Samaj reading the Gita in an Urdu translation. It should also be recalled that the Rajputs, Marathas, and Jats, all of whom rose in revolt against Muslim rule, did not mind wearing the Muslim costume, even though they called the Muslim a Yavan in contempt.

Nevertheless, even this partial naturalisation would not have safeguarded the Muslim costume in India after independence, which India is Hindu Indja. All over the Gangetic plain today there is a strong movement for the rejection of the borrowings from Islam, even the most assimilated. It is most marked in the field of language. Till independence the broadcasting organization of the Government of India always called 'news' khabar in its Hindi bulletins, it immediately adopted samachar, a Sanskrit word. Almost all the words of Arabic and Persian origin which had been completely absorbed in Hindi are being replaced now by words of Sanskrit origin which the common people of Hindustan do not understand. Therefore it is not only
the continuation of the Muslim costume but also its deliberate adoption as the official dress in India, as as result of which even Bengalis and South Indians who never before put on this dress have begun to sport it, which calls for an explanation.

This is not difficult to find. The sanction behind the Muslim costume was Jawaharlal Nehru himself. If this sounds odd at first, I am afraid it will seem only too obvious and devoid of originality when I have recalled the sartorial history of the Nehru family and of Nehru. The Nehrus came originally from Kashmir, and down to recent times maintained their Kashmiri affiliations. Now, in Kashmir the Hindus, including even the Brahmins, adopted the Muslim male costume long ago. Perhaps this adoption was made easy for them by their pre-existing clothes. It seems probable that some Kashmiris, if not all, had taken over the sewn garments of the nomads from Central Asia, which were of the Scythian type, before the coming of the Muslims. Thus as Kashmiris the men of the Nehru family would consider the Muslim male costume as their natural dress.

At the next stage they migrated to Delhi and took up employment in the Mogul administration, which estranged them still further from any Hindu traits they might have had and strengthened their Muslim affiliations. That was not disturbed when the family moved on to Allahabad. On the contrary, the cultural situation in the U.P. was such as to reinforce the old Islamic connexions. In striking contrast with Bengal where the social and cultural élite was constituted by high-caste Hindus, and the Muslims were mostly peasants and thus boors, in upper India it was the Muslim who were dominant both socially and culturally. In fact, they were the élite in Hindustan, and the Hindus were either peasants or only shop-keepers. Therefore all urban Hindus who wished to lead a sophisticated life were drawn into Muslim circles. The Nehrus also were, and the result was that their daily life, so far as it was not modified by Western influences, remained Islamic in much of its form and spirit. For example, they spoke Urdu and hardly knew Hindi. Muslim clothing for them was thus only the second aspect of a comprehensive Islamization.

But Pandit Motilal, Jawaharlal's father, was a lawyer of eminence, and he had all the Westernizing inclinations of the
new Indian professional class. He cultivated British officials, and was on terms of friendship even with some of the provincial governors. So European clothes became an alternative costume for him. Actually, he acquired the reputation of being a very fashionable and well-dressed person, and even a legend grew up that he sent his linen to be laundered in Paris.

His only son Jawaharlal was brought up in the Western manner, and he wore European clothing as a boy. This continued when he went to Harrow and afterwards to Cambridge. Owing to this upbringing European clothes became so natural to him that even after he himself had wholly given up wearing them in his country he did not mind his daughter’s adoption of the frock and the hat when she was in England for her education. Indian women, even the most Westernized, never did it formerly. Thus, if the Nehrus had remained in private and professional life, they would have been shared sartorially by the Muslim and the European world. But it so happened that the nationalist movement sent its call to them and they joined it around 1919. This made them write *incipit vita nova* in respect of clothes.

But in this the father and the son took different though parallel lines. Pandit Motilal did not identify himself wholly with the Gandhian movement and at one stage he even broke with it to found and lead a new party of parliamentary opposition. Accordingly, he could also maintain some sort of independence in clothing. Thus it happened that though he gave up his well-tailored wardrobe of suits he went back only to his ancestral costume, that is to say, the Muslim dress consisting of the shawl and pajama. But his son Jawahar had to undergo a more radical transformation. He became a popular nationalist leader, and a follower and disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, indeed the Beloved Disciple. That left him no choice in regard to dress, for the law of correlation between clothes and the nationalist movement in India imposed the dhoti as a matter of course, and he did adopt it. From 1919 to the time he became the Prime Minister of independent India he appeared in public, as a rule, only in the Hindu dhoti. In the thirties I saw him from time to time, and I never found him in anything else.

The ways of the Hindus were so distasteful to Nehru that

* 'Here beginneth new life.'—Dante—*Viti Nuova.*
he could have felt no natural attraction for the dhoti, just as he
could not also subscribe to the political and economic doctrines
of Mahatma Gandhi. Still he never wavered in his loyalty to
his leader in every thing, including clothes, though he resisted
the loin-cloth. This was not due to opportunism. He sincerely
believed that the Indian nationalist movement could not do with-
out Mahatma Gandhi, and he was prepared to make any sacri-
ifice personally—of convictions and tastes—for the sake of the
Cause.

But it would have been extremely unreasonable for others
to expect that after independence was achieved, he would con-
tinue to hold Gandhian political and economic views or wear the
dhoti, in which he did not feel natural nor comfortable. So he
cast off both the ideology and the clothes. Mahatma Gandhi
appears to have noticed the rejection of his doctrines, but not
of the dress. He mildly deplored the abandonment of the posi-
tive part of his economic teaching. His death soon after in-
dependence removed even such hesitations and constraints as
might have lingered in Nehru’s mind. He could be himself in-
ternally and externally. Externally, he appeared in the sherwani
and pajama.

To sum up, in the evolution of his personality Jawaharlal
Nehru could be compared to a choice rose grafted on a natural
stock. The Western scion which was budded on his own Kash-
miri Hindu stock, as is well known, flowered in a profuse and
varied bloom, but since it could not be allowed to blossom in
clothing, it was the stock which sent up its rank shoot. The
secondary Hindu scion was grafted too late and too artificially
to survive. It lived on as long as it was kept laboriously alive,
and withered the moment its political usefulness was gone.

Nehru’s reversion to his ancestral clothing was bound to
have its impact on the sartorial outlook of his political colleagues
and administrative helpers, because it was geared to the shaft
of his overwhelming political power. It is a commonplace of
human behaviour that the good opinion of a man in power can
be secured more easily by copying his external habits than by any
amount of agreement with his policies and principles. There-
fore the politicians who wanted to get on by making a show of
their loyalty to Nehru also got quickly into Muslim clothes, even
when they had no natural liking for them. Even so, wherever and with whomsoever his influence was not absolutely decisive, Hindu clothes were put on. And it can be seen today that where it is risky to alienate Hindu opinion the Indian politicians still wear the dhoti or follow the Hindu manner. Of this, Nehru's daughter, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, furnished a most striking instance after her installation as the Prime Minister of India. Formerly, she was always seen with her head bare, although she wore the sari. It would have been unreasonable to cover her head, for she had her hair done at the best hair-dressers of Paris even after widowhood. But the assumption of the Prime Ministership of the Hindus has made her put the end of her sari on the head, and since then she has been seen, as a rule, with this Hindu veil—called ghomta in Bengali and gunghat in Hindi. Noblesse oblige.
Chapter 2

DECLINE AND FALL OF CLOTHING

The discrimination against the Hindu costume by the present rulers of India raises yet another question, the most fundamental in connexion with clothing, but puzzling in the form which it has taken in this country since the natives took over from the British. It bears on the most important subjective factor in clothing, its beauty, which is no less important than its cultural associations.

Now, whenever men and women show pride in their own apparel and air contempt for those of others they do so above all in the name of beauty and magnificence. The new Indian ruling class is snobbish in the interest of the meanest conceivable ugliness. There are differences between the Indian politicians and the Indian officials over many things, but they are allies in a new war, which is a war of every form of ugliness on every form of beauty. It is the fusion of an exceptional ugliness with an exceptional arrogance which poses the final question about clothes in contemporary India.

There will be, of course, an immediate protest from those who wear these clothes. But that need not be taken seriously. Whoever wears any set of clothes knowing and admitting it to be ugly? Decline of taste always precedes the decline of every form of art. Among those who are outside the movement of decadence in present-day India there will be agreement that there are few gatherings of men who are more shabby-looking than a group of Indian politicians. If nature has been ungenerous to them, they themselves have been even more so, for they might as well have remained satisfied with the plainness they were born with instead of making it worse by their deliberate choice of a set of hideous political weeds. And the high officials are lagging behind them only by half a length. In one sense they create a more painful impression of ugliness, for the politicians seem to generate shabbiness spontaneously, whereas that of the officials is laboured and ponderous.

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Anyhow, between them these two classes have a remarkable achievement to their credit—the degradation of every kind of costume seen through the ages in India, Hindu, Muslim, European, each of which was beautiful in its own way. So universal and to all appearance so irresistible is the shabbiness that if I wanted to be a satirist in the manner of Pope I would have written, not only a *Dunciad*, but also a *Dowdyad*:

*Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;*  
*And Universal Darkness buries All.*

The situation which has been developing in India since independence with an accelerated momentum of squalor in regard to clothing is much more untidy than what is inevitable in the mere heterogeneity of the clothes. The worst that any observer of clothing in India would have thought was that our clothing was no more eclectic than what a Gothic cathedral would be if it were furnished with a Doric porch, an onion dome, and a half-timbered cottage by way of lady chapel. But quaint and even grotesque as our old synthesis in clothing was, it held together and it involved effort, complexity, and expense. What is seen today is an expanse of ugliness in which a casual and debased Westernization is being added to the degeneration of the different types of indigenous clothing.

Perhaps the best and most interesting illustration of this combination is provided by the modern bridegroom and the wedding procession in northern India. The groom goes to the bride’s house on horseback, and the animal is harnessed in the ancient style, not in that of a cavalry horse or a hunter, nor even that of the steed on which young Lochinvar galloped away with fair Ellen. The horse has a gilt and ornamented saddle, reins, breast-band, breeching, and an elaborate crupper, as seen in the reliefs of Amaravati in India or at Naqsh-i-Rustum in Persia. It seems as if Shapur I was going out to give battle to and defeat the Emperor Valerian.

The bridegroom has a bright scarf or turban on his head, and his face is covered with strings of jasmine hanging from a band passed round the head. If he is a Sikh he carries a curved scimitar under his arm. His small nephew sits behind him on the croup, tightly clasping his waist with his arms. The father stands by or walks along, his head in a pink turban,
The band marches in front. The brasses blare out popular film tunes, with the bagpipes playing strathspeys, reels, and even pibrochs. Behind them come the male relatives and friends of the bridegroom, dancing along in couples. Each holds two sticks in two hands and strikes them against those of his partner, in the way of a mock fight, producing a sound like that of castanets. Shot-guns go off from time to time: bang! bang! bang! All this is in the good old tradition of marriage by capture, but without the Chauhans, Rathors, and Shishodias, or the Graemes, Forsters, Fenwicks, and Musgravess to give it a real taste of battle. There are, unfortunately, only fat-paunched Punjabi banias and their fat-bottomed young men.

But the modern note, the note of the Five Year Plans of India, is struck by the dress of the men, including that of the groom. They are all in the European costume, which is just a shirt and trousers in summer and a two-piece suit in winter.

The sheer ugliness in what was the most glorious day for magnificence of clothes and elegance of appearance is appalling. Whenever I see it my teeth begin to gnash unconsciously. But this downward trend connected with all kinds of dress is recent. I have observed it with astonishment in Delhi since we became independent politically. The capital was notoriously snobbish in regard to clothes before that. When I was coming to it from Calcutta in 1942 to take up a post in the broadcasting organization of the Government of India, a leading tailor of that city looked at my Bengali costume and said that I must change my style of dress if I wanted to be respected in Delhi. 'You cannot be simple there as in Calcutta,' he explained, and then added the pithy epigram: 'The better you suit, the greater your izzat.'

After coming to Delhi I soon discovered how right he was. When even strangers saw me in my new clothes in the streets they cried, 'Salam, Sahib!' If I had been seen in my old clothes they would not have answered a question in a civil manner. I also saw that my Department also had the same code, and if I rapidly made a position for myself there it was not due to my capacity I showed in my work, but only to my clothes, which were all made by the leading English tailors of New Delhi. When I appeared with a new tie or shirt my colleagues would come running up to me, and ask where I had got it. Once when I
was in a very smart tropical suit in the corridor of the Secretariat, strangers came up and felt the material all over.

But nowadays people are amused when they see me in the same clothes, though they are no longer new and smart. But even the residue of the old smartness tickles them to laughing. In the streets urchins who do not notice a man who is looking like a ringed king cobra in his striped beach-shirt, stare at me and shout from behind: 'Johnnie Walker, Passing Show, Charlie Chaplin!' Notice that all their verbal symbolism is derived either from drink, or smoke, or the film. Under this good-humoured coercion from the democratic sansculottes I am gradually toeing the line. I have given up my trilby in the cold season and sola topee in the hot, and have taken to the bush-shirt in summer. There is no doubt that I shall soon join the great unwashed.

I have indicated the general trend of the ugliness, and shall now consider the degradation of each of the major families of clothing—the Hindu, the Muslim, and the European. Let me begin with the first.

Since the imposition of handspun and handwoven clothing by Mahatma Gandhi as a means of spiritualizing the activities of the Hindu politicians and nationalists if not their nature, the clothing for men has been sliding down a ramp towards the gutters. There is, however, no reason whatever why it should be so. Handmade textiles can be very beautiful, but when so in these days they are very expensive, and that alone would rule out the wearing of them by the Hindu politicians. We must not forget that the old Benares sari was handwoven in the looms in that city with yarn which came mostly from Lyons.

The rougher homespun materials of these days, whether they are silk or woollen, are also very beautiful in a different way. Due to this difference they are suited to certain activities and occasions, not to all. A European friend of mine once took a piece of Indian handspun and handwoven silk to Sulk. one of the leading chemisier of Paris. They were in ecstasy over it. But they no more thought of making a shirt for the tenue de ville with it, than they would have dreamt of making a tenue de la soirée with Harris tweed.

The enforcement of homespun in its coarsest and cheapest form has deprived the Hindu costume of its characteristic beauty,
semi-nudity, achieved through flowing lines, graceful draping, and lightness. In stark contrast, a sharp and cutting angularity or an unrelieved rotundity marks the Hindu politician who observes the dress regulations of the Congress Party.

One should have thought that this general degradation was enough. But it has not been so. To the Hindu costume has been added two of the ugliest imaginable adjuncts from non-Hindu families of clothing, which add to the unattractiveness of the political costume. These are the so-called Gandhi cap and the so-called Jawahar waistcoat. This nomenclature is deeply significant. It shows that not even the most unaffected simplicity of one modern Indian and not even the most sincere love of beauty in another, have been able to prevent them from standing godfather to ugliness.

To me it seems monstrous that the hideous cap should have been allowed to supplant one of the most beautiful articles of Hindu clothing, the turban. The cap is an eroded form of the Muslim fur cap. The Muslims of India found that fur could not be worn with comfort on the plains, and therefore they converted the fur cap into a velvet or fine cotton cap, with embroidered designs. In this form it was worn not only by the Muslims but also by the Hindus of the Gangetic plain. I still remember the scandal this caused to my mother. She saw it at Gaya in Bihar, when in my boyhood we were there, and she objected to some men in this cap coming into the room she was occupying, taking them to be Muslims, for in Bengal only the Muslim peasant wore this cap—the Muslim upper classes wore the Turkish fez. My father was very amused and explained to her that in upper India the Hindus, too, wore this kind of cap. In fact, the offending men were the Brahmin priests who were looking after us. When the miserly Congress Party had to prescribe a head-dress for its members it naturally hit upon the cap as the prototype which could be most easily degraded and cheapened. I was glad to learn that when Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Jaipur the Maharaja forbade the wearing of this cap at the receptions and insisted on the Rajput turban, which, of course, is beautiful.

The so-called Jawahar waistcoat is also an adaptation of a Muslim garment, which is worn from the Balkans to Afghanistan,
In its proper form it is made of good material and is embellished with beautiful designs in gold or coloured thread. The Greek Evzones wore one form of it, and as a boy I used to admire this waistcoat in green or red velvet on the strapping Pathans and Afghans in Calcutta. For winter use in Afghanistan it was made of skin with fur, and then it was known as the Poshtin. But to think what it has become!

I have now to speak of the abominable phenomenon of the degradation of the Muslim male costume in contemporary India. Regrettably as are the transformations of Hindu clothes, nothing can approach the political and official version of the Muslim costume for pure ugliness, which seems to be a fresh proof of the saying that the corruption of the best is always the worst corruption. Muslim clothes were pre-eminent in every feature which makes for beauty in raiment—fine quality of the materials, elegance and comfort in the making, adaptation to the physique and life of the wearers. On all these scores the new Hindu ruling class of India has utterly degraded them, though it is in them that they display their egregious snobbery towards Hindu clothing.

In wearing the Muslim sherwani and pajama the Hindu politicians and officials have coarsened the material, hardened the lines, and done away with the colours of the originals. Furthermore, even when, following the British imperial tradition, they have continued the use of broadcloth for the sherwani, they have shown no perception of the natural correlation that exists between a material and a garment wherever clothes are made artistically.

But their worst offence is to have forgotten that all costumes have to suit the figure of the wearer. When I first came to Delhi I knew very little about European clothes, and so in my innocence I asked my English tailor to make a double-breasted suit for me. He at once replied with a quiet gesture of deprecation: 'I would rather not. Of course, we cannot do much, but we should like, so far as anything can be done at all, to add half-an-inch or so to the stature of a man.' (Mine, incidentally, is 5ft 3in.) Though a modern Hindu I at least had the good sense to admit that he had made a point. The Hindu politicians and officials would have overruled him with a superior smirk.
Decline and Fall of Clothing

That is why they have been able to adopt the churidar pajama. The Muslim costume is, essentially, a costume for riders and warriors. It just does not sit on the two types of figure the Hindu politicians have—the scraggy and puny, and the bloated and obese. Especially, the churidar pajama looks very unattractive when worn by them, for most elderly north Indians have bow legs, besides having an ample, too ample middle. The tight pajama horribly exaggerates the bow-leggedness, and the sherwani the obesity.

The aesthetic ugliness passes into the moral order when the same costume is seen on the senior officials. These men, so long as British rule lasted, did not as a rule speak with ordinary politeness with a fellow-Indian if he was not in immaculate English clothes. Most of them, particularly the men belonging to the old I.C.S., were very class-conscious. The I.C.S. men still regard themselves as a bureaucratic aristocracy within the privilege class of all the bureaucrats. That is why today, when all the British titles, decorations and honours are forbidden, they have been able to extort from the nationalist politicians afflicted with the inferiority complex the right to put the letters I.C.S. on their nameplates and stationery. But that has not made them exhibit any courage of clothing.

The sherwani-and-pajama has been prescribed as the formal costume for Indian diplomats, one fails to understand why. Anything more anachronistic and anomalous cannot be conceived. Our ambassadors are not Aghas accredited to Christian courts. I once saw a picture of a reception in the Palais d’Elysée, in which the Indian ambassador stood out in painful isolation and with a conspicuousness in outright bad taste among others in the normal diplomatic dress. It seems a strange paradox to me that the present ruling class of our country who are imitative of the West in everything else, should have stood out for originality and Orientalism in costume, in respect of which originality is least wanted.

It creates an even more unpleasant impression on me when I see this costume worn by young third secretaries and attachés, who have almost all of them had an Oxford and Cambridge education. I know some of them, and I have found them to be intelligent and attractive young men, so I should not like them
to be opportunists who for the sake of their career would wear clothes which were not natural to them.

But this impression is momentary. I soon hit upon an explanation for this unnatural choice which gives their opportunism, such as it is, a justification. It occurs to me that over this they might be actuated by an honourable duplicity. They might be affecting the Turquerie for the sake of the daughter of the Bureaucrat-Gentilhomme and humming ‘Dara dara, bastonnara, bastonnara’ all the time.

Coming last of all to the degradation of European clothing in present-day India, I have to say that this was inevitable. There are ineluctable geographical, social and psychological factors which stand in the way of any effective adoption of European clothing by the Indian people. The climate and weather of the country are hostile to it, and no less hostile is the inertia created by both, which imposes a slipshod manner of living and encourages the habit of doing things rather more or less, as Kipling said.

Besides, European clothes involve expense, an unqualified evil, almost a major sin in India. I used to say in the late 'thirties that I could be respectable in the Bengali costume at a capital expenditure of about Rs. 25, but to attain the same degree of respectability in English clothes I should have to spend Rs. 300, or twelve times more. This was only for summer clothing, winter clothing would have cost much more. So I never wore English clothes, knowing that I could not afford them. But others did, without being willing to spend, and the result was shabbiness.

This did not matter to them, because the impulse to wear the clothes came, not from taste, but from snobbery, and it is easy to indulge this, because it costs nothing in India and can be kept sustained on pure arrogance without any material buttress. This motivation has acquired infinitely greater force in the epoch after independence than what it had before. So what we find in the wholesale imitation of British ways which characterizes the Indian ruling class today is a strange paradox—pride of possession without possession in any real sense.

It is this snobbery which is responsible for an immense extension of the habit of wearing clothes of the European type in the last twenty years or so, in spite of the fact that qualitatively
and ideologically there has been a retrogression and reaction. It is not simply that more people are adopting and wearing these clothes than ever before, the trend is most noticeable precisely among those in India who till recently wore nothing but the dhoti, and are still unshakably conservative in their social and cultural outlook. These new wearers of the European costume belong to the trading or Bania castes, especially the Marwaris. They have now begun even to send their children to the schools run by the Christian missionaries, and in order to secure admission to them are quite ready to offer large sums of money as gifts to these institutions.

This curious backwash is easily explained. These classes, whose main and almost the only interest in life is money, find that political power, and more especially administrative power, are concentrated in the hands of the land-and-moneyless Anglicized upper middle class, who control all the sources of worldly advantage. This class does not respect and oblige persons who do not exhibit a certain degree of Westernization in externals, and therefore in order to deal with it on terms of equality the men of money have had to modify their conservatism, at least up to the point to which it is considered essential by the new ruling order. Perhaps some of the Banias also nurse the ambition of grafting their cadets on the governing stock, which would make the liaison between the two orders intimate.

But they can no longer overhaul the time-lag in their Westernization in order to join the Anglicized upper middle class at the latter’s stage of Westernization. They can no more skip the intermediate stages than a butterfly can become itself without passing through the preliminary stages of larva, caterpillar and pupa. So the Banias are recapitulating the entire process by which the Anglicized upper middle class became what it is now.

To be precise, they must first acquire some of the things of the West, then develop the arrogance that goes with Westernization, next drop the things, and last of all, retain only the snobbery. But perhaps by the time they have completed the process, even the arrogance of Westernization will have run down the gutters of Hindu society, and so the Bania’s chance is belated. Even this they are getting only because they are in private life. No one in public life, for example, a politician dependent on the votes
of the electorate or an official dependent on the good opinion of
the politician, has this freedom. They cannot afford to play with
things Western, although Western words are still live and powerful.

But though snobbery can keep something going, that can
only be, as Sir Thomas Brown put it, a fallacy in duration.
No genuine continuance can come out of it. So European gar-
ments in contemporary India are losing one by one their finer
points and complex adjuncts. In this respect clothes resemble
languages, which lose their inflexions whenever one impinges
on another. So, the shirt, to take the most obvious instance,
no longer looks like the European shirt, and not only does it
differ in appearance from its original, it also gives a different
feel when worn. Some tend to strangle the neck, some to pinch
the thorax, and all slip out of the trousers in the most discon-
ccerting manner if one gets up and sits down again quickly.
Since the English chemisier wound up their business in New
Delhi the wearing of a shirt has ceased to be a pleasure for me.

Careless maintenance is added to the loss of correctness
in details. In fact, maintenance hardly exists. This can be best
illustrated in regard to trousers. In my young days most In-
dians who wore the English suit had also trouser-presses. Such
meticulousness is not to be dreamt of now. Even at formal par-
ties I see high officials in such trousers as would justify the ety-
morelogical meaning of the word as a ‘bundle’. Over and above,
when made for the less wealthy they have all sorts of unexpected
novelties, and seem to be made, so far as the motive of adorn-
ment is concerned, for the express purpose of proving that men
in northern India can have as shapely behinds as women.

To mention two more items. After independence the tie
had almost been completely done away with. But the eruption
of the American models, with landscapes and shrubberies print-
ed on them has largely restored their vogue. The collar is the
Cinderella of the group. It is never properly made.

Besides, the different articles of European clothes have be-
come more mixed than ever before. It is a common sight in
India to see men, even those who have learnt the catchword,
‘Don’t mix your wines’, wearing coats and waistcoats in pin-
stripe suiting with slacks. Lawyers go to the courts in the upper
half of the morning dress, and the lower half of flannels. A
friend of mine who was at Cambridge for years came with a
DEcline AND FALL OF CLOTHING

shawl on this combination. The sola hat protects the head of a man in shervani or dhoti.

There remains to describe the transformation of one other European garment to complete the story of the downfall. It is the coat. At a hint from Jawaharlal Nehru, about which something will be said later, the senior officials of the Government of India, who as a class are notoriously opposed to all kinds of change, at once turned revolutionary. They dropped the English type of coat and took to a new type of coat which had its neck buttoned up. No high official is seen any more in an open-neck coat with lapels.

The tailors of New Delhi saw their opportunity and promptly seized it. Soon after the hint from Nehru, one of them announced the following offer in a newspaper advertisement: 'Get your open collar coats converted into close neck at specially reduced prices.' I am sure the tailors did good business. So did the officials in another way. They carried out their revolution economically, and acquired a new wardrobe without casting off the old.

But I cannot say that the result has been happy. The buttoned-up coat had very mixed associations in British India. In the first place, it was worn by the butlers of the English homes and clubs, and therefore nowadays when a high functionary enters the lounge of the Gymkhana Club in New Delhi, to name one important official centre, it becomes a nice point to decide whether he is a butler or a Secretary, that is to say, an official of the rank of a Permanent Under-Secretary in England.

On the other hand, the coat was also sported by the Maharajas, or the ruling princes of India, in comparison with whom the officials in the same garments do not show to advantage. The reason is that the Govt. makes one kind of impression on square shoulders and quite another on round ones. It is not realized that the riding and shooting Maharajas with straight backs could do justice to any clothes, while the stooping officials could do that to hardly any.

Another complication was added by the coat in the days following its introduction, which has now more or less disappeared through political reasons. Those were the days when India and China had sworn to be friends in the name of Buddha. People were full of China, and therefore when an Indian
official entered a hall in his new coat, they could take him for a representative of the People's Republic of China. It was only the absence of the epicanthic fold in the eyelids which showed that he was an Indian and not a Chinese neo-Mandarin.

I once asked a high official whose family used to be enthusiastic collectors of the English suit in the manner of all well-to-do Punjabi families in the British days, why he had changed over to such an ungraceful garment. He smiled, for he could not deny that new coat was ungraceful: he was a man of taste. But he remarked in a minute, 'But at least it saves the bother of a tie'. That made sense, which the plea of the officials themselves that it was meant to bridge the gulf between them and the common people of India did not. The high officials in their new coat look no more like ordinary Indians than the cocker spaniel would look like our pariah dog by only having its drooping ears clipped in the manner of the German Great Dane.
Chapter 3

LE BEAU MONDE

I turn now to feminine clothing and fashions in contemporary India. For this subject the title of the chapter is too inclusive, it should really have been Le Beau Monde Feminin. But in my country the masculine world of costume is an unrelieved expanse of shabbiness without fashion, and the thing which is mode has the same gender as the word has in French. If French grammar had not ruled it out, I would have called the chapter La Belle Monde.

Our women even in this age of ugliness can neither be nor are dowdy. Far from it, they are becoming more and more resplendent from day to day, as I have hinted before. But the question is—Is this display beautiful? If I might be frank in the expression of my opinion, for the most part our women are going to hell, for me an aesthetic hell though for many it is also a moral one, down a path spread with nylon and paved with imitation gold. If their clothes are gaudier, they are also cheaper; and if they themselves are more elaborately adorned, they are also more elaborately inelegant. Amongst us the phrase 'painted Jezebel' has lost its pejorative association.

But I must make it clear that this world of fashion gone astray, is not all one. If Dante's hell had seven circles, the hell to which I have referred has almost as many, and one of them, instead of being horrible, might be as pathetic as that in which Paolo and Francesca suffered for their sin and brooded on it. The wrongness of fashion in India today can be sorted out in a gamut ranging from the sad to the vulgar and degraded.

Before I go on to speak of all that, I have, however, to put on record my admiration for the truly fashionable in India. They are in a class by themselves as a sort of premier grand cru hors classe. I have seen women as elegantly dressed as any that can be conceived of, who can make it a delight for the eye, the head, and the heart to look on them, and who have paid the price, the literal price, of their elegance.
For one thing, these countrywomen of mine are expensively dressed, how expensively those others who go about in our society with an inordinate conceit of clothes are not able even to guess. What is more important, they have also paid the intangible price. They know, more by instinct than perhaps by intellectual analysis, that a woman cannot be elegant externally without success in bringing about an internal transformation, an alchemy which gilds the personality with a gold that only the spirit can detect. So, even if I were brought into their presence blindfolded, I should know, as they spoke to me—by the timbre of their voice, diction, and elocution—what sort of clothes to expect on them when the bandage was taken off. But how few are these women, and how much fewer are they becoming. *Eheu fugaces!*

The great majority live in a different and lower world. They have not heard the saying that true art is concealment of art, or Hazlitt's paraphrase of it that the perfection of art is the destruction of art, and they make the display of such virtuosity as they have acquired worse by being extremely self-conscious, especially in their imitation of the fashions from the West.

But even these women fall into classes. The highest of these is constituted by the elderly women of the upper middle-class, who hold important positions in Indian society. They dress well and expensively, but their clothing and general style of adornment suggest, not complete Westernization of the spirit of adornment, but a rather uneasy compromise between the Hindu traditions described earlier in the book, and the recently introduced Western ones. They have created an unstable equilibrium between the two, and if they do not actually fall between two stools it is only because as soon as they feel unbalanced they kick away the Western stool and plump on the Hindu one.

The next group is made up by younger women, mostly the daughters and daughters-in-law of the just mentioned matrons. They look more naturally Westernized, and one must say that they impress one by their success in being fashionable. They never overload themselves, if anything they are under-loaded. Within the four corners of their system they dress well and with taste. Above all, in their moments of introspection in solitude they do
not shirk the concentrated meditation on the problem of personal appearance which has the same importance for modishness as staff-work has for military operations. If only they were more skilled in conversation they would have been irresistible, but being aware of this shortcoming they try to hide it by never chattering except among themselves and taking special care to avoid those who might be out to size them up, for whom they have an uncanny nose.

But for the moment they have another feather to their cap. It is the admiration of their new foreign friends, of whom they have many. If anything, it is the elderly foreigner who is the most bewitched of all. This is achieved through a subtle antithesis: in the eye of their own men they are piquantly Westernized and therefore like armour-piercing shells; on the other hand, the foreigners regard them as delightfully Eastern, the impact being a repetition of the old story of the Roman in Asia and the Syrian dancing girl:

Copa Surisca caput Graeca redimita mitella,  
cri spum sub crotalo docta movere latus........

of the Appendix Vergiliane. In this dual apparition these girls are comparable to Dr. Radhakrishnan's exposition of Hindu philosophy.

But if the analysis is carried a step further they are seen to split up into two groups which are in no way consubstantial. The first of these is comprised by girls who come from families with a positive cultural complexion, for the great part Hindu, and they are only the bijou editions of their mothers in a mint condition. In our society, too, as Byron put it:

A lady with her daughters or her nieces  
Shines like a guinea and seven-shilling pieces.

The other group looks superficially more revolutionary. It is composed of girls from families with no cultural background, mostly those of the new rich and adventurers. Some of them are by nature coquettes also. But coquette or not they are unpleasantly film-posterish.

* Syrian dancer, her hair tied up in the Greek fillet, Consummate in swaying her throbbing flanks to castanets.
These girls are responsible for most of the aberrations in feminine fashions. They are also the red rag to rouse the ire of the lower middle-class Hindu puritans, who are nevertheless not above pawing them vicariously and hating their own wives for not being as provocative.

But I do not really think that these girls, who are raising so much scandal superficially in Hindu society to be dangerous morally, though they are so aesthetically. Even when they want to live a fast life they cannot. They are not allowed to go the whole hog. Hindu society gives a long rope to heterodoxy of every kind, and most of all to so natural a heterodoxy as sexual sub-promiscuity. But it also makes use of a very strong hempen rope—not to hang them, Oh no! we are non-violent in these matters, only to redeem and reclaim them—this rope never breaks and is run from a gigantic and yet perfectly smooth fishing-reel. So after marriage, most of these girls become Madame Jourdains and not Madame Bovarys.

Anyway, the fashions of the upper classes in India have some art in it, and if one is not too fastidious one may enjoy the exhibition. But the aspect changes distressingly as soon as one turns to the fashions of the lower middle-class women when they want to be mart in imitation of their betters. That smartness is an expression of atrocious bad taste. These poor women drudge all day long, bear children in a never-ending series, and at their worst gad about aimlessly in search of the company of other women of their kind. Their spirit of adornment is wholly traditional, which I have described. But what an expression do they give of that tradition in trying to be modern! It is painful in its meretricity. Yet no one can go up to them and say—"Mataji or Bahinji, Mother or Sister! it is not for you who are so functional in society and fundamentally so virtuous, to look so sexy, so dubious; be fair to yourselves and be simple."

They would neither understand such a remonstrance nor obey it without understanding. As to their menfolk, they have lost every right to remonstrance by their addiction to the cinema and their adoration of the hussies à l'écran. They are without authority, and so we have to endure these caricatures of the Indian film-stars.

It is not necessary to be an aæsthete to see that all this is
absurd and extravagant, as well as inartistic. But the best way
of dealing with this state of affairs is not to read moral lectures
to the women. I must confess that if I were asked to choose be-
tween the lectures and the fashions, both of which are evils to me,
I would choose the latter as the lesser evil. Here an extraordi-
nary paradox confronts us. On the one side are the moralists of
both sexes sending up their lamentations to the skies, and on the
other, the fashionable women or women aspiring to fashion, one
arm akimbo, snapping their fingers at the preachers. The ex tra-
vagance of the denouncers is only inciting their objects to be ex-
travagant in a far more efficient way. But as to the outcome of
the quarrel, it is plain that the sides are equally matched, or
rather they are equally beyond each other's reach, and therefore
the rumpus cannot come to an early end. Nowhere else is the
proverb about the caravan and the dogs more true.

But this is wholly consistent with the general pattern of mod-
earn Hindu behaviour in respect of most things, and more espe-
cially moral issues. Down the ages we have been growing more
and more didactic as we have become weaker and weaker in moral
fibre, and after independence didacticism has become a real bane
in every field, because it is completely divorced from action. Words
no longer have any relation to conduct. This, however, is com-
pletely un-Hindu in the light of the best intellectual traditions of
the Hindus, according to which there is no salvation for man ex-
cept in knowledge. This they called ćīnana Marga—the path of
gnosis.

If we modern Hindus had been capable of following this path
of knowledge in respect of women's fashions we should have seen
at once that they are the products of a cultural and historical situ-
ation in present-day India in which two contrasted forces are pull-
ing in different directions without any one of them being success-
ful in overcoming the other and becoming operative singly. This
covers all fields of culture or even human life as a whole, but in
the situation in regard to clothing the forces are, first, the old
traditions of costume and adornment, both Hindu and Islamic,
which exert their power through their weight and gravitation, and,
next, the new ideas on them from the West which are dynamic
but not the sole driving force.

The women are unconscious of both forces, though perhaps
it may be said by paraphrasing Plato that uncriticized fashions are not worth having. Their minds are uncritical and their practice unanalysed. So they are submitting to both the forces at the same time while intending to be driven by only one—the Western, and in spite of any conscious desire they might have not to allow the traditions to influence them, these established traditions are leading their practice of Western modes into native channels. There is thus an intermingling of two forces with no happy result from their combination. The result is an odd intermixture of styles and motives.

The oddness is made worse by the fact that Western fashions are being taken over from very inferior sources. These women, who yearn so piteously to be fashionable and who are trying to go over from one tradition of adornment to another, have no access to the highest expression of the new tradition they are adopting. They do not and cannot see the real beau monde of the West. They have no contact with the gracious world which greets the eye at a dinner, ball, concert, play, opera, and race course. I do not think that they take their ideas even from high class fashion papers, or from those women of the West who live only for fashion. Affected as these mondaines are, they are so in a recondite way, and it needs a good eye, keen by nature and trained in addition, to take in all their points. They are the précieuses of our times, the modern bluestockings, and in some cases they are even les précieuses ridicules. If our girls had taken their fashions from these sources I certainly would not have objected, though I might not have been pleased.

But they take their fashions from very much inferior sources: the pictures of Miss Worlds and such abominations, and above all from the films, both Western and Indian. Appropriately enough, the word they use for modishness is 'glamour', the low word. But however low the model and the word, to be a glamour girl is considered to be the birthright of every silly chit in a democracy, and certainly their fathers who are proclaiming from the rooftops what a wonderful democracy they are building up in India, have no right to complain if their daughters want to become and actually become 'glamour girls.' But they do complain.

The aberrations are then intelligible, and if tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner, each one of our aesthetically stumbling wo-
men should deserve to be forgiven like the woman caught in adultery. But perhaps I am only mystifying those who do not know what the contemporary women's fashions in India are. In fact, I am afraid I am pronouncing the judgement before presenting the case. So I shall pick out certain of the fashions and explain why I consider them to be mistakes. Here I am concerned, however, with only the aesthetic and emotional aspects of these, from the general human and the special Indian point of view.

Many modern Indian women are cutting off their hair. They are sacrificing their luxuriant tresses, not out of a patriotic motive such as the Carthaginian women had when they gave their long and black Semite woman's hair to be made into bow-string, but from that inescapable servility to the West which one meets with in every sphere of modern Indian life. But this thoughtless imitation of the West is making them look, not like the Western women they want to be, but like half-castes.

Aesthetically and emotionally the sacrifice is more deplorable. Love-making remains sadly incomplete if a riotous abundance and abandon of hair cannot be let down from the chignon to fall on the shoulders and frame the face. In the great days of their civilization the Europeans knew the poetry of hair. Think of the Venus of Botticelli with her golden tresses in his famous Birth of Venus, or read the following question and answer:

Q.—Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all your letters?
A.—Only with those in verse. I never pin up my hair with prose.

Was short hair meant here? What is short hair but prose, drab prose?

I am not likely to be intimidated by the argument that Europe has changed its attitude, and thought better of the question of long or short hair, for I know where the fashion of cutting the hair comes from. Social and cultural decadence is always accompanied by an epicene tendency, physical, psychological, and social. When this tendency is very pronounced people lose even the sense of the physiological difference between the sexes and come to think that homosexuality and heterosexuality are matters of taste. Compared with this obliteration of sexual dimorphism, the cutting of hair is a very small matter.

In addition, I shall draw attention to one aesthetic loss from
this, which is emotional as well. Few writers on love between man and woman seem to have noticed that the curves of a woman’s body in their linear rhythms play a very large part in bringing about falling in love. A man might do so even before he has seen her face, such is the abstract attraction of the lines, though a particular linear form and rhythm might not attract all men. It must not be thought that I am speaking here of the line of the flanks and hips, I have another linear form in mind—that formed by the shape of the head, the neck, and the shoulder on one side only from the crown of the head to the joint of the arm and shoulder. This may create a predisposition to love which even a plain face may not destroy. This line is destroyed by short hair, but not by the long, because that can be put up, leaving the linear rhythm unobscured. I cannot imagine why women should give up such a feature of physical beauty willingly?

An associated mistake is seen in the matter of care of the hair. For black hair, I should think, a glossy finish is the natural one. I have never yet seen a crow which is not glossy, though of all the birds it has the least vanity in respect of appearance and the greatest indifference to display in courtship. Oil, which all Hindu women put so liberally on their hair, helps the natural gloss. Fair hair, on the other hand, is more attractive in a non-lustrous finish. It seems to me that the best coach-builders of the best cars, like Hooper or Indian pay a good deal of attention to the correlation between colour and texture. If I have observed correctly, all black cars have an intense sheen, whereas mauve and yellow ones are matte. But our modern young women are turning silk-floss into horse hair. They do not stop to ask themselves why oil has been so universally used in the East if it is so easily dispensable.

The same irrational prejudice is responsible for the ruin that has overtaken their skin. In India women have always been rubbing themselves with oil or cream to keep it in condition, and this sensible practice gave them faces which seemed to be made of ivory, gold, bronze, or polished sandalwood. But by playing the sedulous ape to European women they have only turned their skin to suède leather. If I may say so, powdering, the nose continually is not a natural practice with them, and its effect is certainly not felicitous: it makes their elegance mouldy,
dampens their anger, and extinguishes the waves of light which otherwise ripple away from their smiles.

Another mistake is to put the red on their lips and cheeks. Red on a dark skin always produces a pinchbeck and even meretricious impression. It makes people say inaudibly, "Ah, minx! You are trying to look what you are not." It was responsible in Calcutta for the brutal practice of rubbing a girl's face with a wet towel to find out whether her apparent complexion was made up or not, when the bridegroom's people came to approve of her. The prejudice is so great that some time ago the walls of old Delhi were covered with posters calling for the abandonment of lipstick.

Apart from this, in Hindu society red on a women's body has very special associations, which differ according to circumstances. For instance, if you are an innocent young girl and put the scarlet of lac round the edges of your feet, people will have ineffably tender feelings for you. If you put a little vermilion in your hair-parting you will be respected as a matron. If, however, your whole forehead is covered with vermilion powder and you are being carried on a bier, men and women will bow reverently to you, for you are then one of the blessed women, going to heaven leaving a husband and sons behind, and without suffering the pain of widowhood. If again you are a living woman and have a good deal of vermilion on your forehead, and you are also carrying a trident, you are one of those holy women called Bhairavis, who in their Tantric devotions are widely believed to practice bizarre sexual rites, and are nevertheless respected and held in awe. You can have red on your body in all these ways. But if you put red on your lips and cheeks in the Western manner you are something unspeakable.

I must explain that these are later associations, those which have been felt during the last few centuries. In ancient India the use of colour seems to have been differently felt. Women then put the red of lac on the lips, and the employment was neither meretricious nor erotic. On the other hand, some poets have made even the use of the red dye on the feet a motif for erotic treatment. But the ancient Indian tradition had obviously died out.

I have to consider next the display of the bust as an expression of fashion. As a young student I had to read a good deal
of Wordsworth, and my earliest aesthetic notions on this point were derived from the following lines:

And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell.

At the next stage I read Stobert's comparison between the Medici Venus and the Aphrodite of Praxiteles: "She is not aware of human spectators; there is no self-conscious prudery, as in the abominable Medici Venus, which was an attempt by a later and baser generation to imitate the same type."

At the last stage I read a good deal of Sanskrit poetry and erotics, and learned what a flamboyant association of a different sort the bust had in our traditions. Yet in one-half of my sensibility I have remained the East Bengal boy who was used to seeing not only peasant women but even the patrician women of his own order in their unconscious exposures, and in the other half the Hellenist by education.

What I see in India today is radically opposed to both the traditions. An egregious mammary and even mammillary ostentation stalks where it ought not. Foreign aid which is trying hard to do something for our under-developed economy without much perceptible result, has already succeeded in far less time and with no effort at all in over-developing the bust. No self-respecting Indian woman today is without her 'bra', and the more assertive of these articles are always driving out the less assertive.

It is only after seeing our women with this new aid to beauty that I have understood why the Prophet Ezekiel made paps the symbol of the apostasy of Jerusalem. In the street in which I live in old Delhi I have often to share the road with herds of buffaloes, trundling, bellowing, and spreading their reek all around. But I have never been so frightened by them as to stampede. This, I am on many occasions seized with an uncontrollable panic to do before the women in the same street. As I see them coming on, I feel like the commander of a submarine who has lost control over his diving gear but sees a destroyer with a magnificently raked bow heading straight to ram him.

After this display of bust comes the exhibition of the posterior as an expression of assertive modishness, and one must say
that it *is* impressive, though whether it is also beautiful may be open to question. If the women are like destroyers when seen from front, in their back-view they are like great liners moving away with throbbing sterns.

In theory, however, being a Hindu, I have no right to complain, for we Hindus have always admired the posterior as one of the most beautiful features of a woman's body. Actually, the Hindus have always been obsessed with it; how much, I shall try to show by producing a piece of interesting verbal evidence. Etymology in Sanskrit grammar is based on the idea that all nouns are derived from verbal roots, and that often leads lexicographers to formulate utter absurdities. But from their specific emotional point of view the derivation they give of the Sanskrit word for the posterior is very appropriate. The word is *ntamva*, and its etymological meaning is given as follows: *Ni=nirantaram* (continuously) *tamvayati=pidayati* (presses on) *iti ntimvra*: i.e., the part is called *ntamva* because it ceaselessly beats on the mind, though occasionally on other things also.

Thus the Hindu idea of a good figure was embodied in a striking metaphor. A woman, they would say, is *nyagrodha-parimandala*, as circumambient as the Banyan or Bo trees. Naturally then, they were pleased further when they saw the women making an effort to increase its apparent size by using accessories. One such aid was a wide girdle, to be put on not at the waist but at the widest part of the hip lower down. Even in my boyhood Hindu women wore a gold or silver chain at that level, and for those who could not afford such expensive hip-expanders Lancashire very considerately manufactured a kind of sari with a third border which fell exactly across the hips at their widest when worn. These were called *pachha-pédé* or 'buttock-striped' saris in home-ly Bengali. The traditional women just adored them, while the re-formed hated them as strongly. Since we were of the reformed school my mother never wore them. But when my father went to buy saris for her the cloth-merchant would ask as a matter of form: "Plain or buttock-striped?" My father with an uneasy glance at the young son by his side and with a quick, deprecatory wave of his hand would say: "Plain, plain."

But the display which I see now is neither traditional nor artistic, and the difference between the old and the new manner
of exhibiting the posterior is easily perceived and explained. In the old the plastic and the linear beauty of the spheroid that the part is, was suggested by making the clothing adhere to the body from the waist to the line of the greatest width and swelling of the hips. Below that the garment hung either straight or in a slightly outward curve to the ankles. That is to say, there was no further vertical side-to-side constriction nor any horizontal re-entrant at the meeting line of the thighs and the hips, with the object of fully revealing the shape of the whole posterior. Secondly, the natural bifurcation of the part, which gives it its bivalve-like appearance, could not be revealed by the clothing. On the contrary, the middle cavity or cleft had to be levelled up by a continuous surface of integument. The exact shape and full beauty of the posterior had thus to be left to the imagination.

But our women seem no longer to have any confidence in the imagination of their menfolk. Therefore they are becoming quite explicit. The hips are now displayed both under the sari and the kamiz in their realistic rodunility down to the very junction with the thighs, and in addition there is a more or less complete indication of the bifurcation or bilateral symmetry. Some women make their dressmakers put a deep seam vertically in their petticoats along the axis of the spine, and wear a thin sari not to allow a bushel to hide that light. This makes the display too anatomical to be pleasing.

But the objection will be raised that in art the part is represented in exactly that way without any suppression of any curvature or rotundity, and yet it is possible to admire that display. As it happens, I have to make use of the argument from sculpture and painting to meet precisely that objection. In the nudes of art the apparent naturalism of the hips is profoundly modified by abstract geometrical modelling. On the one hand, their outlines and volumes are made to conform to abstract linear and plastic rhythms; on the other, they are matched in the relative proportions by the modelling of the waist and back above and the thighs below, which are given the same kind of abstract beauty. The whole back-view of the nude hangs together as a satisfactory composition. This can be checked by looking at the Rokeby Venus of Velasquez in the National Gallery, London, or the Aphrodite of Cyrene in the National Museum, Rome. I do not know what
the Polycleitan canon had to say on this point, but there must have been some abstract formula.

This kind of beauty few living bodies can present, for the simple reason that in most the backs, waists, posteriors, and thighs do not have perfect proportions independently by themselves, and to have them all matched must be rarer still. This is particularly true of India where the manner of life and the diet develop superfluous masses of adipose tissues; some women even tend to become steatopygous. So amongst us both nature and art would call for an obscuration of the realistic shape of the posterior in the interest of fashion if it stands for beauty (which may not be the case), rather than for the display our women seem to be bent upon.

These remarks on the fashions of presenting two of the most intrinsically attractive aspects of the landscape that a woman’s body is, lead me to consider the application of the same method to the whole. The body is now being displayed in a manner never seen before in recent centuries. But it is not being exhibited in the Hindu way, though the Muslim principle of softening too much flesh by delicately flowing clothes has been given up. The women are shy even of going into the Western beach-wear, though the effect they aim at is of that costume. So they are keeping on their full complement of clothing, only tightening it as if it was skin and not artificial integument.

The sari, however, by its very nature resists shrinkage beyond a certain limit. So, to study the display of the body à la mode contemporaine, one must look at the latest kamiz-salwar ensemble of young Punjabi girls. This has been so tightened as to create the impression of the girls being in knitted underwear. Many of the girls are no longer wearing even the tightened salwar, they have taken to the churidar pajama, which is very much like being in trunk hose. Nowadays, the kamiz-churidar ensemble is hardly distinguishable from the fashion of feminine clothing in the West. The world has shrunk.

As almost all these girls are too bust-and-middle-heavy for their age, when they walk in the new kamiz and pajama they look like the adjutant birds which used to scavenge in the big Indian cities in the early days of British rule. Their appearance may be schematically described as an inverted $S$ with a lower-case $o$ above and two lower-case $l$-s below;
To be more naturalistic, I might say that they look like the pictures of the sagittal sections of a woman's body in gynaecological books, without being cut into two halves. This appearance is heightened by the fact that even very young and unmarried Punjabi girls have surprisingly bulging abdomens. The kamiz, which is shaped to it, meets the upper ends of the thighs to make two very pronounced angles on either side, whose harshness is not softened by the coy suggestion of triangularity between them.

This coyness, I most definitely do not like, for its result is the suggestion of a depression only, without any suggestion of the counter-rise in which lies the specific beauty of the region. The ancient Hindus were so enamoured of this beauty that their poets just raved about it, and even their grave treatise-writers laid down the points of excellence for it. As one of them says, in outline the part should be like the leaf of the Pipal (Ficus religiosa) and in surface like a turtle's back. I am sure what is meant here is the soft green turtle, not the hard reticulated tortoise. But the analogy, though concrete, is not felicitous. For lyricism about the feature one should go to the poets who convey in words the quality you get in painting from La Source of Ingres. No inkling of that beauty is to be found in the new fashion in the kamiz-pajama combination of today. It falls between I don't know how many stools.
Chapter 4

A ROOTLESS FASHION

I THINK that the picture of fashion in contemporary India which I have just drawn is full enough. No one can have feelings about it similar to those with which Elizabeth Bennet contemplated the landscape gardening at Pemberley: "A stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste." It is in everything the opposite in the world of our fashions.

This is due to the neglect of the fundamental aesthetic principles behind the practice of modishness. To illustrate the point further I shall now discuss a feature about which I have not said anything so far, but which has become well established and is to be seen among women belonging to a much higher level of culture than that on which those who give the extravagant and tasteless exhibition criticized in the previous chapter stand.

So it comes handy to explain the complex technique of making mistakes in being fashionable which even our most cultured women have developed. The entire activity is unthinking, capricious, bereft of historical consciousness. The anarchy in fashion, as in all our current activities, is to be set down, down to the combination of a little knowledge of the West with virtually no knowledge of India.

The feature I have in mind is the blouse with the open waist, wrongly called choli, which is now worn by all fashionable women in India. Nobody who has been in the big cities can have failed to notice it, and the poor puritans cannot close their eyes without bringing the titillating vestment before their mind's eye.

But for those who have not yet seen it I shall provide a short description. Imagine a blouse made by any Western dress-maker but which, instead of joining up with the skirt at the waist-line, falls short of it by anything from one to six inches, thus leaving
a portion of the stomach and small of the back exposed to public
gaze between two horizontal and parallel lines of covering. This
is the new choli.

The old choli, the real choli, has a history, a cultural affilia-
tion, and a distribution of its own, and I have spoken about it.
I need not repen that information, for here I am concerned with
the non-traditional use of the garment. The modern Indian women
who wear the new choli did not get it through their ethnic or cul-
tural inheritance. Till it came into fashion they were all wear-
ing the Western blouse which went all the way down to the waist-
line to meet the sari and the petticoat. These women are des
nouvelles venues to the fashion, which they themselves prove deci-
sively by being extremely self-conscious about it.

But what is it that has made them take it up? When a gar-
ment is worn in obedience to custom it is not fair, nor is it neces-
sary, to look for a wholly rational explanation, because people
who have come into a country from outside may continue the use
of the costumes of their original habitat in a wholly different and
even unsuitable environment. But our modern women have ad-
opted the open blouse deliberately, and therefore a student of man-
ners has the right to apply the most rigorous intellectual analysis
to their motives.

I shall do so, taking the possible practical motives first. It
cannot be said that the new blouse was adopted for the purpose
of feeding the babies easily. If it were so our unmarried girls
would no more have thought of wearing it than unmarried girls
in the West think of wearing the maternity coat. Besides, I have
never yet seen a Westernized Indian woman feeding her baby be-
fore others even at home, let alone in public places, as the women
of the peasantry, the working classes, and the lower middle-class
always do.

There is also the important fact that those who feed their
babies in public do not stand in need of a short blouse. Our babies
are like fledgelings, they are always gaping and crying for food,
and butting their mother's bosom. So, if our women had to clear
the decks to feed the little creatures, they would have to be almost
always without any clothing on their bust. But the women who
have been formed by tradition do not require that kind of artifi-
cial aid. In the buses I often wonder at the skill and speed with
which women in heavy satin or velvet clothes can whisk these away to put the baby to the breast without the slightest disturbance of their clothing, or injury to propriety.

Coming to the next possibility—Could it not be called for by the necessity for ventilation, which might be thought essential in a hot country? But I do not see that this part of the human body needs more ventilation and airing than the flesher parts above and below. On the contrary, I should think that exposure to the extremely hot or cold winds of north India is bad for the stomach.

Thirdly, it certainly was not introduced for the sake of giving support to the bust, as is indeed the case when it is found on those who have been wearing it in obedience to an unbroken and authentic tradition of costume. But our modernistic women always wear brassières, and so they would be guilty of 'tautology' if they used a blouse for the same purpose.

Now since all the possible utilitarian grounds have been ruled out by a process of elimination, I have to take note of the ethical. Is the piece an aid to modesty? It certainly is among those who keep their bust unclad or partly clad as a matter of habit. But if those who were covering themselves up elaborately beforehand, and even had all coverings superfluously multiplied, suddenly reduce the area of coverage, that cannot be set down to pudicity. On the other hand, it may be regarded as a movement in the opposite direction, if not in the thoughts of the women themselves, at all events in the eyes of the beholders. I am quite sure that the men of modern India, no longer used to the classical nudity of their womenfolk, invariably go on from the surface actually exposed to the unexposed surfaces in the adjacent areas, uncovering and dwelling on them in imagination.

With the ethical consideration also seen to be irrelevant, there remains only the aesthetic motive to consider. It seems that our women have an unconsciously formulated aesthetic theory about it. They are practising an archaism, and doing so in order to appear charmingly Indian in the eye of foreigners. They want to be, if I may coin such an expression, Indianarty. But it is precisely on this score that they are making their worst mistakes, over many other things besides the so-called choli. In their version of it they have given to a traditional garment a form which violates every
aesthetic canon behind the original, as also behind all Hindu art.

Any effective practice of fashion, as I have hinted before, calls for the formulation of some basic concepts, and had our women tried to arrive at them, they would at once have seen that the principle which governed the addition of clothing and ornaments to the representation of the human figure in ancient India was that of the inviolability and integrity of the torso. Nothing could be put on it which might detract from the continuity of outline and surface from the shoulder to the hips. Moreover, the unity of the torso was grasped by the ancient Indian eye as a unit bounded by flowing and unbroken lines. Therefore even the natural reliefs of the body were rendered as far as possible, not as plastic volumes, but as flat surfaces in successive planes and contained within linear boundaries. I feel certain that this representational manner was derived from life.

In this concept of apparel, either for the living body or its representation, the choli had its place, though it seems likely that it did not form part of the original Aryan system, but was added later. Nevertheless, when adopted, it was made to conform to the earlier concept of costume, and therefore it was smaller, tighter, and more shaped to the bust than its modern caricature. Its lower edge was also cut as a double curve, with an apex going up between the breasts like a re-entrant, and in addition it had embroidered or printed roundels, roses, or annulets in appropriate places.

The subtlety of the adaptation did not end there. The curves of the choli at the lower end were not only a complement to the curves of the breasts, but they were also a response—the necessary means of correlating the piece with the traditional manner of wearing the sari. It should be kept in mind that the sari when worn in the old style, as it still is in the Aryavarta or Hindustan, is not fastened at the high Western waist-line, but further down, along the line of the pelvic girdle, with the right and left sides resting on the top of each ilium. At the back this low waist-line can be straight, but in front it must curve concavely, bearing a mathematical relationship to the navel, expressed in the following equation:

\[
\frac{x^2}{a^2} + \frac{y^2}{b^2} = 1, \text{ etc.}
\]
The nīvi or zona was worn along the same line, giving greater definition, firmness, and prominence to the curve. Thus not only was the unity of the torso left undisturbed, it was even fortified by the addition of a centripetal dynamic attraction between the choli and the sari.

This basic principle, which one should have thought was simple enough to grasp, our miserable Westernized women have wholly disregarded. In fact, their great weakness is their insensitivity to the abstract geometry of clothing and adornment. Another example of this can be given by reverting to the question of the exhibition of the body. In art and life the Hindus have tried to illustrate its solid geometry, but they have confined themselves to the geometry of the sphere and never gone forward to its conic section which seems now to be the fashion. They have also avoided asymmetry, whereas many Hindu women have now begun to wear ornaments on one wrist keeping the other bare, or having only a wrist watch on it in imitation of Western women. There is an even more egregious asymmetry. Many modern Hindu women nowadays part their hair on one side, but not daring to appear without the vermilion mark—the sign of being married with the husband living—they put it in the parting on the side, which makes it look aesthetically unpleasant and absurd. I wonder how they can do these things, for if they had only taken note of the symmetry of the human body they would have seen that there is duplication of every limb in it when it is not dead on the axis.

Coming back to the method of wearing the sari, by putting it on higher and in a straight line, and by making the lower end of the choli parallel to the same line, they have destroyed the unity of their own torso. This mistake is not committed by those who wear the salwar. According to such information as I have, they never fasten the garment at the waist in a straight line, but always in an ellipse. I can explain this difference. In things which are open to the observation of others, especially foreigners, our women become self-conscious and trying to improve invariably go wrong, whereas in matters connected with invisible features they are not ashamed to obey their traditions, which keep them on the straight course like a gyro-pilot.

Thus when one looks at the women who wear the choli and
sari in parallel straight lines, disregarding the law of ellipse, one has an uncomfortable feeling that they will at any moment break in the middle. It is only the obese among them who do not create this apprehension, because they have a convex and continuous magnitude to preserve the unity. The normally shaped person gives me the impression of being a gigantic prawn with its carapaces, and much as I fancy langouste à la bordelaise, I cannot say that femme à la langouste is much to my taste.*

This failure raises yet another question: How can these women, seeking to be more strikingly and prettily Indian, commit such a mistake? The explanation is, however, very easy to give. These women are not honest enough, intellectually and aesthetically, in their Indianness, and what they are out to do is to put a pseudo-Indian veneer on their imitations of the West. But I would add that this dishonesty is more or less innocent, for it is due to ignorance. In a sense it is inherent in our cultural situation.

Our fashionable women saw that their counterparts in the West exposed a part of their body by way of adornment, wanted to do the same thing, and yet felt that it would not do for them to bare the shoulders like the women of the West. That would be too slavish and not piquant enough for their foreign admirers. So they hit upon what they thought would be an Indian way of doing the same thing and invented a déstomacqué to take the place of the décolleté, completely forgetting that the two were not commensurate or interchangeable.

The shoulders are always presentable by themselves, the stomach hardly ever is, especially in India where starch and fat are the main ingredients of food. So what most often the déstomacqué reveals to the expectant aesthete in front is a tier of Swiss rolls, and behind, along the axis of the spine, a lovely dimple, down which one feels an irresistible impulse to drop a lump of ice or a mouse.

Of course, nobody is so wicked as to do this, but the mice of Delhi are themselves self-reliant and enterprising, and they are quite capable of playing such a prank. They are not like their cousins of the church, they live in prosperous bureaucratic homes, and through the influence of that environment have imbibed a

* Since this was written, the fashion of showing the navel has taken on among the female avant-garde.
good deal of self-confidence and spirit of push. They do things
which I am sure no mice have done before, which only proves
the correlation observed in history that revolutions always originate
with people who are going up in the world, and never with those
who are oppressed and downtrodden.

I shall relate an anecdote about what a mouse of New Delhi
did to me. My wife and I were lunching in one of the so-called
prestige quarters of that city at the house of an English friend.
When I got up from the table I felt something creeping within
me, round the seat of my trousers. I thought it might be a scor-
pion or centipede, and felt very alarmed. I stood undecided even
after going to the sitting-room. My wife afterwards told me that
at first she thought that I was playing the usual wag, but that the
look of extreme anxiety on my face convinced her that something
was really the matter.

Just as I was pondering whether I should not move elsewhere
to get rid of the intruder—hickory, dickory, dock, a mouse ran
down the right leg of my trousers, scuttled across the living-room,
and finally disappeared in the box-room, madly whisking its tail.
Everybody shrieked with delight, my host's little daughter most of
all. After that she always called me the "Little Man with the Mouse
Inside Him." I am sure if the mouse had not come out in public
nobody would have believed me.

But the moral of the story is that if New Delhi mice can do
this for such a bag of skin and bone as I am, what might they not
do to our fashionable women, who deliberately, with all their em-
bonpoint, present a breach to them? I should think that storming
parties of them would rush in and gnaw where they ought not.
And without in any way abetting such crimes, those of us who
love beauty would be entitled to one great satisfaction: that bad
taste, which in ordinary course is never beaten by good taste, is
for once having the worst of it with the *ridiculus mus*.

But I must also say that it is the men whom I blame most
for these mistakes. There is no country in the world where the
most elegant fashions for women have been invented by the wo-
men themselves. It is the men who introduce them, because it
is they who enjoy a woman's beauty of appearance and best feel
where the shoe pinches. But in contemporary India the men will
not bear a man's burden. They have neither the knowledge, nor
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the taste, nor above all the courage to dictate fashions to their womenfolk. As to the husbands they are the most craven people of all.

I am sure that India after independence would have been a different country if the officials, to mention only one class of dominant and Westernized men, could go up to a wife or daughter and say like the old Prince Bolkonsky: "You have done up your hair in this way for the visitors, and before the visitors I tell you that in future you are never to dare change your way of dressing without my consent."

But what an unreasonable expectation from men who are arbiters of others' fate only in their offices, and suppliants for their own at home!
Chapter 5

A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

From chaos thou art, to chaos returnest, was never said by anybody of human life. But this is the law of imperial interregnums in India. It should be pointed out, however, that chaos in the proper sense of being the unorganized state of primordial matter before the creation of distinct and orderly forms, is not reached amongst us without passing through disarray, that is, utter overthrow of every kind of order and logic—intellectual, moral, or aesthetic. So, in clothing the inherited and natural jumble has been transforming itself into confusion worse confounded since independence.

The result was not liked by Jawaharlal Nehru. Though he was like Shakespeare’s Jaques, that is, both melancholy and contemplative, he could not, like Jaques, burst in with a joyful cry: “A fool, a fool, a motley fool. O noble fool, a worthy fool: motley’s the only wear.”

For a fool to be in motley clothes is one thing, but for a prig to be so is quite another, and we Hindus are the most perfect prigs that have ever trodden on this earth. I do not say this in any disparaging spirit. I cannot, because I have seen that whenever a Hindu is not a prig he is as likely as not a fop or at best a man of straw. So we are also governed most successfully by prigs, native and foreign. It was not a mere chance coincidence that the greatest and the most aristocratic British Governors-General in India, the men who did most to found and maintain the Empire—Wellesley, Dalhousie, Curzon—were all prigs by English standards. Warren Hastings, too, though not brought up as an aristocrat in spite of his ancient and noble ancestry, was a prig, and there was something Napoleonic in his intellectual awareness of the political problems before him.

However that may be, Nehru was so distressed by the confusion he saw all around him that he actually trenchéd upon his valuable time which was not enough for the momentous affairs he had to handle, to write a long note on dress. The state of affairs
demanded it. As if it was not enough to see the spectacle of confusion in the homes, streets, and bazaars, the motley had made its way into the secretariat and even more exalted places. Young women in the employ of the Government of India came to office as if they were going to give a performance of Bharata Natyam or the Indian classical ballet. The men appeared in anything they liked, in any patchwork, even at the garden parties and receptions of the President of India. Then Nehru felt that he had to do something to effect a diversion.

In his note he set down his opinion as to what the men and women who were employed by his government should wear, and he circulated it in the secretariat. I read a copy of it at the time. There is no doubt that it contained views which were sound, civilized, and rational. He said that everyone should dress appropriately for each occasion, or for each kind of work, and to this end he asked the men to be more careful, and the women more simple. He even referred, if my recollection is correct, to the use of jewellery in office and the length (or rather the shortness) of the sleeves. To the higher grades of officials he gave the advice which he thought they most urgently needed. He told them to give up their old style of dressing, which had continued from the bad days of British rule, and which marked them out as a privileged, denationalized, and out-of-date class, and to adopt such clothes as would take them closer to the people.

The note showed him as the Renaissance man, l'uomo universale that he was, and produced some stir for a few days. It furnished a topic of discussion to the high officials from whom normally even champagne cannot extract bright conversation. But its effect was very temporary and small. It seems even to have been forgotten by everybody but me, who has a very inconvenient memory. The high officials did indeed make a great show of falling in with the wishes of their master, but they knew so little about the common people of India that the only means they could think of to make their clothing more Indian was to adopt the new coat I have described elsewhere.

For the rest, nothing happened. The lower officials ignored it. They were not called upon to do anything, for they were never invited to official functions where their ties and suits would have been noticed as anti-national. They had no need to be demo-
cratic through clothing, for they were already that to the bone. As for the women, only very unreasonable and unintelligent persons could have expected them to take any notice. So, summing up the effect of the note in its totality, one might say that it was written in water. The turbid waters of bad taste and ugliness are rising in ever higher flood.

But why? The answer to this question has to be twofold, one for the women and the other for the men. In the first case it is sensuality, and in the second avarice. Let me consider each aspect in turn.

The relation between women's fashions in contemporary India and sensuality is revealed whenever these are discussed by the governmental and the educational authorities, and they are always discussing them. The fashions have even become a police matter, because they are being connected with a scandal which is growing in all the big Indian cities. This is the molestation of well-dressed young girls by loafing young men. To speak only of Delhi because I am familiar with the state of affairs in this city, the nuisance became so widespread in many quarters, particularly the university area, that special police arrangements had to be made to protect the girls.

Even so a very ugly incident happened in the coffee-house of Delhi University in March, 1960. A student of one of the men's colleges pursued a girl of the most fashionable women's colleges into the university restaurant and, apparently infuriated by her rejection of his attentions, slapped her full in the face before a whole crowd of other young men.

In former ages a hundred swords would have leaped from their scabbards to avenge the insult. But, to continue in Burke's words, the age of chivalry is gone, that of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded. The hefty young men of the Punjab whom American aid is modernizing and the American film softening, sat still looking on helplessly. The correspondent of one of the most important newspapers of Delhi commented: "Their cowardice is explained, though not perhaps justified, by the fact that the person involved and his friends were rumoured to be regularly carrying knives and occasionally using them."

The culprit was eventually rusticated, and the matter raised in the Indian parliament. A member suggested that the Preven-
tive Detention Act, the dread special law which enables the Government to send people to jail without trial, be applied to those who habitually teased girls. The Home Minister of India replied that the Government would be prepared to do so if such habitual offenders could be traced, and assured the House that "plain-clothes policemen and police patrols were keeping a vigilant eye on girls' colleges and institutions where women were employed."

But the nuisance, it may be described even as an evil, remains endemic, and the police of Delhi at all events organize yearly drives against molesters. In the latest of these at the time of writing (spring of 1966) more than a hundred of them were arrested, and the majority were students.

It is in discussing the etiology of this phenomenon that the authorities let a very mangy cat out of the bag. They try to be discreet in language, but what they imply amounts to saying that these molesters are roused to uncontrollable rut by the modern fashions of the girls. For instance, in the course of the debate on the incident (to which I have referred) in the Indian parliament, a member suggested that many of these incidents were caused by the modern fashions in dress and make up.

The educational authorities are almost unanimous about this. A few days after the rustication of the hero of the slapping incident and the discussion in parliament, Dr. V. K. R. V. Rao, a distinguished economist, who was then Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, had to address a meeting, and at it he appealed to the girls not to do anything "which would provoke special attention to the fact that they were girls." He advised them, not indeed to suppress their sex by dressing as boys which certainly would have made matters worse, but to dress "as workaday girls." He asked them to refrain from adorning themselves "glamourously." He also added that the parents were responsible for the new fashion trends among university girls, and when they themselves were ultra-modern it would be difficult for their daughters to be otherwise.

From the point of a moralist all this was very well said. But I feel distressed that Dr. Rao, who asked the girls to camouflage their secondary sexual characters in such delicately euphemistic language, stooped to the low word 'glamour'.

An even more impressive academic denunciation of the new fashions was to follow. For many years what is called an Inter-
university Youth Festival has been held in Delhi under the auspices of the central Government, and all the universities have been sending their contingents of young men and girls to it. But progressively this festival became more and more of a spree for the young people, and its sessions in the late fifties were marked not only by what is regarded in India as indecorousness, but also by extreme rowdiness.

So in 1960 the Vice-Chancellors of the Indian universities, assembled in a conclave, recommended to the Government that the Festival should be discontinued, and one of the reasons which influenced this advice was the dress and behaviour of the girls. One Vice-Chancellor criticized the girls from a particular region, noted for the piquancy of their dress and behaviour, for trying to corrupt the morals of the young men who came from the more innocent provinces. He declared that the girls from this area dressed "provocatively."

This led to an altercation between him and the Vice-chancellors from the criticized region, and it was only after the intervention of the presiding Vice-Chancellor that the quarrel was composed. But the decision of the Vice-Chancellors went against the Festival, and for some years it was suspended. That does not mean, however, that the feud between education and fashion has come to an end. The temptresses remain as tempting as ever, or rather they are becoming more and more so, and to induce them to abandon their role, two universities are going to introduce a system of giving prizes and extra marks to girls who come to schools and colleges dressed simply.

I think the amazed Western reader will again ask a question: What is it that is creating and maintaining such a close connection between fashions in dress and sensuality? I shall try to explain that, but I shall have to take the question in two complementary aspects: first, why do the modern feminine fashions rouse so much sensuality? and, secondly, how is the excited sensuality fed back into the fashions to make them more and more sensual in feeling and motivation?

The explanation of the first aspect was implicit in my account of the two traditions of adornment in India, one for respectable society and the other for the demi-monde. I said in that context that as soon as a woman dressed with the object of being pleasing to a man she tended to pass from the first world
to the second in the opinion of the men. Modern Indian women who are adopting Western fashions, which are oriented overwhelmingly towards the males, are taking that association further step by step.

Our women, in their attempts to be modish in the Western manner, are adopting new fashions and adornment which are not only different from the Hindu and traditional ones in themselves, but are also based on different motivations. But they have no inkling of what they are doing, nor do they have any perception of the character they are acquiring, by reason of their new look, in the eyes of persons whose vision and sensibilities are in the relentless grip of the old traditions. What is more important is that in adopting their new ways they are making precisely those changes in their appearance and selecting those features of Western fashions which are most likely to take them farthest away from the Hindu idea of decorum and respectability in women.

Moreover, in taking over the modishness of the West, they could not remain free from the tendency which is very pronounced in women's fashions all over the Western world, that is, to replace elegance by voluptuousness. This is consistent with the drift always observed in history that as civilizations approach decadence, Amazons, Matrons and even *mondaïnes* properly so-called retreat before odalisques. Our women in their attempts to be fashionable in the Western manner could hardly have escaped from being drawn into this current. Therefore with every new attempt to be smart they ring more false to the beholders in India. The sensitive observer who can resist the sensual appeal, cannot help feeling that every one of these women is doing great injustice to herself, for each coat of Western smartness on her is an additional coat of cocottization, sometimes subtle and subliminal, sometimes thick and obvious, and almost always undeserved.

I wish I could say that the impression would remain equally undeserved in the future, or that even now it is substantially undeserved in the case of Indian women of all classes and social positions. This is not so, and that brings me up against the second part of the change in which the subjective feeling of sensuality is becoming an objective expression. I have already said that any shift in the motivation of dressing in the respectable Hindu world not only influences the men who behold, but also the women who practise, making them move towards the demi-
monde and almost compelling them to be positively, though vicari-
ously, sensual. This tendency has become infinitely powerful
through the new attitude to dress and adornment which the modern
Indian woman is acquiring from the West.

Moreover, it is being reinforced by an extension and amplifi-
cation of that sensuality in the actual relations between man
and woman which has always been present in India and is now
becoming more widespread and assertive. In this process the old
traditions and the new ideas are working together. Both the
Hindus and the Muslims have traditionally taken a very sensual
view of the man-woman relationship, and it has never been cor-
rected even in married life by the addition of any spiritual, moral,
or romantically passionate values. Speaking as a Hindu of the
Hindus, more especially would I say that with them married life
was by custom an entwining of three more or less independent
strands. These were social duty, affection, where present; and
lust, ever-present. Every Hindu wife knew that so far as she was
dependent on the last string she had to reckon with the obliga-
tion that if she fell short of prostitutes she would only drive her
husband to them. So in that aspect of her function as a wife,
she tried to acquire as much of the attractions of her rivals as
she could.

But in order to exert that kind of power she did not stand in
need of clothing, she could be far more effectual wholly unclad.
But though a practical proposition in married life that could not
be applied to other men, and therefore as soon as our women
came in contact with the sexual libertarianism of the West, or
at all events became familiar with the idea of free intermingling
of the sexes they were bound, if they wished to have that kind of
social life, to come under the pressure of an inexorable tradition
and make their dress more and more meretricious. That is what
is happening in actual practice. All European women notice that,
for an equivalent degree of divestment, an Indian woman looks far
more sensual than they.

Some of my readers would be inclined to doubt whether a
submerged historical tradition of behaviour could make those who
are not aware of it conform to it so implicitly. But I am con-
vinced that such traditions are immensely powerful and that they
can impose obedience even when their power is neither perceived
nor admitted. To illustrate this I shall give the example of an
other submerged tradition, this time from an Islamic, and not Hindu, source, which is certainly behind the egregious and absurd exhibition of the posterior described in the previous chapter.

Chronologically, at least in Delhi where I have observed the phenomenon closely, the exhibition by the girls was preceded by a not less aggressive exhibition by the young men through the adoption of their very tight trousers with a small seat. I was puzzled by this until I got a clue for understanding and placing the fashion from a story of the Arabian Nights.

... In it an elderly husband in a fit of temper divorced his young wife with the triple formula. This was irrevocable in Islamic law and, to be admitted again to the marital relationship the man had to go through a complicated procedure: he had, first, to get a man to marry his wife for the fee of one night; next he had to get him to divorce his one-night’s wife; and, last of all, he had to re-marry her himself. So the man in the tale persuaded a stranger to marry his wife and to sign a contract before the Kadi to divorce her the next morning or to pay a compensation of 5,000 gold dinars.

But the man committed the mistake of choosing a very handsome young man, and so both the wife and the temporary husband felt grieved to give up each other after finding the pro tempore marriage extremely agreeable. The wife wanted the young man to flout the contract outright, but he replied that he had no money to compensate the husband. The young woman was very intelligent, and after thinking for a while hit upon an idea. She had heard of the Kadi’s foible and told her lover to go to him and ask for time, waving his hips. She demonstrated the gestures, warning him, however, that he must not make the waving as emphatic as hers was bound naturally to be, but on the contrary to keep it in a low key. This, she added, was sure to make the Kadi’s mouth water and make him give extension after extension until the temporary marriage was made absolute. The advice was followed, and the expected result followed.

Here, I thought, was the key to my puzzle—the ubiquitous exhibition of the posterior by young men and girls alike in Delhi. These are all Punjabis, and the Punjab has always belonged culturally to the Middle-Eastern zone, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, which means, that it has also been in the pederastic zone. So the young men would quite naturally, even when they did not
know the reason for doing so, try to display their behinds as effectively as possible, and the poor girls faced with this unfair competition from the young men, would be compelled to maintain a Two-Power Standard. This shows what tremendous power even quite submerged historical traditions can possess, for I feel sure that all the girls and most of the young men practice the fashion quite innocently.

Consequently, I cannot think that it is impossible for the deep-seated Hindu tradition to influence the fashions in dress and adornment in order to lead them into more or less pre-determined channels. The pre-determination was, of course, in the direction of sensuality, which is asserting itself more and more in actual fact.

This natural drift towards sensuality has been powerfully helped by the cinema in India. Here it is primarily a money-making and even a sordid industry and business, and in order to attract the largest body of customers it has for decades been exploiting all the vicarious sensuality that exists in the country, actually and potentially. Since there is always an accelerated momentum in such exploitation and since the demand and supply have brought into existence a vicious circle of sensual inflation, our cinema has reached a level whose degradation is not approached even by the lowest films from Hollywood.

But in India no public entertainment can be sensual in the manner of the Folies-Bergères, or now of spectacles which would put Folies-Bergères to shame. The Hindu prudery rules that out. Therefore the cinema in India has to use clothing as a veil, and a very diaphanous veil it is. The beauty and dignity of both clothing and adornment have suffered from this, but through their popularity the films have become the most powerful single influence on the fashions of a majority of Indian women who want to be modish. I know that many women and young girls take their dress-makers to see a film, so that they might point out to them the clothes of the particular film-star they wish to imitate. In fact, the films can be said to be the real mannequin parades in India.

Turning now to the masculine side, one discovers an equally powerful force working in favour of ugliness. It is not perhaps so complex, but it is as deep-seated in the Hindu traditions. It is the Hindu love of money, which may be described as the most
powerful of the cacogenic forces working in our life, and this love has a stout and staunch ally in Hindu asceticism.

The politician is the person in whom both these forces of ugliness are most active, but the politician has not only become ugly himself, he has also secured an exalted victim, the Indian official. In the days of British rule the officials as a class were very smart in dress, and many of them were far more smart than their British colleagues. But this had no basis in any innate love of beauty. They wore fine clothes primarily out of a sense of self-interest, to be in the good books of their foreign superiors who had a cult of dress. Secondly, they went for smartness from snobbery. These two motivations kept their natural love of money amounting to miserliness repressed.

But with independence the same motivations have led them to become shabby in clothes. Their masters, the politicians, cultivate shabbiness, and they cannot remain in favour by being smart. On the other hand, their subordinates, and more especially the clerks, try to be as well-dressed as possible, and therefore the higher officials can retain their exclusiveness by being ill-clad. Theirs is an aposematic shabbiness. As a result, the ironing of clothes has virtually disappeared in the higher ranks of officialdom. Besides, it must not also be overlooked that the wives and daughters of the officials need so much money for their own clothes, that there is not much left over for themselves.

To consider the politician next. With him ugliness of dress is not derivative, it is first-hand, imposed on him by the very fact of his being a politician in the present state of politics in India, with avarice and asceticism as its most outstanding features. How these two have influenced clothing needs a somewhat extended analysis. I offer one.

Asceticism, as I shall show presently, is not natural in truly Hindu politics, but it invaded the Indian nationalist movement with the Gandhian leadership. It was a necessary complement of Mahatma Gandhi's greatest achievement, mobilization of the Hindu masses for the struggle against British power. He was aware, not as a political leader deliberately adopting a method, but as the natural and regenerate leader of the Hindu masses, that they could be brought into a political movement only on their terms, and the most basic of these terms was that our nationalism was to be affiliated with the simple and timeless morality
of the common Hindu. Again, in this morality, the renunciation of worldly greatness and even ease was the most easily understood and spontaneously venerated element. Mahatma Gandhi established the connexion.

Clothing was inexorably involved in this gearing of politics. It was looked upon as a means of asserting a man's worldly position as well as a luxury, and therefore there could be no place for it in politics as soon as it was oriented on abnegation. Secondly, there is in Hindu society a very firm correlation between costume and vocation, especially the religious vocation. “No weeds, no alms,” says the Hindu proverb, and the alms are the taxes levied by the spiritual on the worldly. Thus, as soon as the nationalist movement in India assumed a quasi-religious character, it had to adopt its weeds. Mahatma Gandhi tailored them, so to speak, for his followers.

He was nothing if he could not take his principles with the utmost literalness. So it was the easiest thing for him to say: “Though I speak the language of the highest Hindu spirituality and of the most rabid Hindu xenophobia and I have not asceticism with shabbiness of clothes, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” Thus he went straight into loin-cloth to lead a movement which was to establish his disciples finally in the Viceregal Lodge and the other Government houses of India, in which they are having not only to put up with but actually enjoy all kinds of unsaintly bric-à-brac and vanities.

But not all the men who joined him could afford to be so literal. Even if they had mastered pride of life and lust of the eye so far as to remain unmoved by three-quarters nudity, they would have been ridiculed by their own people. Ascetic garbs are looked upon with suspicion when they are on men who do not unambiguously display traits of saintliness, and let it be said in fairness to even Hindu politicians that not all of them would have cared to put a mere mask of holiness. So most of the followers of Mahatma Gandhi devised a more or less effectual compromise. They adopted a costume which, though it covered the body more or less fully, was yet coarse and shabby enough to show that even if they were not saints they were at least spouses of the Lady Poverty. By means of this expedient they succeeded in reconciling three ends which are usually regarded as irre-
concilable in Hindu worldly life: a reputation for unworldliness, as high a standard of living as they could practise or understand, and avoidance of all unnecessary expense, and according to the Hindu view of life all expenses above the compulsive is regarded as unnecessary.

The last gain was in some ways the most outstanding one, because the choice of a political career would have imposed an irksome burden on the Hindu politicians if Indian politics had remained tied to Hindu moorings, and not been cut loose from them by Mahatma Gandhi. If the connexion between politics and expense has been so close in the West as to make many Prime Ministers poor, it is not less so in traditional Hindu thinking. The Brahmanic approach to life sorted out all human activities and attributes into three groups—the saintly and quiet, the kingly and splendid, and the common and squalid. It insisted that each of these categories was binding on the corresponding role in life. So renunciation was not only not expected in the ruling class, it was even considered very inappropriate except in very special circumstances, and magnificence was prescribed both as a necessity and a virtue. Thus the Muslim and British practice of pomp and ceremony in politics was no new thing for a Hindu. It was only a continuation of his sacred tradition in which the attributes or gunas were correlated with the activities or karma.

If, however, this Hindu concept of political life as an expression of power and splendour had been allowed to continue in our time it would have placed all the contemporary Hindu politicians who have emerged from the nationalist movement in a terrible fix, and confronted them with very unpleasant prospects. The reason was that these politicians did not belong to the old Hindu ruling class, which in northern India was virtually destroyed by the Muslims. Almost to a man the new politicians who belonged to the Indian national Congress came from the money-worshipping lower middle-class. Even for political power they would not have been ready to spend or part with money. Mahatma Gandhi saved them from this calamity and solved their dilemma.

This was not, however, the end of the matter, and indeed it could not be. The greatest danger which lurks in extremism of every kind, especially religious and ethical extremism, is that it forces the inevitable compromises and these in their turn brings
in something positively repulsive—hypocrisy. Thus it happens that all over India the practical outcome of the Gandhian movement has been that Hindu avarice is reaping where Hindu asceticism sowed. Now it can do so without any loss of respectability. After independence the cult of holy miserliness has become more firmly established than before.

It is also showing itself in an aggressive form, for which there is, of course, an overriding urge. Miserliness provokes contempt and ridicule if it is seen alongside of spending, and all the Indian politicians who are in office today have incomes which justify people if they expect a certain amount of open-handedness in them. But these expectations, and with them the disgrace of sordidness, can be easily done away with if, in the name of austerity, spending can be made irredeemably vile and universally disreputable. This apparently impossible achievement is a thing for which contemporary Indian politicians as a class deserve full credit.

When all this is kept in mind and pondered over, the cause for surprise would be, not the shabbiness in clothing, but any beauty if that had survived. To recapitulate, asceticism in Indian politics made the first onslaught on clothes, and that attack was very successful. How effective asceticism is against moral evil may be open to question. Perhaps the best that can be said in its favour is that for nine battles lost it wins one. But there can be no doubt about its power against beauty of every description. That power has been effective in injuring the beauty of dress.

Still, the ironic point is that in India this victory of asceticism has been Pyrrhic, it may be regarded even as a defeat, for its ally has proved too strong for it, and it is avarice which is the winner in the last round. The alliance between asceticism and avarice has been in dissolution for a long time, and now the former may be said to have been pushed out altogether. This is rather like the final outcome of the wars of succession among the Moguls. In those wars the less powerful brothers often made common cause against the one who appeared to be strongest at first. But stage by stage they too fell out, until in the last round the most crafty won, disposed of the rest of the brothers even though they had helped him, and took possession of the throne. In the same way in contemporary India avarice began by enlisting an ally in as-
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ceticism and even by submitting to it, but it has ended by sending asceticism into exile and reigning alone Magna est avaritia et praevalebit.
EPILOGUE

I do not wish to end the book on a note of satire. Not that I disapprove of satire. On the contrary, I have an immense respect for the genre, because in my view it is one of the most powerful weapons of civilization militant, and since civilization can never be triumphant, but must always remain militant owing to the continual birth of Calibans in all civilized societies, it cannot dispense with any means of self-defence. The Romans have laid all future generations under a debt of gratitude by inventing this literary form. The Hindus did not have much capacity for moral indignation at any time, and in their contemporary existence they have lost it wholly. Therefore they would not understand the saying: Facit indignatio versus—anger makes poetry. I got the notion from my study of Greek and Roman history. So, for any satire that might be found in the book I offer no apology.

But I cannot forget that in these days satire can be mistaken for mere peevishness. In fact, a good deal of the anger aired in literature in our times is nothing better. The pseudo-satirists of today write from just personal irritation, hardly knowing what they stand for positively. In any case, they do not make that plain to readers. In no circumstances shall I display anger without showing its cause. If I hate anything it is only because I love its opposite with all my heart, and I trust that in the books I have written I have not left anybody in doubt about my loves.

It is love which makes me set down my feelings for the glorious past of our clothing and adornment in the words of the Schubert-Schiller song:

Beautiful world! Where art thou? Come again,
Nature's fairest flowering time!
Oh, only in the fairyland of song
Lives on the impress of your fabled lore;
The countryside mourns its desert state;
No godly faces meet my gaze.
Ah, of all that world so warm with life,
Only a shadow trails behind.
But my love of the vanished Indian world, unlike Schiller's love of the gods of Greece, is not nostalgic. I do not hark back to any past at all, because in an intangible form the beauty is all in the present for me: perhaps I should say that it is a timeless presence, though only in the spirit. It is this sense of its haunting continuance, again, which gives me faith—the strength to believe that it will come back in its tangible forms—why should it not?

It has been written:

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn;
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empire gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

And it will be fulfilled.
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