COMPETING IDENTITIES

THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO WEAR

IN LATE COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Thesis Submitted for the PhD. in Social Anthropology

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Abstract

This thesis examines the importance of dress in India. It focuses less on the material artefact than on the use of clothes in the construction of social and political identity. Scholars often stress the rigidity of the clothing system in India where identity appears neatly prescribed by caste and tradition. Challenging this view, I suggest that clothes are often a highly controversial issue.

In Chapter 1, I define my approach as an examination of the problem of what to wear. This provides a dynamic model with which to address questions of local and national sartorial identity. Each chapter that follows is an exploration of the problem as faced by different people in various circumstances. Chapters 2-4 focus mainly on questions of national identity through a discussion of the clothing controversies of Indian men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These are analysed within the context of British Imperialism and the Indian struggle for Independence. Chapters 5-8 concentrate primarily on contemporary clothing issues concerning women's dress in a Gujarati village. Here the clothing choices of individuals and groups are discussed in relation to such factors as caste, education, urbanisation and ideas of female modesty.

Questions of local and national identity are brought together in Chapter 9 where I examine the development of contemporary "ethnic" fashions in an urban village in Delhi where members of the educated elite are returning to the clothes that rural women are rejecting. Finally I demonstrate how all of the sartorial trends discussed in this thesis are part of a long-term cultural debate concerning Indian identity which is played out at a variety of levels from the village to the nation. By incorporating the attitudes of people both to their own clothes and to the clothes of others, I hope to have created a new dynamic model with which anthropologists can approach the complexity of the relationship between clothing and identity.

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List of Abbreviations

The Following abbreviations are used throughout the text:

SWMN   Selected Works of Motilal Nehru

SWJN   Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

ILM   Indian Ladies Magazine

CWMG   Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi

IOL   India Office Library and Records

Preface

Some reflections on a Photograph
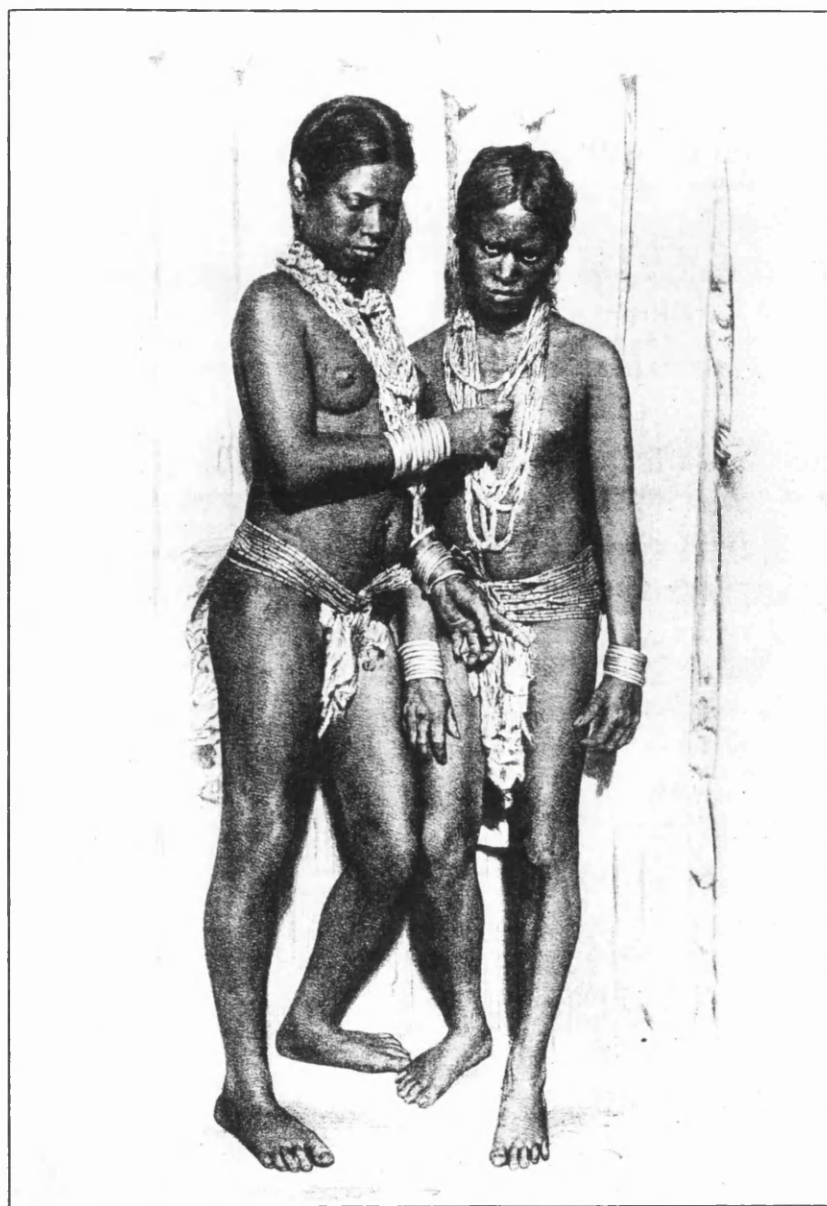
This photograph of two young women, taken by Tosco Peppe, was used by Colonel Dalton to illustrate his **Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal** (1872). Dalton, then Commissioner of Chutia Nagpur, stumbled across these women in the forests of the Juang hills and was much impressed by the scanty nature of their clothes. He recalls:

"The *Juangs* are in habits and customs the most primitive people I have met with or read of.....

"Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves and made themselves aprons. The *Juangs* are not so far advanced; they take young shoots of the Asan (*terminalia tomentosa*) or any tree with long soft leaves, and arranging them so as to form a flat and scale like surface of the required size, the sprigs are simply stuck in the girdle fore and aft and the toilet is complete.

"The beads that form the girdle are small tubes of burnt earthen ware made by the wearers. They also wore a profusion of necklaces of glass beads, and brass ornaments in their ears and on their wrists, and it was not till they saw that I had a considerable stock of such articles to dispose of, that they got over their shyness and ventured to approach us. They made their first appearance at night and danced by torch light; it was a wild weird-like sight.

"At Gonasika I saw them in their more normal state, when they returned from their work in the evening with dishevelled hair, dusty bodies, and disordered attire, ie somewhat withered leaves, and it was truely like a dream of the stone age..." (Dalton 1872:153-156).

The photograph has attracted the attention of a number of ethnologists and historians. Not only was it used to illustrate Dalton's work, but it was also published, along with some of Peppe's other photographs, in Risley's **The People of India** (1908). By this time the image was over thirty years old, but Risley justified his decision to include it partly on the grounds that many of Dalton's lithographs had been destroyed. In the introduction to his book, Risley stated:

"It seemed....to my publishers worthwhile, and to myself as a lover of Chutia Nagpur and its people, a pious duty, to preserve from oblivion these fine pictures, one of which, the study of *Juang* female attire ...is, I believe, absolutely unique." (Risley 1908:vi)

More recently the historical significance of the image has been reconfirmed by its inclusion in the encyclopedic exhibition catalogue, **The Raj** (ed. Bayly 1990). Here Pinney, following Dalton and Risley, reminds us of the circumstances in which the photograph was taken:

"Mr. Peppe had immense difficulty in inducing these wild ,timid creatures to pose before him, and it was not without many a tear that they resigned themselves to the ordeal" (Pinney 1990:282).

But it is not merely the nakedness of the women, nor the disturbing account of their unwilling subjection to Mr Peppe's camera, that accounts for the

photograph's popularity. Another reason is quite simply that it is possibly the only photograph of the *Juang* clothed in this way. Risley's assertion that it is "absolutely unique" is confirmed by a footnote in Dalton's volume:

> "...when the *Juang* girls posed themselves for the photographs.... it was almost their last appearance in leaves" (Dalton 1872: 156 footnote).

It is, of course, significant that the *Juangs'* first ever subjection to the camera coincided closely with their last appearance in their customary attire. But it was not Colonel Dalton, nor the enthusiastic Mr. Peppe with his camera, that finally brought about the demise of *Juang* dress. This was left to a Political Agent of whom we read:

> "Captain Johnstone, with his usual liberty and tact, has clothed two thousand naked savages, and has succeeded in inducing them to wear the garments" (Ravenshaw, preface to Johnstone 1896:xxiv).

Details of this momentous achievement and of the origins of *Juang* clothing are found in another footnote, this time in Risley (1908). The note is revealing and is worth recalling in detail:

> "The origin of *Juang* millinery is obscure. According to one legend the goddess of the Baitarni river caught a party of *Juangs* dancing naked, and ordained for the women, on pain of divine displeasure, the costume shown in the illustration. ....The *Juang* ladies, according to Colonel Dalton, repudiated this scandalous tale and alleged that their attire expressed their genuine conviction that women's dress should be cheap and simple, and that fashions should never change. How much this was worth was seen a year or so later when a sympathetic Political Agent took the prevailing fashion in hand. An open air darbar, fitted out with a tent and a bonfire, was held in the *Juang* hills. One by one the women of the tribe filed into the tent and were robed by a female attendant in Manchester saris provided at the Agent's expense. As they came out they cast their discarded *Swadeshi* (home made) attire into the bonfire. Thus ended a picturesque survival" (Risley 1908: pl.xx, footnote).

Risley's footnote provides my starting point. It is customary when acknowledging one's gratitude to an author, and particularly an author like Risley who was so influenced by craniometry (the science of skull measurements), to make reference to his head rather than his feet! It might therefore seem strange that I should choose to elevate a footnote to a position of such centrality, but I would argue the reverse: that it is strange that such a central issue as dress has been relegated to the downtrodden footnotes of Indian history and anthropology. This is an attempt to restore clothing to its rightful place in anthropological debate.

The photograph of the *Juang* women tells us very little about them, except of course that they were the reluctant victims of colonial administrators, photographers and ethnographers. It tells us even less about the clothes of the people of India, most of whom have far stricter codes of modesty than any European. I have included it, not for its iconic value, but for the debate that surrounds it. For it is in the writings of men like Dalton, Risley, Johnstone and Crooke that we encounter a series of attitudes and pre-suppositions that have permeated, not only colonial discourse, but also anthropological literature and perceptions on the subject of dress.

Let us examine Risley's footnote in detail. Firstly, there is the question of the origins of *Juang* dress. Here we encounter a classic conflict, familiar to all ethnographers: the conflict between outsider and insider explanations. Usually this takes the form of the outsider (in this case Dalton and later Risely) searching for magical and symbolic explanations of phenomena which the insiders (in this case, the *Juang*) consider the ordinary everyday aspects of quotidian life. The desire for interesting information often leads the outsider to impute symbolic significance where it is inappropriate or unrecognised by the insider. Such treatment is all too common in the literature about Indian dress. Risley tried to avoid the trap by at least including the *Juangs'* denial of the mythic origins of their sartorial heritage. Yet it is clear which version of the story *he* favoured. By revealing how willingly the women accepted Johnstone's Manchester saris, he cancelled out their explanation, showing us just how little it was "worth".

We have already seen how the *Juang* were coaxed into a sense of security by offers of jewellery from Colonel Dalton. Once they had advanced, they were rendered tearful in their attempts to avoid being photographed. Their will was ignored and the photograph was not only taken, but also published and later republished, out of Risley's sense of "pious duty to preserve..." These were but the the first stages in a series of acts which served to rid the *Juang* of their agency altogether. The next stage involved stifling the *Juangs'* own explanations of their attire. Their simple and practical considerations were discarded in favour of the more exotic, not least erotic story of naked dancing women and angry goddesses. Finally, there was the abolition of their sartorial identity altogether. Captain Johnstone, assuming that he knew best how these "wild timid creatures" should be dressed, persuaded them to submit their native

clothing to the flames and to accept his generous offer of saris, woven in Manchester. From Crooke we learn the final detail:

> "the girls were marked with vermilion as a sign that they had entered civilized society and the men promised not to allow the women to resume their primitive dress" (Crooke 1906:157).

It is no small paradox that, despite putting an end to the *Juang* tradition of dressing in leaves, the British simultaneously preserved the image of the *Juang* as "naked savages". By the time Risley's treatise on the peoples of India was published, the *Juang* may well have been wearing saris or some other apparel for over thirty years. Yet no attempt was made to provide a photograph of *Juang* women in Manchester saris. Rather, they were visually ossified in their "primitive" nakedness where they fulfilled the reader's expectations of "wild timid creatures".

But what of such timidity? Such passivity? Can we assume that Captain Johnstone's magnanimous act was the end of the story? Were the *Juang* to spend the rest of their lives in Manchester saris, now that a British Political Agent had shown them how? We can assume nothing. For even subjugated tribals are not without their powers to act, despite being pinned like specimens to the ethnographer's page. Writing of one of the *Juangs'* neighbouring tribes, Colonel Dalton makes a remark that is not without its resonance:

> "The *Singbhum Kols* have a tradition that they were once similarly attired, and during the American war, when cotton was so dear, they told the cloth merchants that they would revert to their leaves if cloth was not sold cheaper! Manchester beware!" (Dalton 1872:157).

Dalton realised what many writers on Indian dress have failed to acknowledge: that even within the constraints of a given tradition, there is room for individuals to negotiate and to act. The clothes of the peoples of India are not so indelibly fixed to labels as our museums and photographs would sometimes have them. And if clothes are badges of identity, they can, like badges, be removed and replaced by new ones. The *Juang* did in fact return to their leaves, at least for a time (Crooke 1906:157). The British, meanwhile, were forced to pay increasing heed to Dalton's prophetic warning: "Manchester beware!". For, during the struggle for Indian Independence, India resurrected the bonfires of clothes that were first kindled by "sympathetic agents" like Captain Johnstone in the remote corners of the *Juang* hills. In these new bonfires, Gandhi and other nationalist leaders encouraged Indians to cast their Manchester saris and items

of European fashion onto the flames, replacing them with Indian hand woven cloth (*khadi*). So much for Indian passivity.

The curious relationship between Indian and European manufactured clothes continues today. Before I left for India, where I carried out my research, I received a letter from a woman in Delhi. In it she requested me to bring a bottle of whisky, some Paco Raban afershave, and two London saris. At the time I felt it strange that I should be expected to carry saris from London to Delhi. I also felt entirely unqualified to choose the appropriate designs. I left the choice to an Indian friend who had spent her childhood with the woman in Delhi. She selected synthetic saris with floral patterns in subtle blues and browns. These were received with pleasure in Delhi and I was left wondering how, with all the choice of different saris available in the Indian capital, these two apparently dreary ones could possibly be admired. This study has enabled me at least to begin to comprehend.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine an apparently mundane dilemma as it manifests itself in India. It is a dilemma which most of us face on a daily basis, but which we rarely treat with any degree of intellectual seriousness. That is the problem of what to wear. It is generally considered a rather trivial problem, more suitable for discussion in women's magazines than anthropological works. From time to time it appears in newspaper articles which, by exposing our secret dithering at the wardrobe, elicit a smile. I argue, however, that if this problem is examined more widely and with a greater degree of seriousness, it can reveal much about society, history, politics, culture and above all about the way in which people seek to manage and express their own identity.

To speak of clothes as if they constitute a dilemma in the Indian context is to challenge the accepted view that Indian identity is neatly prescribed by caste tradition, and that people dress in the clothes dictated to them over generations. In fact much of this study concerns those often controversial moments when individuals and groups choose to change their clothes or mingle one type of clothing with another. A number of case studies concerning specific historical and contemporary sartorial dilemmas will be presented in detail. These show how clothes play an active role in the identity construction of individuals, families, castes, regions and nations, and are part of a system through which people define themselves.

Clothing dilemmas have hitherto featured remarkably little in academic debates about India. With the exception of an article by Bernard Cohn (1989), anthropological literature on the subject is almost non-existent. In this introduction, I outline some possible reasons for this neglect and examine the strengths and weaknesses of approaches from other disciplines. In particular I highlight the problems of aesthetic and moral approaches to dress which require making value judgments about beauty and authenticity. I then go on to reveal some of the more positive insights to be gained from historical approaches. Finally I give a brief outline of the symbolic potential of clothing before going on to define the trajectory of my own approach.

Although this study is all about clothes, I have deliberately avoided the use of the word "costume", for I see it as part of the process by which we separate

clothes from the people who wear them. Since we do not refer to our own clothes as "costume", I see no reason why we should classify Indian clothes under that name. I have therefore used the words "clothes" and "dress" throughout this study. These words act as reminders that I am talking about the significance of clothes *as people wear them*, and not as they are arranged in museums and catalogues.

Anthropology Without Clothes

The famous story of the Emperor who had no clothes is, of course, a lesson in perception. Until the intervention of a little boy who exposed the king's nakedness, an entire crowd was willing to assume that their ruler was really magnificently dressed. The crowd of anthropologists that has spread itself about the globe has the opposite problem. Confronted by continual visual evidence of people wearing clothes, most anthropologists treat these clothes as immaterial, nothing to do with the real people underneath. Yet clothes were not always so marginal to anthropology. Their marginalisation was part of the historical development of the discipline itself which, during the 20th century, became increasingly separated both from the museum and from earlier imperial concerns.

In his discussion of the relationship between material cultural studies and anthropology, Miller shows how, before the emergence of mass photography, objects played a vital role in symbolising strange and exotic places (Miller 1983:5). Clothes, weapons, curiosities were collected and arranged for the purpose of portraying other cultures and these trophies of the other were displayed in museums, exhibitions and trade fairs, thereby making different races visible to the public. These representations not only presented other cultures to the public but also framed the public's perception of those cultures (Breckenridge 1989).

In India, as in England, the role of the museum with its overriding emphasis on the classification of types was to have a profound influence on the perception of clothes. Clothes became divorced from the contexts in which they were made, exchanged and worn. Instead, they were seen as part of a wider system of classification which enabled the museum visitor to identify the multifarious "types" of peoples that made up the Indian population. Pinney has shown how, in the Victoria and Albert Museum in Bombay (now the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum), human types were displayed in the form of small clay models and

different styles of headwear were presented in ordered rows to aid in the process of identification (Pinney 1990:256).

Even when clothes seemed immaterial to anthropological debates about Indian society, they remained, paradoxically, visible within the early 20th century representations of India. Risley, for example, whose theories dominated British anthropology about India at the turn of the century, published Dalton's lithographs of Indian people along with the original descriptions of their dress (Risley 1908). Yet to Risley, whose primary concern was to classify peoples according to their physiological structure, clothes might logically have been seen as a barrier, rather than an aid, to the identification of human types. The assumption that "knowledge" could be "gained through visibility" (Pinney 1990:254) did, however, keep clothes within the realm of anthropological and museological debate.

As the 20th century progressed, a new form of anthropology emerged in which fieldwork was to play an increasingly important role. By the 1950's functionalist and structuralist models of society had shifted the focus away from historical and evolutionary trends, towards an understanding of the functions of Indian social institutions. To study this phenomenon, anthropologists lived amongst Indian peoples, usually in small communities such as tribes or villages. Their insights did much to dispel the Western myth of exoticism and strangeness of Indian peoples. Customs, life styles, kinship systems and rituals were shown to be functionally interrelated in a rational system. Many anthropologists treated the village as an integrative whole in which each caste played its role and each individual fulfilled the expectancy of his or her caste. This often lead to highly deterministic theories of Indian society where clothes, if they were mentioned at all, were seen as determined by caste. Writing in 1967, Barrington Moore argued:

> "In Pre-British Indian society, and still today in much of the countryside, the fact of being born in a particular caste determined for the individual the entire span of his existence, quite literally from before conception until after death. It gave the range of choice for a marital partner in the case of parents, the type of upbringing the offspring would have and their choice of mate in marriage, the work he or she would legitimately undertake, the appropriate religious ceremonies, food, dress, rules of evacuation (which are very important) down to most details of daily living..." (in Inden 1990:76).

At a more theoretical level, the influential French sociologist, Louis Dumont, encouraged a school of thought which interpreted Indian society as essentially a religious, caste-bound world in which each element served to maintain the fundamental principle of hierarchy which governed the whole (Dumont 1970). His essentially religious interpretation opened up a series of debates about the nature of the caste system. More recently anthropologists and historians have begun to question the very assumption that the two concepts of "caste" and "tradition" provide the keys to understanding Indian social life. They argue that the continual emphasis on these two concepts has often skewed analysis in favour of all things social and to the detriment of the thinking, acting subject (Inden 1990, O'Hanlon 1990, Mani 1990).

What, one might ask, have the familiar old debates about caste got to do with clothes? The answer is: very little. Anthropology's overiding emphasis on social relationships dismissed clothes to the role of name tags on which a person's caste was neatly inscribed. If material culture had any place in ethnographic accounts, it was analysed largely in terms of production (Fischer and Shah 1970, Swallow 1982). The initial rise of fieldwork led, it seems, to the demise of clothes which were left hanging, sometimes a little forlornly, in museums:

> "The objects, the museum studies, the older theories were now a peripheral pursuit, secondary, in some senses dated, and unlikely to contribute to the development of modern "advanced" theories and perspectives, but better used as a secondary and simplified level of signification to the general public" (Miller 1983:5).

Paradoxically, then, it was at precisely the moment when anthropologists came into direct contact with the people they studied that they ceased to pay attention to their clothes. This was partly because the "functions" of clothes as markers of social identity seemed so obvious and so natural as to obviate the need for discussing them altogether. But it also reflected the fact that early ethnographers were largely men who, despite showing considerable interest in nakedness, were not so interested in clothes. Clothes, after all, were a "feminine" issue, and little to do with things serious.[1] It was only with the proliferation of women anthropologists in the early 1970's that clothes begun to appear in ethnographic accounts. But these were usually restricted either to discussions

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1 For a discussion of the hierarchical divisions of the arts into serious activities pursued by men, and "feminine" activities pursued by women, see Pollock and Parker 1981, also Parker 1986.

about the significance of the veil (Jacobson 1970, Sharma 1978, Nanda 1976, Thompson 1981) or about women's rituals, where clothes, though not the central focus, were inevitably mentioned (Luschinsky 1962, Fruzzetti 1982). Thus, even with the advent of female anthropologists writing about Indian women, very little attention was given to the subject of dress, despite the fact that for many Indian women it is possibly *the* most important subject of discussion.[2]

Clothes, like many other phenomena were, then, subject to academic partition. *Either* they were discussed in terms of social institutions and rituals in the village, *or* in terms of production, trade and aesthetics in the museum. In the former case, very little attention was paid to the artefacts themselves, and in the latter case, the artefacts and their classification were the primary focus. In Ahmedabad the Shreyas Museum houses a permanent display of "folk costumes", neatly arranged according to caste and occupational group. Similarly Elson's exhibition catalogue, **Dowries from Kutch** (1979), emphasises the overriding importance of classification:

> "The cut, the material and ornamentation of a costume reveal the age, occupation, origin, caste and marital status of the wearer" (Elson 1979:19).

Museum anthropologists and curators have, then, been helpful in pointing out the connection between clothing and identity. But perhaps their greatest contribution has been their detailed historical and ethnographic research in the fields of textile production, design and trade (cf. Buhler and Fischer 1979, Nabholz-Kartaschoff 1986, Mohanty and Mohanty 1983, Irwin 1971, 1973, Crill 1985, Murphey and Crill 1991, Nicholson 1988, Jain 1978,1982). These have enabled us to focus on dress as an artefact, and have illustrated not only what is worn, but also how it is made and who wears it.

But museum knowledge is constrained by certain factors which have served to conceal the existence of the problem of what to wear. Firstly, there is the fact that most museums are to some extent answerable to their public. This means that they are expected to display clothes and objects of "public interest". This

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2 Gold recently pointed out the inordinate amount of time that Rajasthani women spend discussing clothing, and the rigorousness with which they pay attention to matters of beauty and adornment, but Gold herself does not expand upon the subject (Gold 1988:15).

inevitably restricts the museum curator's choice of artefacts. Faced with the range of clothes worn in India today, curators will usually write about those garments that are classified as "traditional" and which fulfill the public's notion of "authentically Indian". This inevitably leads to a sifting out of many contemporary forms of dress, such as trousers, shirts and plastic flip flops, all of which have important social significance.[3]

A second limitation of the museum approach is that museum curators "collect" and "display" clothes, and in doing so they inevitably take them out of their social and political context. In other words, they rob clothes of their "social life" (cf. Appadurai 1986). During this process of sartorial kidnapping clothes usually become reclassified as "costume", a word more associated with history and theatre than living. Clothes, which in the normal course of events, are exchanged, purchased, worn, stored and discarded become ossified in the museum where their meaning often appears static and rigid. Instead of playing an active role in the making of identities (Hodder 1982), they become labels which do little more than "reveal" identities to the museum public. The very notion of identity itself becomes fixed and constrained in the process. And when identities are so neatly prescribed, the problem of what to wear goes unnoticed and unquestioned. For it seems that there is no problem.

Towards an Anthropology with Clothes

During my stay in an Indian village I realised that anthropologists and museum curators were not the only people who made classificatory assumptions about the other. At Diwali time (the business new year), one of my neighbour's sons returned to the village for the celebrations. Seeing me for the first time, he scrutinised my appearance and asked the proverbial question of where I was from. When I replied that I was from England, he looked at me in disbelief. He had seen white people often because he worked on the railway and, he assured me, they never dressed like me. They wore brief shorts, both men and *even the women*, and had naked arms and you could always recognise them by the huge plastic bags they carried on their backs and their cameras. Why wasn't I dressed like that if I was from England? Having conveyed his esoteric knowledge of

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3 An example of this weeding out process is Nicholson's exhibition and catalogue, Traditional Indian Arts of Gujarat (1988) where she displays only so called "traditional" artefacts. This was an understandable choice since had she displayed too many flip flops and synthetic trousers, she would no doubt have lost her public.

white people, he began demonstrating to his family just how brief the typical white person's shorts actually were. And I was left contemplating what he might write if he were required to give an ethnographic description of my people: an exotic tribe of backpackers, obscenely dressed, largely nomadic, migrating through India with cameras. Distinctive features: style of bag and bare legs, *even the women.*

My neighbour's account of white people perhaps confirms the idea that, in India, behaviour is socially prescribed and that people wear the badges of their identity, neatly fixed. For he seemed to attribute some kind of generality to the few white people he had seen and now described their characteristic features as if they constituted something akin to a caste. But clothes and classifications are not that simple. Amidst the sartorial silence of ethnographic accounts, small incidents about clothing have been allowed to creep in, suggesting that a person's clothes are not so eas ily determined in India as one might expect. We read, for example, of a low caste man in Gujarat who imitated the style of moustache and turban of high caste *Patidars* and was beaten up for doing so (Pocock 1972:28); of high caste Indians in the Ramnad district of South India who tried to impose restrictions on local *Harijans*, including prohibitions on certain types of ornament and dress (Hutton 1946:74-5); of Muslim women in northern India who veiled their faces in the village but not when they visited the city; of a *Nayar* man who claimed that when he put on his shirt for work, he literally "took off" his caste (Gough, in Srinivas 1968:123) and of a Gujarati man, who tried on the hat and coat of his local anthropologist but dared not wear these into the village for fear of inviting the envious gaze of his fellows (Pocock 1973:25).These incidents, brief and scattered though they are, and referring mainly to men's dress, hint at the fact that clothes can be a controversial issue in India, and that classifications, though they exist, are open to manipulation and dispute. In other words, they suggest that people are involved in *making* the classifications as well as in following them (Parkin 1982, Douglas and Isherwood 1980).

It is interesting that some of the most dynamic accounts of people's attitudes to their clothes in village India appear in books written outside the institutions of anthropology and the museum. A fine example of such an account is found in **Behind Mud Walls** (1930), written by the two American missionaries, Charlotte and William Wiser. They had been living in a village in Uttar Pradesh

and wished to record certain events which seemed inappropriate to their official documentaton:

> "Many of our experiences along the way have been too personal to have a place in the survey. And yet they are too revealing to be discarded" (Wiser 1930:vii).

One such "revealing" experience was their conversation with a villager in which he described how local people deliberately dressed in shabby clothes in front of government and hospital officials:

> "When we are to deal with strangers we suit our dress to the occasion, not to our means. And most occasions call for poor clothes. You have heard them complain in the hospital that they are at a loss to know who should be charity patients and who should pay. We would be foolish to bring ourselves big bills, when the simple matter of dressing will give us charity rates. The Memsahiba let appearances influence her that first year when she picked out what she thought were the ten poorest among our children. She did the choosing so we did not interfere. They (the children) had learned the most effective way of appealing to her sympathies, by word and dress. And their reward was a ride in the motor and new clothes from the landlords' wives in Mainpuri. Later she learnt how mistaken her choice had been. And the next winter she came much nearer to the poverty line. What a joke we had on the accountant when the new Deputy came on tour! There sits friend Accountant, looking very smart, all ready for the Deputy's arrival. At the last moment someone breaks in with the news that the Deputy rebukes well-dressed accountants. Tells them they cannot live within their income honestly and have fine clothes. Off comes the new turban, off comes the yellow silk waistcoat. Friend Accountant rushes about and borrows a shirt and loincloth that look neat but old. In these he bows humbly before the Deputy Sahib. And some of us who were absent during the rapid change, did not at first recognise our grand Accountant in his shabby clothes. The visiting Deputy was properly impressed" (Wiser and Wiser 1930:158).

Sarah Hobson, who carried out research for a documentary film in a South Indian village, was equally sensitive about the importance of dress in her book, **Family Web** (1978). Again, unconstrained by the discipline of anthropology with its implicit criteria of what makes serious knowledge, she recorded local attitudes and interpretations of dress at various intervals in her book. She found her own dress a barrier between herself and the women with whom she was living and so, soon after her arrival, she adopted a sari. But the transitory aspect of her gesture of shared identity was recognised by a village woman who later commented:

> "Because you've come to our country...you've done everything like us. But when you go back to your own country, you'll take off your village clothes and forget us quickly" (Hobson 1978:261).

What all these details provide is a picture of people making decisions, choosing to some extent their own self image, playing with identities and recognising the role of clothes in image construction. In other words, clothes are not merely defining but they are also used to define, to present, to deceive, to create and to hide (cf. Schneider 1989, Lurie 1984).[4] If we shift the focus away from clothes themselves to the wider issue of what people do with their clothes, we are faced with a number of questions: What do clothes mean to the people who wear them? Why do they choose to dress in a certain way? What are the various constraints on their choice? And what are the consequences of their choosing a particular image? We arrive, at last, at a theory of dress in which clothes are central to a person's identity, but not in any rigid and deterministic way. We arrive in other words at a theory which takes as its central theme the problem of what to wear rather than the description of what is worn. This not only enables us to see beyond classifications, but also enables us to avoid some of the highly subjective value judgments characteristic of the literature which takes an aesthetic and moralistic approach.

Aesthetic and Moral Approaches to Indian Dress

From the days when European travellers first arrived in India, they began making aesthetic and moral judgments about Indian dress which they recorded in their journals and diaries (cf.Tavernier 1889, Bernier 1891, Billington 1895, Surendranath 1949, Postans 1838 and 1839). But it was not until the end of the 19th century that an aesthetic approach was clearly formulated in literature. This aesthetic approach emerged at a period when many professional Indians were adopting Western style clothes and when a large proportion of the Indian population was buying machine-made cloth of European manufacture. The formulation of an aesthetic approach to Indian dress was, then, intimately bound up with the idea that Indian dress was "threatened" and required "revival". This approach continues to thrive in contemporary literature on the subject of Indian handicrafts, in which textiles and items of clothing play an important part (cf. Dhamija (ed) 1985, Dongerkery 1960, Jaitly and Sahai 1990, Saraf 1982).

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4 The recent publication of Weiner and Schneider's (eds.) Cloth and Human Experience (1989) is a welcome and much needed documentation of the multiple roles of cloth in a number of different societies. The introduction provides an excellent summary of the importance of cloth.

One of the early exponents of the aesthetic approach to Indian clothes was George Birdwood, founder of the Victoria and Albert Museum in Bombay and Art Referee for the Indian Section of the South Kensington Museum. In 1880, he assembled his famous work, **The Industrial Arts of India**, in which he praised the skill of Indian craftspeople and discussed the need for craft preservation. He was disturbed by the decline in the Indian handloom industry and by the popularity of Manchester cottons. Arguing on both economic and aesthetic grounds, he called on British and Indian peoples to return to hand woven clothes. Speaking of Indian cottons, he wrote:

> "Nothing could be more distinguished for the ball room, nothing simpler for a cottage, than these cloths of unbleached cotton, with their exquisitely ornamented narrow borders in red, blue, or green silk. Indian native gentlemen and ladies should make it a point of culture never to wear any clothing or ornaments but of native manufacture and strictly native design....." (Birdwood 1988: 244).

Birdwood was not alone in his artistic appreciation of hand made products. There were a number of leading figures both in India[5] and England who were expounding a similar philosophy. In particular William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement of Great Britain, tried to elevate the idea of craftsmanship to an aesthetic and moral ideal. He saw craft as part of a whole conception of life, "the good life", which he felt had existed in Europe during the Middle Ages and which still existed in distant village-based societies such as India and Japan. This ideal life was, he argued, being destroyed by industrial development:

> "So far reaching is this commercial war that no country is safe from its ravages: traditions of thousands of years fall before it in a month: it overruns a weak semi- barbarous country, and whatever romance or pleasure existed there, is down trodden into a mire of sordidness and ugliness; the Indian or Japanese craftsman may no longer ply his craft leisurely, working a few hours a day, in producing a maze of strange beauty on a piece of cloth: a steam engine is set a-going at Manchester" (Morris W. in Lipsey 1977:262).

Morris' attitude to crafts embodied a number of value laden moral dichotomies:

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5 In India the primary exponents of these ideas were E.B. Havell, Lockwood-Kipling and members of the Tagore family.

Beauty	Ugliness
Hand-made	Machine-made
Rural	Urban
Past	Present
Indigenous	Western
Domestic	Commercial

These dichotomies, which typically emerge in rapidly industrialising societies (cf. Moeran 1984, Dewey 1972, Apppaswamy 1968) were later to become a sort of blue print for both Indian and British writers on the aesthetic aspects of Indian dress. They were first given wide credence by Ananda Coomaraswamy, geologist, art critic and philosopher.

Coomaraswamy, owing to his origin and upbringing, cannot be regarded as either an Indian or a British critic of Indian arts. His Ceylonese father died when he was only two years old, leaving him to be brought up in England by his English mother, grandmother and aunt. After a thoroughly British education, he visited Ceylon for the first time in 1902, at the age of 25, and was horrified by the people's "vulgar imitation" of the West. In 1905 he published a book entitled **Borrowed Plumes** where he denounced the adoption of European dress which he saw as part of "the continual destruction of national character and individuality and art..." (in Lipsey 1977:18). That same year, he founded the Ceylon Social Reform Society which aimed to encourage the retention or readoption of national dress along with vegetarianism and other social customs (ibid:24).

Coomaraswamy recognised that he had an outsider's view point when he criticised "natives" for wearing European dress. He told an audience in Jaffna:

> "I believe it is difficult for any of us who have not been brought up in England, to realise the hopeless inadequacy of any attempts at imitation; to Englishmen the absurdity is obvious, but to us it is not revealed. Coming freshly to the East and starting from the ordinary English point of view, I have been struck" (ibid:18).

The "ordinary English point of view" was, of course, the ideological view of the Victorian romantics. The subjective nature of Coomaraswamy's attitude, spoken from a stand point of superior judgment, is perhaps best revealed by his own actions. He soon put aside his European suits and adopted a *dhoti* (waistcloth), *kurta* (long shirt) and turban (cf. Mohan 1979). Logically this

could have been interpreted as a "vulgar imitation of the native". Yet he saw his own actions as an aesthetic and moral example to the Ceylonese, despite (or more accurately because of) his "ordinary English point of view".

The recurrent themes of the destruction of "Indian tradition", the futility of "Western imitation" and the need for a revival of local textiles were expounded in a number of different forms in India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some early nationalists leaders, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade, B.G. Tilak and G.K. Gokhale propounded the need to buy *swadeshi* (Indian-made) cloth in order to restore a declining Indian economy (Bean 1990). In Bengal, the call to *swadeshi* was vigorously propounded from 1905 to 1910, following Lord Curzon's announcement of his intended partition of Bengal. Here *swadeshi* was not merely an economic revival but a political protest and national ideal (Bayly 1986). The Nationalist Movement was later to combine a number of political, economic, aesthetic and moral arguments under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi who tried to encourage all Indians to revert to "Indian" dress. But for men like Coomaraswamy, beauty was the key to a clothing revival. In 1910 he wrote:

> "Swadeshi must be something more than a political weapon. It must be a religious-artistic ideal" (Coomaraswamy, 1910:8).

This aesthetic and moral approach to Indian dress flourished immediately after Independence with the formation of the Indian Handicrafts Board (1952) which aimed to stimulate the appreciation, support, and revival of Indian handmade cloth, clothes and craft. It was accompanied by a flurry of literature on the subject, most of which embodied the aesthetic and moral judgments listed above. Urbanisation was interpreted as an "onslaught" (Nanavati et al 1966:9), commercialisation as a "blight" (Chattopadhyaya 1964:4). Factory made articles were described as "humdrum commercial" products as opposed to the colourful variety of India's "ancient costume traditions" (Mangaldas' preface to Jain 1980). The arrival of machine manufactured goods was, then, perceived as the destruction of more beautiful Indian tradition which was being steam rollered over by the powerful forces of industrialisation.

Implicit within these aesthetic judgments is a deep moral overtone and an implication that the adoption of European dress by Indians is a sign of weakness and lack of good judgment. S. N. Dar exemplifies this view point:

"In India we sometimes come across recalcitrant rebels who exult in disparaging oriental ways indiscriminately. They affect foreign manners and so camouflage themselves that, whereas had they followed the modes of their country, they could with their superior mental culture have made themselves an excellent model for their countrymen, they have now to be content with becoming at their best a mediocre "half caste" type of youth. A modernity which is achieved by an intellectual serfdom of this type would not be a mark of real progressiveness" (Dar 1969:207).

One of the major disadvantages of an aesthetic and moral approach to Indian dress is that it fails to consider the perspective of the person who is wearing the clothes. Instead, Indians who adopt Western dress are perceived as weak while villagers who adopt commercial products are seen as the passive victims of industrialisation. In this study I hope to reveal a more dynamic aspect to the clothing choices that people make. By focussing on the problem of what to wear, I examine *why* people make certain choices of dress and what these choices mean to them. This involves recognition of the idea that buying and wearing a certain type of dress, is in fact a creative act (cf. Douglas and Isherwood 1980, Hodder 1982, Wilson 1987). It is one of the ways in which people participate in the formulation of their own self image. While this creative aspect of dress has not been recognised in ethnographic or aesthetic/moral literature about India, it *has* featured in some historical literature.

Historical Approaches to Indian Dress

Historical literature on Indian dress is, on the whole, more dynamic than the literature generated through anthropology and museums, not least because historians and art historians recognise the temporary nature of different types of dress. There has been some impressive documentation of changes in clothes over time, usually traced through ancient sculpture and paintings (cf. Fabri 1960, Chandra 1973, Alkazi 1983, Ghurye 1951). But by focussing on the formal properties of dress, such scholars often produce works that are more descriptive than analytical. Using a more multidisciplinary approach, a few writers and scholars have recently demonstrated some of the more symbolic aspects of historical developments in Indian dress (Nirad Chaudhuri 1976, Bayly 1986, Bean 1990, Cohn 1990). In particular Cohn, who describes himself as "an anthropologist among the historians,"[6] has provided some fascinating insights into developments in Indian dress in the 19th century. Like Chaudhuri, Bean and Bayly, he sees dress as part of a wider issue concerning

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6 This is also the title his book (1987).

the nature of the relationship between the British ruler and the Indian ruled during the Colonial period. Taking the example of the distinctive style of Sikh turban, nowadays interpreted as a badge of Sikh identity, he suggests that it became standardised largely as a result of British attempts to classify Sikhs in the army.

By shifting the focus away from the simple act of reading classifications, Cohn shows how classifications were actually created in official and public intercourse beween Indians and the British. In particular he demonstrates how the British sought to reinforce their separateness from the Indian population by rigourously adhering to British standards of dress, and by encouraging Indians to dress in an "Oriental manner". Many of Cohn's insights provide a framework for my second chapter where I shall address the problem of what to wear as it was faced by Indians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A second essential point made by Cohn is that dress codes are often at the centre of a number of wider issues such as notions of modesty, honour and respect, and that a clash between different styles of clothing is often symbolic of a wider conflict between different cultural and social values and norms. He also suggests that clothes in India are capable of retaining the essence of the people who wear and exchange them. Bayly elaborates this point still further by outlining a distinctively pre-Colonial Indian view of cloth "as a thing that can transmit spirit and substance" (Bayly 1986:286). Having defined a number of Indian beliefs about the "moral" and "transformative" properties of cloth, he reveals how Gandhi rekindled these essentially dormant beliefs when he encouraged Indians to reject British dress and return to Indian clothes.

The problem with such an approach to Indian dress is that by defining an "Indian view", Bayly comes close to a deterministic standpoint. He emphasises the "magical" and symbolic aspects of Indian beliefs about cloth when it is almost impossible to judge the extent to which these beliefs were actually recognised or held by the Indian population at large. While some Indians today might argue in favour of the transformative aspect of cloth, others might deny it. But can we assume that there was ever a past age when everybody shared the same point of view in India? As my preface shows, outsiders are often more inclined to read magical beliefs into clothes than the people who actually wear the garments. In particular Westerners have been quick to emphasise the magical and mystical aspects of Indian society. When this process occurs in

reverse, and an Indian scholar expounds the magical aspects of Western society, we are perhaps less willing to accept unfounded presuppositions. Certainly I felt a strange lack of recognition when I read S. N. Dar's analysis of sartorial customs in Europe:

> "In Europe, a cultural refinement of a primitive form of sex-worship requires men to keep their hats off and their shoes on, when in the presence of ladies. The removal of the hat is an act of homage to the eternal feminine, while the injunction against bare feet is a symbolic acknowledgement of woman's monopoly in the field of corporeal display" (Dar 1969:138).

Whilst the belief that cloth is capable of transmiting and retaining moral properties may be stressed in certain contexts in India, it can also be underplayed in other contexts. Ideas of purity and pollution are often context-specific (Appadurai 1988).

Of all the approaches to the subject of Indian dress, Nirad Chaudhuri's is perhaps the most dynamic and ambitious.[7] He sees the evolution of clothes in India as part of a general pattern of the evolution of human life and culture in India:

> "This means that the evolution of Indian 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" (Chaudhuri 1976:xi).

After defining what he considers to be the origins and generic types of dress available in India, he goes on to discuss the historical development of clothing traditions in terms of a series of battles (Hindu vs. Muslims, Indian vs. British). Finally he discusses the "decline and fall of clothing" (ibid:97) as all types degenerate into "bad taste and ugliness" (ibid:133). Whilst I cannot accept Chaudhuri's evolutionary schema, nor his moral judgements and ideal types, I have none the less found his approach the most valuable written documentation of the problem of what to wear, for it is crammed with personal reminiscences and historical detail as well as interesting, though at times contradictory, analysis. It is refreshing in assuming that Indian clothes can be explained as

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7 Chaudhuri, who claims categorically at the beginning of Culture in the Vanity Bag (1976), that "a man who has lost interest in clothing and adornment has also lost interest in life", hotly denies that his book is a scholarly work. Yet again the most dynamic approaches to Indian dress seem to be coming from outside the confines of academic disciplines.

much in terms of conflict as consensus. Chaudhuri's sensitivity to the conflictual aspects of dress stems perhaps from his own personal experience of the problem of what to wear. Brought up in a Bengali village, settling in Calcutta and finally Oxford, living through the rise of nationalism, the attainment of Independence and after, he has had ample experience of the problem of what to wear. Although he does not discuss his personal dilemma, he refers in the introduction to the troublesome range of clothes in India and suggests that it is the discomfort they inflict which has motivated him "to seek their cause, and to find peace if in anything else at least in understanding" (ibid:xii).

Why is the Problem of What to Wear a Problem ?

It has become clear that the problem of what to wear in India *is* a problem. But it remains to be seen, why. I here set out three central theoretical issues which are at the heart of the problem as I see it. These do, of course, combine and interact with other practical considerations such as price and the availability of choice. But I shall concentrate here on the theoretical aspects of the problem.

The first concerns classification. How can we reconcile Elson's orderly museum classification of clothes and identities with Chaudhuri's perception of clothes as a series of battles? I argue that the two arguments are in fact reconcilable for they are but two aspects of the same debate. It is precisely because classifications are so important that the conflict exists. Museums have been right to stress the importance of clothes as markers of social identity, but their weakness lies in the fact that they often favour one criterion of identity over another. But identities, like classifications themselves, may be multiple and conflicting.

Classification is about the dual processes of identification and differentiation, and choosing a certain type of clothing is one of the means by which individuals participate in these processes. Yet classification is problematic when a person's identification with one group conflicts with his or her identification with another group. In India, a society that is highly stratified on a number of different levels (social, sexual, religious, political, economic, cultural, regional, national), the likelihood of wishing to identify with more than one group simultaneously is extremely high. At times a certain type of clothing may coincide with a person's religious, regional, social and political beliefs. But at other times, these may be at sartorial loggerheads.

An example serves to illustrate the point. A Hindu man who lives in Delhi might dress in a cotton *kurta pyjama* (tunic and trousers). As far as most foreigners are concerned, he looks "Indian". But if he wishes to attend a particularly auspicious Hindu ceremony, he may find some orthodox *Brahmans* accusing him of looking like a Muslim. Then again, if he returns to his home village, his family may rebuke him for deserting his caste dress. Other villagers may think he looks too modern (deserting local regional styles), or conversely they might find him too old fashioned (he is dressed in cotton when they are dressed in synthetics). In other words there are a number of different criteria on which a person's clothes may be judged, and the clothes appropriate to one classification system are not necessarily appropriate to another. When individuals have to decide what to wear they have to address the problem of their audience but they may, like the man in Delhi, have multiple audiences with multiple expectations. Historically this has been particularly the case with men's dress since men have travelled more widely and participated in a wider range of public activities. Women, whose movements are generally considerably more restricted than men's, have, until recently, had fewer alternative audiences with which to contend.

Part of the problem of what to wear lies, then, in deciding which type of classification to favour over another, and suffering, if necessary, the consequences of flouting other seemingly less important classifications in the process. This leads to the second theoretical issue. Why should clothes be treated so seriously? What does it matter if a person is "wrongly" dressed according to his or her family, friends and associates? I argue that it matters because of the unique and peculiar role that clothes play in perceptions of identity. For clothes are frequently perceived as expressions and even extensions of the people who wear them (cf. Schneider and Weiner eds 1989).

The most striking feature of clothes is perhaps their proximity to the body (cf. Wilson 1985). They are so close to us that they seem almost like part of us. Anthony Trollope recognised this when he wrote of one of his characters:

> "never at any moment.....was he dressed otherwise than with perfect care. Money and time did it, but folk thought it grew with him, as did his hair and fingernails" (Trollope 1876, quoted in Douglas and Isherwood 1980:47).

Clothes, like other phenomena, are often dehistoricised and naturalised, converted to myth (Barthes 1973). Yet at the same time they are detachable.

They are both part of us and superfluous to us. What this shows is not that clothes "mean" in any particular way, but that their peculiar position, both close to the body yet distant from it, gives clothes a special potential for symbolic elaboration:

> "A part of this strangeness of dress is that it links the biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognise that the human body is more than a biological entity. It is an organism in culture, a cultural artefact even, and its own boundaries are unclear.... Dress is the frontier between the self and the not self" (Wilson 1987:2-3).

The idea that people are inseparable from their clothes is by no means uniquely Indian (Schneider 1989). In the West people are often reluctant to buy second hand clothes as if the previous wearer somehow adhered to the cloth, yet precisely because of the close proximity between people and clothes, pop fans will clamber on stage to touch the T shirts of their heroes.[8] We even try on new clothes in shops and ask the question: "Is it really me?" These incidents suggest that humans are capable of interpreting the ambiguous boundary between their biological and social selves at different levels.

One consequence of the common idea that clothes are part of the human being is that a change of clothes is regarded as a desertion of the former self. Where the concept of fashion introduces a wide range of constantly changing images for us to aspire to, we are no longer expected to define ourselves in a permanent way. Change is built into the fashion system (Barthes 1973). But in India, where social, religious, and regional stratifications are still clearly expressed, a change of clothes is likely to be interpreted as an act of desertion or change of mental affiliation. Speaking of clothing in the Indian vs. British battle, Chaudhuri argues:

> "Like language and other features of life which distinguish one human group from another, it is 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" (Chaudhuri 1976:73).

This leads to a third theoretical problem. Whilst clothes may at times express "cultural allegiance", this depends on the attitude of the wearer to his or her clothes. Clothes can conceal as much as they reveal (cf. Lurie 1984, Schneider

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8 Marilyn Munroe's swimsuit was selling at Christies for £13,200 on the very day that I wrote this passage.

1990). They can also challenge (Hebdidge 1979, Bean 1990). In other words, we enter the minefield of communication theory, with its complex debates about problems of intention and interpretation. Many communications specialists have addressed this problem in relation to clothes in the West (Lurie 1984, Hoffman 1984, Phelan 1984). It is a problem intimately linked with the problems of classification and identification mentioned above. People may *seek* to communicate their identity or beliefs through wearing certain clothes, but they cannot guarantee that their message will be understood in the way that they *intend*. As Hoffman puts it:

> "The communicative offer made by means of one's costume is frequently understood, but rarely coincides with what the wearer wants to express" (Hoffman 1984:7).

Two scholars have recently discussed the communicative aspect of clothes in India (Ramanujan 1984, Bean 1990). But both fail to address the problems of intention and interpretation. Bean, for example, describes Mahatma Gandhi as a semiotician who used "his appearance to communicate his most important messages in a form comprehensible to all Indians" (Bean 1990:368). She claims that the "communicative power of clothes transcended the limitations of language" (ibid). But much of Gandhi's difficulty lay in the imperfect nature of his communication through clothes. Throughout his political career he was constantly trying to define the meaning of clothes through verbal explanation, but he was never able to control interpretations which proliferated in a number of different directions, often quite different from Gandhi's professed intentions. Whilst clothes, like language, communicate, they are like language, capable of communicating anything from truth to lies, from the intelligible to the unintelligible (Lurie 1984). Their meaning, like meaning itself, is highly diffuse:

> "But what is meaning? It flows and drifts; it is hard to grasp. Meaning tacked to one set of clues transforms itself. One person gets one pattern and another a quite different one from the same events; seen a year later they take a different aspect again. The main problem of social life is to pin down meanings so that they stay still for a little time" (Douglas and Isherwood 1980:64).

Deciding what to wear is one of the ways in which we try to "pin down meanings" and control both presentations and interpretations of the self (Goffman 1969, Berreman 1972). But since, as we have seen, the problem of what to wear addresses a whole range of issues about classification,

identification and communication, it is a very real and sometimes highly complex problem.

The Evolution of this Study

Trained in the anthropological tradition, and equipped with the usual intellectual baggage that encourages one's gaze in certain directions and not in others, I had not intended to study, nor had I seriously considered, the problem of what to wear before setting out for fieldwork in India in 1988. My proposed intention was to study the social and cultural significance of women's embroidery traditions in a Gujarati village. With this in mind I selected a large multi-caste village in eastern Saurashtra, an area renowned both for its embroidery and its conservatism. It was one of the few regions where peasant women were still wearing hand embroidered clothes and still making embroidery entirely for domestic use, although the craft was clearly in a phase of rapid decline. I was immediately welcomed into the village[9], and was shown the contents of many dowry chests containing embroidered clothes, hangings and animal regalia. For some months I concentrated diligently, though sometimes exasperatedly, on the subject of embroidery and anything that might conceivably be related to it. But there was one major problem. There I was showing inordinate interest in embroidery when the women who actually made it were largely uninterested and thoroughly uninspired. Many had given up wearing embroidered clothes. Others, whilst still wearing embroidery, confessed that they were embarrassed by its backward connotations and were keen to be rid of it.

There was something slightly farcical about the anthropologist searching to illustrate the vital significance of a textile tradition that the villagers themselves were all too keen to see the back of. There was also something rather depressing about the fact that there was more information about embroidery designs in museums and books than in the village. Yet the attitudes of village women to their textile heritage interested me. I became increasingly aware of how and why they no longer wanted to wear embroidered clothes. I also became more generally aware of a number of different clothing controveries that were brewing in the village. While the idea that each caste had its own dress was often propounded, it was quite clear that what this dress actually consisted

9 For this I am extremely indebted both to the people of the village, and to the late Professor Rameshbahi Shroff who made my introduction considerably easier by accompanying me there and visiting me after the first week. His friendship, enthusiasm and knowledge were invaluable.

of was frequently in dispute. Furthermore, there were other issues that arose repeatedly such as questions of female modesty and the degree to which a caste should modernise its image. In short, I became interested in the whole field of clothing and identity, and in particular the question of how, within the often limited confines of village life, individuals and groups changed their clothes.

The fact that I was female, young and unmarried meant that villagers developed an extremely protective attitude towards me which was at once invaluable and constraining. In particular, my access to men was considerably more limited than my access to women. Furthermore men's dress seemed to be a much less controversial issue than women's dress, for most young men were wearing Western style trousers and shirts which were accepted in the village by almost every caste. Yet I was aware that many of the contemporary controversies over women's dress were, in fact, transformations of similar issues that had arisen over men's dress earlier this century. And although these women's clothing disputes had no direct link with colonialism, they were none the less infused with certain issues which had emerged under British rule, if not before. In order to comprehend these links, I felt the need to delve deeper into the history of clothing disputes in India. I therefore left the village and spent a five month period in Delhi where I embarked on a different kind of fieldwork.

My fieldwork in Delhi took place largely in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. I call it fieldwork because it was a form of ethnographic research. My aim was to find first hand accounts of the experience of the problem of what to wear as it was faced by Indian people in the late colonial period. For this purpose second hand sources, which usually weeded out such details, were of little assistance. Diaries, autobiographies, newspapers and journals proved more rewarding. In particular **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**, volumes 1-90 (1958-1984) proved an invaluable source of information. Not only do these impressive tomes contain Gandhi's speeches, correspondence and writing, but also newspaper reports and more importantly letters from the public to Gandhi. These gave insights into the problem of what to wear in a way that history books rarely did.[10] Whilst in Delhi, I also paid closer attention to debates about dress in contemporary newspapers, magazines

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10 The articles by Cohn 1989 and Bean 1989, which do to some extent deal with this question, were published in the United States whilst I was in the field. At the time when I embarked on the subject, it seemed an untouched territory and it was therefore rewarding to read these publications after my return.

and political cartoons, and became increasingly interested in the recent "ethnic fashion revival" and its relationship both to clothing dilemmas in the village and to earlier historical national dilemmas.

Having contemplated these findings, I returned to Saurashtra for a further two month period which enabled me to examine afresh the relationship between different levels of sartorial change. On leaving the village, I spent a further month of fieldwork in a second village, this time in the capital itself. This was an "urban village" which was in the process of being converted into an "ethnic" shopping centre, and where clothes of the type worn in Saurashtra were being converted into exclusive designer fashion garments. It was here, in the urban fashion village in South Delhi, that the links and disjunctions between the clothing dilemmas of colonialism, nationalism, and village life finally became apparent.

On returning to Britain in January 1990, I rounded off my fieldwork experiences in the India Office Library and Records in London. Here, along with the analytical works of Bernard Cohn and Nirad Chaudhuri, I found colonial records of clothing disputes and satirical illustrations which provided greater insight into British Imperial attitudes to Indian dress and which in turn made further sense of nationalist dilemmas.

The end result of these various different methods of enquiry is not, perhaps, the standard anthropological thesis, but as a researcher I found this multidisciplinary approach rewarding. As Nita Kumar has so rightly argued, the "meanings" of a cultural tradition can be understood, "neither simply from their context, nor merely as intentionality" for they are also "part of a larger system that goes beyond the actors' will, and indeed, consciousness" (Kumar 1988:5). History has recently benefited from widening its borders and incorporating subaltern perspectives within its vision (cf. Guha (ed) 1982-9). Similarly the development of ethno-archaeology has enabled the archaeologist to use contemporary fieldwork experience as a key to comprehending the past (cf. Hodder 1982, Miller 1985). My own approach was to incorporate the historian's idea that the past makes sense of the present with the ethno-archaeologist's idea that the present throws light on the past. This work is therefore situated within what I hope will become an expanding domain of anthropology that combines insights from history with the archaeologist's emphasis on material culture.

Trajectory of this study

Broadly speaking chapters 2-4 address problems of national identity and refer primarily to men's clothing dilemmas, while chapters 5-8 address questions of local identity and refer primarily to women's clothing dilemmas. This is not to suggest that women did not participate in history any more than I would suggest that men do not participate in contemporary village life. But my bias reflects the bias both of my fieldwork experience and of historical writings. Whilst I had first hand access to the perceptions of women in a contemporary village setting, I had very little access to their thoughts and opinions in the late colonial period, for very few Indian women recorded their experiences and very few men (Indian or British) thought them worth recording. Conversely, whilst I had limited access to men's opinions in the village, I had easy access to the veritable plethora of literature written by Indian men during the struggle for Independence.

Chapter 2 begins with an analysis of Indian responses to European dress in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular I focus on the question of why European fashions were both appealing and disillusioning to Indian men. This theme of disillusionment is taken up in chapter 3 where I analyse Gandhi's personal clothing changes and his attempts to re-Indianise the dress of the nation. I illustrate how he was often unable to communicate his message through his clothes and to convert all Indians to wearing *khadi* (handwoven handspun cloth). Through discussing different individual responses to this re-Indianisation policy, I suggest in chapter 4 that *khadi*, although it provided a united front against the British, did not succeed in blanking out the many divisions within Indian society. I end the chapter by suggesting that my research in a contemporary Gujarati village helps to provide greater insight into the difficulties that Gandhi faced, for it is clear that even today clothes are an important means of marking out social and regional identity at the cost of preventing national uniformity.

Chapter 5 begins with an account of my arrival in the village and my own attempts to search for a suitable dress. After introducing the village, the people and their clothes, I outline the relationship between clothing and caste and suggest some of the reasons why women's clothes have changed more gradually than men's. In particular I focus on the importance of ideas of female modesty which have served to constrain change in women's dress beyond a

certain limit. The next three chapters focus on the specific clothing dilemmas faced by members of different caste groups, ranging from the top to the bottom of the village hierarchy. Each chapter begins with an account of the specific personal clothing problems of different individuals and then goes on to analyse these in terms of a variety of different social and economic factors. These dilemmas range from whether or not a *Brahman* woman can wear a cardigan or bra (Chapter 6), to whether or not a farming caste can stop wearing embroidery (Chapter 7), to questions concerning what a modern-day shepherd and *Harijan* are expected to wear (Chapter 8). These case studies in the village demonstrate how most groups are anxious to modernise their image but are constrained by a variety of factors, including the local hierarchy.

Chapter 9 concerns an urban fashion village in Delhi where embroidered clothes from Gujarat have become high fashion. Here, I document the process by which a select group of boutique owners from the Delhi area are trying to reimpose "village atmosphere" on unwilling villagers, and how villagers are in turn trying to "modernise" the village against the wishes of the urban elite. Through discussing the various aspects of this paradox, I try to trace the roots of the so-called "ethnic chic" fashion revival. Finally, in chapter 10, I conclude by demonstrating how all of these developments from the first introduction of Western dress to the return to "ethnic chic" are part of a long term cultural debate concerning Indian identity which is played out at various levels from the village to the nation. Using Bourdieu's concept of "strategies of distinction" (Bourdieu 1984), I show how these fashion trends are logically interrelated, but suggest that despite their logicality, the problem of what to wear persists for individuals, groups and nations. I end by suggesting some reasons why, in the contemporary world of increased mobility and mass communications, the problem of what to wear should be taken more seriously by anthropologists.

The thesis contains a wide variety of visual material, including photographs, drawings, advertisements and political cartoons. Some of the early cartoons have overtly racist overtones and it is hoped that my decision to use them will not be perceived as offensive. They have been included to illustrate certain prevailing attitudes of the time and, as such, they are valuable documents. Where possible they have been inserted directly in the text as I wish them to be read like quotations, codified in visual form.

Chapter 2

SEARCHING FOR SARTORIAL SATISFACTION IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

Michael Madhusudan Datta[1] once arrived at a party at a Raja's house in full European dress. Nagendranath Som recalls:

> "When the Raja saw him he said, "Michael! Why haven't you come wearing *dhuti* and *cadar* (shawl)?" Madhusudan replied with a laugh, "If I came wearing them I'd have to help carry pitchers and napkins; but these are the clothes of the Ruling Race; so there's no fear of that."" (Radice 1986:203)

On another occasion, Madhusudan was seen emerging from a lake in a *dhoti*. A friend taunted him: "Where is your hat and coat now?" Madhushudan replied jestingly, "Man is many-formed: he takes on different forms according to the situation in which he finds himself" (ibid 203-4).

In this chapter I seek to explore some of the clothing choices made by the Indian elite in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Madhusudan Datta pointed out, these choices were variable according to the contexts in which people moved. But there was one particular context which was looming increasingly large in the minds and the clothes of the male Indian elite in the late 19th century, and that was the context of British Rule.

British Imperial presence in India introduced new forms of Government, language, education and social etiquette. With these came a new set of criteria of civilization with a new set of clothes to go with it. Most British men and women took it for granted that their customs and lifestyle were part and proof of their superior place on the evolutionary ladder. And to a large extent the Indian intelligentsia were impressed by the European perception of progress. But Indian responses to the British were never straightforward, neither in dress nor in other modes of behaviour. While many Indians admired Europe's scientific discoveries and educational standards, they remained highly selective as to which elements of European culture should be adopted or absorbed into Indian life (Raychaudhuri 1988:23). Clothes were amongst the many manifestations of

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1 Madhusudan Datta (1824-73) was a Bengali writer whom some scholars consider "the first great poet of modern India" (Ray 1977:84). At the age of nineteen he renounced Hinduism and adopted the Christain name Michael, partly as a ploy for going to Europe (ibid).

British culture which were carefully assessed, and to some extent assimilated by the Indian elite. Their assimilation was complex and was often a matter of degrees rather than absolutes.

Since clothing had always been an important sign of affiliation to different social and religious groups in India, few people were prepared to abandon their raiments of identity overnight. At the same time, European clothes were such an essential component of the British notion of civilization, that they could not be ignored by the self respecting educated Indian man. The result was that people juggled with their sartorial identities, sometimes with awkwardness, sometimes with ease or ambition and sometimes, like Madhusudan Datta, with self consciousness, good humour and provocation. While some men wore a combination of Indian and Western[2] garments, others varied their clothes according to the situation, while yet others tried to combine both Indian and Western features within a single garment. These different solutions to the problem of what to wear did in turn generate a variety of responses from family, caste, friends, work and religious associates. They were also scrutinised by the British who tried to control developments in Indian dress (Cohn 1989, Chaudhuri 1976) and who ridiculed what they considered inappropriate dressing. Awareness of these potential responses from different audiences formed part of the framework in which the problem of what to wear had to be tackled.

Alongside the enthusiastic adoption of Western dress by some Indian men was the development of an increasingly powerful critique of this dress by others who sought to   "re-Indianise" their clothes. Yet even this was not without its complications for there had never been an "Indian dress", but rather an immense variety of different clothes which emphasised India's cultural diversity more than her unity. The desire by some to reject or ignore European dress was, then, linked to the further problem of trying to invent a pan-Indian dress. The early stages of this search for a new Indian sartorial identity are discussed at the end of the chapter.

I shall first give a brief introduction to some types of Indian clothes and show how British clothes differed from these. After assessing British attitudes to both

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2 I shall use the terms "Western" and "European" interchangeably.

Indian and European dress, I shall then examine a variety of individual Indian responses to Western dress. In particular I seek to explore the various factors that motivated or discouraged Indian men from adopting European fashions, and to analyse the issues that made their clothing choices problematic.

SOME CLOTHING TYPES IN INDIA

It is of course restricting to define different types of dress for in defining them we crystallize forms which in reality change and evolve over time. For the purpose of clarity however, it is helpful to introduce some of the clothing styles which were common in India prior to the advent of British Rule.

Draped Clothes

Probably the oldest and most common form of dress in pre-Colonial India consisted of various cloths draped around the body, held together by tucks and folds. Men's clothes were often white in colour, plain or with simple borders and were usually made from cotton though sometimes silk. The poorest men wore little more than a basic loincloth (*langoti*). But more common was the longer waist-cloth *(dhoti)* which could be wrapped in various ways. The upper body was either uncovered or draped with a shawl (*chadar*), depending on the season and occasion. The head was wrapped by some form of turban (*pugri*) which could be tied in a number of different regional and specialised ways.[3] By the 19th century many men had added long tunics or shirts to their *dhotis*.

Women's draped dress consisted of the sari, one long piece of cloth wound around the waist and thrown over the upper part of the body and sometimes the head. It was made from cotton or silk and decorated by dyeing, printing and/or embroidering. By the late 19th century most urban and many rural women had added blouses and underskirts to their saris. The most striking feature of the *dhoti*, sari, *chadar* and *pugri* was that they were worn by draping and their manufacture required neither tailoring nor stitching.

Stitched Clothes

In parts of Western India, women did not wear saris, but skirts (*ghaghra*) and bodices (*choli*) with veil cloths (*odhni*). Punjabi men, along with Rajput men of Western India also wore some form of stitched clothes, usually a tunic (*angarkha*) with trousers (*pyjama*). The comparatively limited range of stitched

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3 In some parts of Bengal and South India men did not wear turbans or hats (Crill 1985)

clothes available in medieval India was greatly expanded by the Moghuls who popularised fine muslin tunics and trousers and encouraged Indians to wear them (Chaudhuri 1976:51). The *angarkha*[4] and trouser combination became the popular dress of the Indian elite in public, though not necessarily in the privacy of their homes.

Muslim women generally wore a veil (*dupatta*), a long tunic (*kamiz*) with trousers (*salwar*) or the wide flared skirt-like trouser (*gharara*). After the Muslim invasions in the North many Hindu women adopted such dress making it the regional style for most of Northern India.[5]

The distinction between draped and stitched clothing has often been treated by scholars as if it were a distinction between Hindu and Muslim dress (Bayly 1986, Cohn 1990). Certainly some Hindus, accustomed to wearing draped clothes, opposed the introduction of stitched clothing on the grounds that it was ritually polluting (Watson 1866:11, Chaudhuri 1976, Bayly 1986). Many Hindu men who worked for Muslim employers wore such clothes for work but took care to remove them before entering their homes (ibid). For ritual purposes they favoured draped dress.

But this practice does not confirm the notion that there were once clear cut religious orders of clothing. There is no clear evidence of an ancient Hindu injunction against stitched clothes. It therefore seems likely that certain Hindus used religious arguments as a means of preserving their favoured dress and preventing the widespread acceptance of stitched garments (Chaudhuri 1976:52). Meanwhile certain Muslims used the plea of Islamic moral decency in their attempts to convert Hindus to stitched clothes. As we have seen, stitched garments were already worn in India prior to the Muslim invasions when they

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4 The word *angarkha* was probably the most widely used in relation to men's upper garments. There were, however, a variety of different styles including loose shirt-like tunics (*kurta*), wide sleeved coats (*kaba*), outer jackets (*jama*) and skirted cape-like gowns (*chapkan*). A complete outfit might comprise a *jama*, worn over an *angarkha* with a cummerbund and some form of headwear. For a detailed discussion of men's fashions in Lucknow, see Sharar 1975:169-77. For a discussion of the confusion of terminology in men's dress, see Watson 1866:56.

5 The *salwar kamiz* is commonly known by the name "Punjabi dress". People who wear it today often refer to the outfit quite simply as "Punjabi".
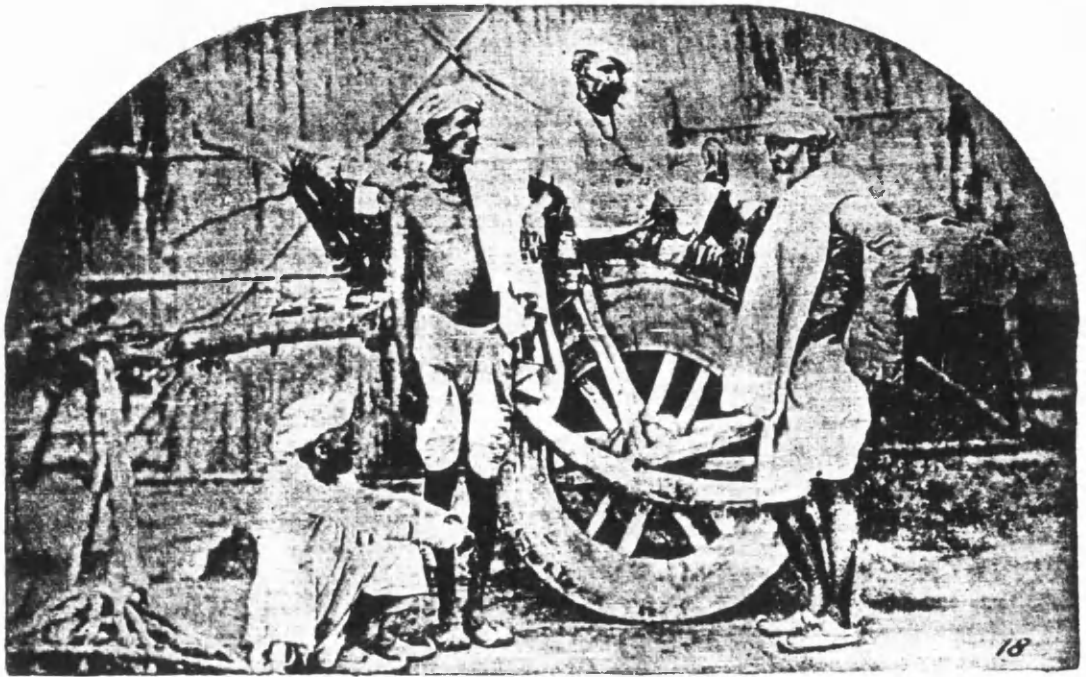
Fig. 2:1 A selection of different types of Indian men's dress, showing both draped and stitched clothes. From Watson J.F., **The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India** (1866).

Fig. 2:2 Top: *dhotis* with ornamental borders, worn with *chadars* and *pugris*. Bottom: baggy trousers with tunics, commonly worn by Muslims. From Watson (1866).

Dress Wear.

Exceptional light weight materials have been secured this season with just enough body to give the correct hang so desirable in Dinner or Full Dress Jackets. Every care is taken in the lowest as well as the first quality to see that only work of a

FIRST CLASS FINISH

is allowed to leave the premises. We specialize in

VICUNAS AND COATINGS

in tropical weights.

PRICES.

Semi Dress from Rs. 62 the suit.
Silk lining extra.
Dress Suit from Rs. 65-8.
Silk lining extra

Dress Suit.

Semi Dress.

Mess Kit.

Sound value in Washing Whites, smartly cut from good wearing material is our aim in this section. That we have succeeded can be seen by the numerous clients we have all over India

PRICES:

Mess Suits.
Rs. 10-8, 12-8, 14-8

Light Weight Suits.

Pure Silk, Tussorette, or White Suits are a leading feature of our tailoring trade. The China Silks are wonderful, and cannot be equalled. Full range of samples, plainly marked, can be had at any time post free.

PRICES:

Silk Suits, Rs. 35-8 to Rs. 45-8.

Fig. 2:3 Selection of European men's dress wear. From the catalogue of **Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co. Ltd.**, Bombay (c.1910).

Fig. 2:4 Selection of Indian women's dress. Top and bottom right: draped saris. Top left and bottom middle: stitched skirts and bodices. Central group: tunic and trouser combination (*salwar kamiz*) commonly worn by Muslims. From Watson 1866.

TERMS CASH.

¹⁴ Here are Pretty Frocks for You!

"BERNICE."

"ETHEL."

WHITE DRESSES

are the most popular wear and always look just right with coloured millinery. We have very many pretty designs for this season, and it's quite possible to **fit** any figure from our varied stock of ready-made dresses.

"ADELA."

Another Ready to Wear Gown of Lawn Lace and Embroidery insertion. This pretty and becoming Fichu style will be very fashionable. Price for this Robe, Rs. 21 0.

Bernice is an unmade robe of beautiful Lawn and handsome embroidery.
Rs. 17-8.

The Ideal Corset Bodice. boned and washable; takes the place of a Camisole and makes the figure beautifully rounded
Rs. 2 15.

The Dainty Camisole. in finest Mull Muslin, insertioned lace
Rs. 2 4.

Also in knitted style.
Re. 1 12.

"**Ready to Wear.**" A very lovely Embroidery Dress made all in one piece Good quality material, choice design. The latest style.
Rs. 14 8.

This frock is quite the cheapest and smartest we have ever offered for the price. When ordering please state size of waist.

Fig. 2:5 Selection of European women's dress, showing the preference for white lace and embroidery (c.1910).

OUR TOPEES
have a style and finish
of their own.
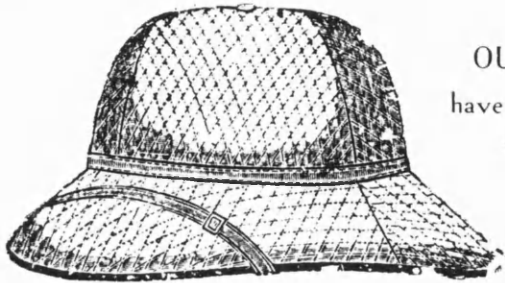
The Cawnpore "Tent Club" Pigsticker Topee. covered Spinner's Khaki Drill, with long chin strap over crown and cross webs inside crown.
Price Rs. 4-12 each.

Ellwoods' Khaki Helmets. Drill on cork and rubber body, with correct pugree and chin strap.
Price, Rs. 14-12 each.
Ellwood's Second Quality, same shape as above.
Price, Rs. 8-12 each.

Hawkes' Topee. A popular price and a smart style. Consolidated Co 's Body. covered White Drill and with White Pugree.
Price, Rs. 15-12 each.

A Smart Shape Topee, very much used for Gymkhana wear. White covers with black ribbon band, non-actinic linings
Covered **Plain White Drill,** Rs. 4-12 each.
Covered **Glazed Drill,** Rs. 5-8 each.

The **MINTO' TOPEE.**

The "Improved Club" Topee, covered best silk alpaca in fawn colour and finished in a high class style, with pugree and long chin strap over crown.
Price, Rs. 5-12 each

Officers' Military Helmets. Hawkes' Khaki Military Helmet. Officer's Newest pattern with pugree and chin strap.
Price. Rs. 18-8. White, Rs 19-12 each.

The "Club" Topee. Covered fawn quilted Alpaca, with smart pugree, lined non-actinic satin, short chin straps.
Price, Rs. 3-12 each.
The " New Era " Topee, pigsticker shape, covered Spinner s non-actinic "Solio" cloth. A smart topee for ordinary wear and excellent for shikar use.
Price, Rs. 6-12 each.

The **"Gymkhana" Topee**

Real Sola Pith Covered Best Fur Felt, lined non-actinic satin with smart silk pugree. White or grey colour.
Price, Rs. 9-12 each.
Also in green and brown with plain or fancy pugree.
Price Rs. 10-8 each.

Fig. 2:6 A selection of some of the many *sola topis* worn largely by the British and Eurasians (c 1910).

were not regarded as Muslim dress.[6] Their designation as "Muslim" is thus a later addition which Hindus used as a justification for sartorial resistance. By the 19th century many educated Hindu families regarded stitched clothes as superior to the comparatively scanty *dhoti*. While in religious contexts they saw them as defiling[7], in secular contexts they saw them as proof of educational advancement and sophistication.

European Clothes

European clothes differed from Indian clothes in the extent to which they were tailored to cling to the contours of the body. They were also heavier than most Indian dress and more restrictive. By the late 19th century, European men were wearing some form of trouser with a buttoned shirt, a cummerbund, a fitted jacket, a hat for outdoor use and boots or shoes. Shirts were usually white and other garments were dark colours. Since most British men in the Indian Civil Service came from top public schools, their clothes were essentially those of the British upper classes who maintained high standards of formality and strict sartorial codes. It was therefore the top hat that came to India rather than the cloth cap worn by the working classes.[8] The British also developed a new style of hat in the 1840's, designed to protect them from the sun (Cohn: 1983:103). It was originally known by the Hindi name of *sola topi* (pith hat) since it was made from the pith of the sola plant, but many Britishers called it a solar *topi* (sun hat). By the late 19th century it was worn fastidiously by British men, women and children. It was the distinctive nature of European headwear that led Indians to refer to Europeans in India as *topi wallas* (hat wearing people).

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6 The arbitrary nature of "religious" differentiation in dress is revealed by the fact that in the plains Hindus fastened their jackets to the right and Muslims to the left, whereas in North India the practice was generally reversed (Crooke 1906:163). This suggests that the *fact* of differentiation was more important than the specific *form* these differences took. Furthermore, differentiation worked on a number of levels, hence poor Muslims wore *dhotis* like poor Hindus (Watson 1982 (1866):21), whereas the male elite, both Hindu and Muslim, often shared the same stitched styles.

7 Hinduism is not of course alone in advocating the use of draped clothing in ritual contexts. The Muslim pilgrim is forbidden to wear stitched clothes and dons two pieces of white cloth, known as *ihram* (holy, consecrated) dress for great and lesser pilgrimages (Encyclopedaedia of Islam 1971 vol 3:1052-3).

8 There were, of course, some exceptions. In parts of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), the tweed cap seems to have been an important status symbol (Vijayatunga 1970).

European women's dress consisted of tight fitting blouses or bodices, heavy full length skirts and a variety of forms of constrictive underwear. Following the fashions of Europe, women's dress became lighter and less restrictive in the early to mid twentieth century. Hats and shoes, like garments themselves, changed according to European fashions.

Having briefly outlined some of the dominant types of dress available in India, I shall now give a brief summary of British perceptions of them.

BRITISH ATTITUDES TO INDIAN AND EUROPEAN DRESS

Cohn has demonstrated how Europeans, arriving in India for the first time, were often shocked by the "nakedness" of the loin-clothed Indian boatmen (Cohn 1990:331). Fig. 2:7 portrays two stereotyped British reactions to Indian dress. The notion of the "graceful" (or picturesque) and the "disgraceful" (or indecent) were in fact frequently applied to both male and female attire. As far as men's dress was concerned, the "graceful" referred to the stitched robes worn by the Indian elite whereas the "disgraceful" referred to the draped clothing, popular amongst vast sections of the Indian population. In other words, subsumed within these two categories was a European assessment of most of the types of clothing commonly worn by Indian men. It is therefore useful to examine briefly just what such assessments implied.

The "disgraceful" sight of the loinclothed boatmen was not merely shocking to Europeans. It also confirmed their notion of the evolutionary inferiority of the Indian race. To many, such nakedness was proof of Indian backwardness and barbarism. Furthermore it revealed the blackness of the skin which was in itself regarded as a biological sign of racial inferiority. The effects of such a sight were described by Lieut. Col. John Briggs in a letter to a young British man. Briggs' intention was to warn the novice about the strangeness of Indian customs which he defended on the grounds of cultural relativism and "ignorance". Describing the Madras boatmen, he wrote:

> "To the European the sight is hardly human, to see a black animal kneeling on three bits of wood, connected only with the fibres of a coconut, paddling away alone several miles from land....
>
> "What then must be the feelings of a person, landing fresh from London, without having witnessed any intermediate state of society

NEW ARRIVALS.

Mr. Griffin.—" Well, Miss Green, what are your impressions of the manners and customs of the Natives?"

Miss Green.—" I have not been sufficiently long in the country to judge, but the costume is really charming, somewhat scanty perhaps; but so *picturesque*, *so graceful*, don't you think?"

Mr. Griffin.—Hem ! It strikes me at times as being rather *dis*-graceful !"

N. B.—Miss Green is looking *one* way, and Mr. Griffin the *other !!!*

Fig. 2:7

THE INDIAN CHARIVARI.—September 19, 1873.

between the height of European civilization in the finest city in the universe, and that to which he is so suddenly brought!" (Briggs 1828:26-28).

The notion of the "gracefulness" of Indian men's dress was a more ambiguous matter. On the one hand, the term "graceful" was clearly a sign of appreciation and there were many British men and women who were impressed by the flowing nature of Indian robes (cf. Crooke 1906:163, Elwin 1907:44). On the other hand, it implied unmanliness. As Briggs put it, the male Indian elite "are habited in long flowing linen robes, giving them in our eyes, an air of effeminacy" (Briggs 1828:28). The terms "effeminate" and "childlike" were frequently used by the British to describe the clothes of the Indian elite, particularly the elaborate and colourful combinations worn by the Maharajahs (cf. Steevens 1899:121-3). Such designations were part of a more general process by which the politically dominant group tried to define the Indian male as powerless and subordinate in his own country. Nandy has highlighted the homology between political and sexual dominance which became increasingly important to the British as their power in India increased (Nandy 1988). When the British described Indian men's clothes as "pretty" (Stuart 1809:152), "graceful" (Crooke 1906:163, Elwin 1907:44) and "effeminate" (Briggs 1828:28) they simultaneously denigrated Indian men to the unenviable status of women; attractive, pretty, dignified even, but irrelevant to serious political concerns. British attitudes to Indian dress therefore revealed their often condescending and humiliating attitudes towards Indians in general.

Since my aim is to demonstrate the heterogeneity of Indian responses to European dress, it is perhaps surprising that I should speak of British attitudes as though they formed a homogeneous British view. Clearly, if I were to examine the full gamut of British attitudes in the 19th century, I would find some variety. There were some Britons who appreciated differences in dress without assuming the superiority of European styles (Shore 1837, Birdwood 1880, Billington 1895). But my aim here is to expose certain dominant stereotypes which form a framework in which the Indian problem of what to wear can be better understood. Furthermore these stereotypes were significant for they were widely expressed in diaries, newspapers and journals and did represent something akin to a shared imperialist view. This was increasingly the case in the 19th century. Whereas in earlier times British travellers mingled to some extent with Indians, often settling with Indian women and adopting at least some Indian customs (Bayly 1990:73), by the 19th century British civil servants were expected to conform increasingly to a well defined set of values

and codes of conduct. What had been a scattered and heterogeneous group of European merchants and entrepreneurs leading individualistic lives, gradually became a minutely structured body of British political authority, the credibility of which rested to some extent on its ability to present a cohesive official view. According to this view, the British were superior beings and Indians were inferiors. Furthermore the British, through improving "native" behaviour and customs, felt that they could enable Indians to better themselves. The "graceful" and "disgraceful" nature of Indian clothes was not only proof of Indian effeminacy and barbarism but it was also a justification for the civilizing presence of the British in India.[9]

Like British attitudes and policies, British clothes became increasingly homogeneous over time. Early European travellers in India were, it seems, comparatively free to choose their own sartorial styles. Often they adapted or discarded their heavy European attire in quest of clothes more suitable to Indian customs and climate (Bayly 1990:73, Nandy 1988:5, Dar 1969:73). Woodruff for example describes 17th century British traders in Surat as wearing "fine white linen coats", girdles, scarfs, turbans and "moorman's trousers" (in Dar 1969:73). From paintings and descriptions it seems that most British men who chose to adopt Indian styles favoured loose stitched garments of cotton and silk to which they sometimes added European touches such as buttons and shoes.

As the British consolidated their political dominance in India in the early 19th century, the wearing of Indian styles became increasingly unacceptable. It was seen as a "sign of eccentricity" and even a "cause of discredit" (Bayly 1990:110). In 1830 legislation was introduced banning employees of the Company from wearing Indian dress at public functions (Cohn 1989:310). Even in private, the British adhered increasingly to the sartorial standards of Europe. Those who became "de-Europeanised" through "long residence among

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9 The desire to "civilize" the native's dress was particularly apparent in missionary activities where the naked were often quite literally clothed (cf. Cohn 1983:78-87). Elwin, a Poona missionary, aware of the problems of imposing European dress, wrote that "people have sometimes sarcastically spoken of the spread of Christianity amongst the heathen as being made a matter of trousers" (Elwin 1907:43). Elwin himself felt that "advancing refinement and civilization" was producing in Indians "an instinctive desire to be more fully clothed" (ibid:43). Ultimately, however, he favoured the idea that Christian converts should be clearly distinguishable from Hindus. It was therefore "advisable for them to adopt trousers (ibid:44).

undomesticated natives" were referred to disparagingly by Lord Lytton as "White baboos"[10] (Yule and Burnell 1903:44).

The Europeanisation of British public and domestic life was part of the wider process through which the British came to distance themselves increasingly from their Indian subjects (Cohn 1989:309, Nandy 1988:9). Maintenance of differences through dress and other social customs was important both for British self esteem and as a means of demonstrating British superiority to an Indian audience. Briggs described its importance as follows:

> ".... yet we should always preserve the European; for to adopt their (Indian) manners is a departure from the very principle on which every impression of our superiority, that rests upon good foundation, is founded....The European officer who assumes native manners and usages may please a few individuals, who are flattered or profited by his departure from the habits of his country; but even with these, familiarity will not be found to increase respect, and the adoption of such a course will be sure to sink him in the estimation of the mass of the community, both European and native, among whom he resides" (Briggs 1828:201).

Apart from the positive sense of security gained by maintaining sartorial standards, there was also the negative fear that failure to do so could result in a British man sinking or being morally weakened. It was essentially a fear that members of this small white minority might somehow be absorbed or at least tainted by the mass of Indians around them. Maintaining British standards of dress was a means of avoiding such deterioration. It became important for the Englishman in India to prove that he was as English as his fellows at home. If foreign influences were detected in his dress when he returned to England, they were viewed with a critical eye. Woodruff tells how Hickey's "gay coats caused so much talk when he first went home that he had to discard them" (in Dar 1969:74).

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10 The Bengali term "Baboo" was originally used as a term of respect attached to a person's name. It was reserved for men of distinction, but by the late 19th century the British frequently used the word "Baboo" on its own. Used thus, it took on a negative connotation with insulting implications. It referred to what the British described as the "superficially cultivated", ambitious, semi-anglicised, educated and "effeminate" Bengali man. It was often used to signify "a native clerk who writes English" (Yule and Burnell 1903:44). When Lytton accused Indianised Europeans of being "white baboos" he was referring to their hybrid nature, an unsatisfactory mixture of the negative aspects of both Indians and Europeans.

Fig. 2:8 Goanese Christians, illustrating the saying that the spread of Christianity is a "matter of trousers" (Elwin 1907;43). The photograph also demonstrates the contrasting responses of Indian men and women to European dress. From Johnson W., **The Oriental Races and Tribes, Residents and Visitors of Bombay,** vol 2, (1866).
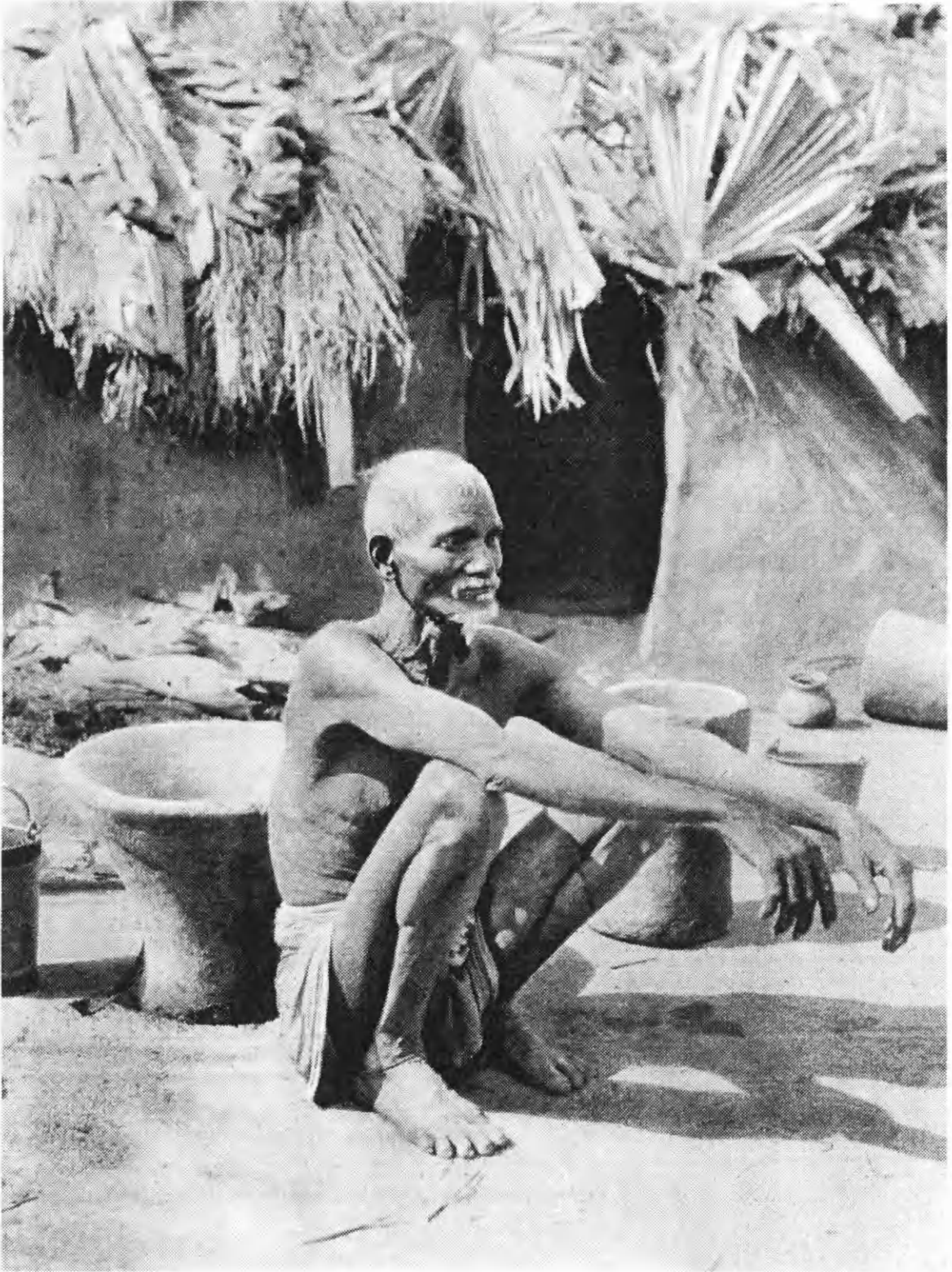
Fig. 2:9 A Patna farmer wearing a *langoti*, displaying the nakedness that so appalled Europeans. From Hurlimann, **Indien** (1928).

The need to preserve impeccable British standards was from time to time discussed in the satirical journal, the Indian Charivari. In 1873 it published a column entitled "Hints on Modern Etiquette: Being a series of letters from Lord Lushingslop to his son". In these letters the fictional Lord Lushingslop doled out sartorial advice to his son Tom, who was serving in India. In particular he was concerned that Tom's standards should never drop. With this in mind he told him the scandalous tale of how in 1870 a British officer was seen dining at "the Club", not in evening dress, but in a flannel shirt! Lord Lushingslop expressed his personal horror, concluding:

> "I am convinced, my dear Tom, that no son of mine would ever forget himself so far as to wear a flannel shirt; but I mention the incident to show you to what depths it is possible to sink in a land so deplorably far from the centre of civilization.
>
> "Nothing can be worse taste than to adopt unhesitatingly the manners and customs of a strange country. An English gentleman should *always* be dressed, so that, were he suddenly dropped into Bond Street, he would pass *unnoticed* in the crowd" (The Indian Charivari 27.6.1873).

The result of such fastidiousness about dress was that certain sartorial rituals such as dressing for dinner survived in India long after they had died out in Europe (Allen 1985:92). The British, far away from home and often isolated and scattered in different parts of India, needed such rituals to boost their own morale. The British civil servant, Kenneth Warren, who was posted to an isolated tea garden in Upper Assam, recalls:

> "If you lost your self-respect you were not looked upon in a respectful manner. So in order to maintain my self-respect I put on a dinner jacket and dressed for dinner and I said to my servants, who were quite likely to get a bit slack just looking after a man by himself in the middle of the jungle, "Now this is a dinner party and every night is a dinner party and you will serve dinner as though there are other people at the dinner table""(Allen 1985:62).

Retaining Britishness was at times a physical strain. In remote areas European clothes were not easily available, neither were the facilities for maintaining them readily at hand. Yet a British civil servant was expected to appear immaculately dressed and often went to considerable lengths to ensure this. John Morris, for example, recalled how he once had his dinner jacket "carried for miles and miles on porter's backs all the way up though Hunzu and Kashmir and on to the Pamirs" (ibid:102).

Quite apart from the difficulties of having to organise one's wardrobe, was the inconvenience caused by the extreme unsuitability of European clothes to the Indian climate. Not even children were exempt from wearing excessive quantities of clothes, despite the heat (Allen 1985:13). Meanwhile women were expected to abide by the sacred laws of propriety on formal occasions whatever the weather. Marian Barwell recalls how both hats and "kid or suede gloves were penitential wear in any but the very coldest months; nevertheless both were said to be absolutely *de rigeur* at luncheon at Government House or Belvedere, while..... *long* white gloves which if necessary must reach above the elbow, were a *sine qua non* at all evening functions at both places (Barwell 1960:109). Failure to abide by both these rules incurred the risk of being asked to leave (ibid).

The somewhat bizarre sight of the British dressing for dinner has been succinctly summarised by Aldous Huxley who visited India in 1930. He recognised the British dependence on their clothes:

> "From the Viceroy to the young clerk who, at home, consumes high tea at sunset, every Englishman in India solemnly dresses. It is as though the integrity of the British Empire depended in some directly magical way upon the donning of black jackets and hard-boiled shirts. Solitary men in dak bungalows, on coasting steamers, in little shanties among tiger-infested woods, obey the mystical imperative and every evening put on the funereal uniform of British prestige (Huxley in Alexander 1987:268)

While it was important for the British in India not to let standards slip (see fig. 2:10a), it also became important for them to protect themselves from the physical perils of their new environment (see fig. 2:10b). The alien customs and climate induced a fear of the unknown and clothes provided an important means of protection. Cohn has written at some length about the development of British theories concerning the relationship between clothing and the prevention of tropical diseases (Cohn 1983:88-111). In particular British men and women were recommended to wear flannel underwear rather than linen since flannel, being a slow conductor of heat, was thought to guard the body against sudden changes in the atmosphere (ibid: 1983:94). By the mid to late 19th century they were also recommended to wear their *sola topis* whenever they went out of doors.[11] It not only protected them from the much feared sun, but it also served

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11 If caught outside without their *topis*, BORs ("British Other Ranks") were confined to barracks for fourteen days (Allen 1985:37).

Fig 2:1Oa

A FACT.

"Are you hurt Charlie? No; but I wish I had a hat brush!"
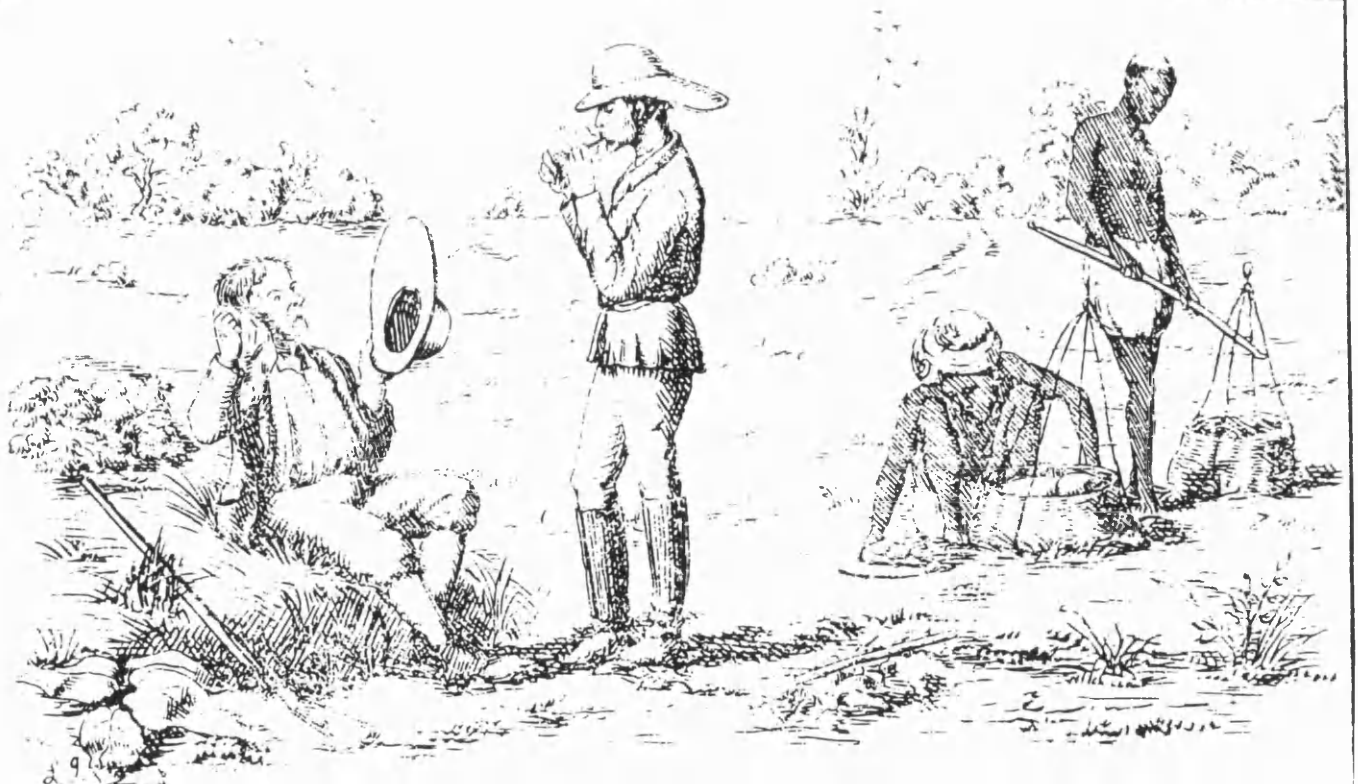
Rich Uncle. "You must find those boots very hot and uncomfortable Charles." *Charles.* "Ah, well, yes— Some protection tho'—country overrun with cobras, killed one just where you are sitting the other day."

Fig 2:10b

to give them a highly distinctive uniform type of headwear, which made all British men, women and children immediately recognisable as European.

But British sartorial habits in India cannot be regarded in isolation from the sartorial habits of those around them, nor from other aspects of British policy. The question arises as to why the British should have chosen to emphasise their social distance from Indians at precisely the time when they were apparently lessening the gap between British and Indian customs through advocating European education in India. If we are to understand the British need to develop sartorial distance, we must also examine developments in Indian men's dress in the same period. Throughout the 19th century, whilst the British were intensifying their Britishness, members of the Indian elite were in fact beginning to adopt various articles of European dress and some were adopting an entirely European image. The sartorial fastidiousness that developed amongst the British did therefore coincide with, and was by no means unrelated to, the adoption of European dress by Indians. The fact that some Indian men were coming to look increasingly like Europeans actually had the effect of encouraging the British to rigidify their own sense of sartorial correctness. In so doing they continually made their clothes and their accompanying rituals less accessible to the Indian elite. They were trying to escape "imitation".

The British desire to differentiate themselves from Indians was, then, the reverse of the Indian desire to integrate with the British. Similarly, the British fear of "sinking" was inextricably linked to fear of the Indian "rising".

Civilization by Degrees: British Attempts to Control Indian Dress

Indian dress posed not merely a sartorial dilemma but also an ethical dilemma for the British. On the one hand they felt it their duty to civilize barbaric natives, rescuing them from their own primitiveness. It was with such notions of "improvement" in mind that Captain Johnstone clothed the "naked savages" of the Juang hills (see Preface). But on the other hand the British did not want these natives to become *too* civilized. Captain Johnstone, for example, clothed the "naked savages" in Manchester saris, not European styles. If the British wanted to offer India the raiments of civilization, it was civilization with a cut off point above which Indians were not supposed to climb.

The problem of how to clothe the Indian was further linked to the problem of the British economy. Although the British did not want Indians to adopt

European styles, they did want them to buy and wear British manufactured textiles. By the late 18th century, Britain had developed sufficient technology in machine spinning and weaving to produce large quantities of cheap cotton textiles for home use and for export. Previously, Britain had imported cotton textiles from India but from this time onwards her need for Indian hand woven textiles diminished. British interests now lay in importing raw cotton which she could then export back to India in the form of cloth, spun and woven by machine in Britain.[12] But in order to produce textiles for the Indian market the British had to decide on the type of textiles they wished the Indian to wear. The choice was not entirely theirs, since the majority of rural Indians were conservative in their tastes.

British interests and intentions were carefully codified in John Forbes Watson's famous work, **The Textile Manufactures and Costumes of the people of India** (1866). It was accompanied by eighteen volumes containing 700 "working specimens" of Indian textiles. These were to be regarded as "Industrial museums" that would enable British manufacturers to study Indian tastes and to imitate her indigenous designs. Watson wrote:

> "India is in a position to become a magnificent customer....*What is wanted and what to be copied to meet that want*, is thus accessible for study in these museums (Watson 1866:2-3).

Watson pointed out that most of the clothes worn by the poorer sections of Indian society consisted of unstitched pieces of cloth. It was these "plainer cheaper stuffs" worn by the "hundreds and millions of lower grades" that the British should imitate (ibid:7). The more complex and elaborate garments worn by wealthy Indians were not however worth imitating since they could not be produced cheaply in England.

The British were successful in capturing a large proportion of the Indian demand for cotton textiles.[13] Aided by Indian conservatism, they could supply clothes for the Indian "lower grades" and in doing so, they could keep the

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12 For a concise account of the history of Indian and British textile relations, see Swallow 1982, Bean 1989. For detailed historical accounts see Irwin 1966, Chandra 1966.

13 Between 1849 and 1889 the value of British cotton cloth exports to India increased from just over £2m. a year to just under £27m. a year (Bean 1989:362).

Indian masses looking suitably Indian. But it was more difficult to control the clothes of the Indian elite. Furthermore it was this small educated minority, not the Indian masses, that posed a threat to the British for they were the most Anglicised Indians who came dangerously close to integrating themselves with the ruling British elite.

The British had in fact invented their own problem. It was succinctly expressed in Macaulay's famous "Minute on Education" (1835). Macaulay, who favoured the introduction of European education in India, argued the need for: "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Vittachi 1987:36). In other words, the Indian man was to be educated along Western lines and versed in Western values and tastes. The only thing that would convey his distinctiveness was the colour of his skin. The problem was that the anglicised Indian, *despite* his skin, was sometimes not distinctive enough (see fig. 2:11). Furthermore, he had been educated in European tastes and was therefore unlikely to stick to the Indian fashions worn by his forefathers.

The British tried to resolve this problem, not only by rigidifying their own dress, but also by trying to control the Indian adoption of Western styles (Chaudhuri 1976:58, Cohn 1989). The idea was to keep differences apparent. An incident in the life of Madhusudan Datta reveals this process of racial differentiation at work. Datta had been sent to Bishop's College in Calcutta where he was given a Western education and developed the Western tastes that Macaulay so recommended. Yet he was not allowed to share the college uniform of his fellows. Krishnamohan Bandyopadhay recalls:

> "The ecclesiastical authorities had an idea at the time that natives in India should not be encouraged to imitate the English dress - the tail coat and the beaver hat. It would have been infinitely better if they had not interfered with questions beyond their province - for it was this interference that goaded a fiery spirit like Datta's into an obstinate resistance. The collegiate costume was a black cassock and band and the square cap... The authorities wished him to put on a white cassock instead of black. Datta said, *either collegiate costume or his own national dress* (Radice 1986:202).

Datta, playing the British at their own game, appeared in college dressed in an elaborate Indian outfit of white silk with a highly colourful turban and shawl. The authorities, who felt this was embarrassingly like "fancy dress", were

IRRESISTIBLE.

Street Salesman (with insinuating emphasis)—"WANT GOOD HINDUSTANI BOOK, SAB? LEARN LANGUAGE QUICK!" *(delighted at being supposed a European DeSouza invests immediately.)*

THE INDIAN CHARIVARI.—

AUGUST 17, 1877

Fig. 2:11

OUR "WALLAHS."

1st Wallah.—" Who's that old bloke?"

2nd Wallah.—"Oh, he's only the fellow that educated me. He's devilish low, but I'm obliged to notice him. Though between ourselves, if it wasn't for his daughter, I'd be inclined to snub the old fool."

THE INDIAN CHARIVARI.—August 18, 1876.

Fig 2:12

finally forced to allow him to wear the ordinary uniform (ibid). But the fact that he had to fight for such a basic right highlights the peculiarly self-centred aspect of British policies for "improving" the Indian. As Macaulay's speech made clear, the British needed educated anglicised Indians as "interpreters". They were therefore quite willing to share their education system, but not their physical identity with the Indian. As Chaudhuri put it:

> "The Englishman in India..... considered his way of life superior to every other ..... but was wholly opposed to sharing its higher or more respectable features with anybody who was not to the manner born.....They were violently repelled by English in our mouths, and even more violently by English clothes on our backs" (Chaudhuri 1976:57-8).

Underlying this control of dress was a fear that the Indian might be a little too successful in his "imitation". He might even rise above the very people who had enabled him to rise in the first place (fig. 2:12).

British attempts to control Indian dress were by no means limited to the sphere of education. Cohn has illustrated how the British chose to Orientalise the uniform of the army, and the official dress of the Maharajahs (Cohn 1989). They also laid down regulations concerning what Indians should wear for official and ceremonial occasions (Chaudhuri 1976:58). Fig. 2:13 illustrates and describes the Madras Government's definition of appropriate official Indian dress.

Many of the disputes that arose over Indian men's dress focussed on the two issues of headwear and footwear (Cohn 1989). Time and time again the British were seen trying to control Indian appearances, but their failure was as apparent as their success. Cohn writes:

> "By 1854, so many Indians in Bengal, particularly in Calcutta, had taken to wearing European shoes and stockings, that the Governor General in Council passed a resolution allowing native gentlemen ...to appear in the presence of the servants of the British government wearing European boots or shoes. Twenty years later the rule was made general throughout India... as the practice of wearing European dress had spread up country...." (Cohn 1989:336).

The success of the Bengalis in winning this battle over footwear encouraged them to try to change one of the rules regarding headwear (ibid:336-8). A group of Bengali officials requested that Indians should be allowed to follow the European custom of uncovering their heads on official occasions. They also

requested that they should be allowed to wear caps rather than turbans in the work place. The cap was however opposed by the British on the grounds that it was neither "Western" nor "oriental" but was by implication, a bastard concoction (ibid:337).

To summarise, the British disliked Indian men wearing European dress, but regarded Indian dress as primitive. They wanted Indians to progress from barbarism, but not to the full heights of European civilisation. These preoccupations are perhaps best summarised in fig 2:14. Not even the improved and educated Indian male is portrayed in full European dress. It is a portrait of how far the British were prepared to let the Indian "advance". But there were some Indians who were not prepared to accept the somewhat begrudging offer of partial civilization. Their attitudes, along with the attitudes of others who adopted Western dress will be explored in the next half of this chapter which focuses on how Indians tackled the problem of what to wear in late 19th and early 20th century India.

INDIAN ATTITUDES TO EUROPEAN DRESS

It is impossible to define an "Indian view" of Western clothes in the same way that we defined a British view of Indian clothes for Indian reactions were neither so rigid nor so stereotyped as British ones. This is hardly surprising since the Indians who came into contact with or simply saw the peculiar white man with his strange apparel were from a variety of different religious, educational and regional backgrounds. Some saw the British and their clothes as peculiar, exotic, ugly, smart, funny, sacrilegious and unclean. Many saw them as civilized but rarely, so far as I can tell, did they find them beautiful. The fascination with European garments was related more to what they represented than to their aesthetic value.

People's attitudes to European styles of dress varied to some extent according to the closeness of the contact they had with Europeans. In areas with a strong missionary influence, such as parts of South India, or with a strong British presence, such as Calcutta, Western clothes were more available and were more rapidly adopted than in other parts of India. In many rural areas the inhabitants had little contact either with Europeans or their dress. Where such contact was minimal, European clothes were seldom adopted although European manufactured cloth was often worn in Indian styles.

MADRAS FASHIONS.

WE IMAGINE SOMETHING LIKE THE ABOVE WILL BE NECESSARY IN THE ANTI-CHAMBER OF GOVERNMENT HOUSE MADRAS, VIDE, THE FOLLOWING NOTICE, DATED MARCH, 1876.

THE FOLLOWING NOTICE, DATED MARCH 13TH, HAS BEEN ISSUED FROM THE MILITARY SECRETARY'S OFFICE, GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MADRAS:—"HINDU AND MAHOMEDAN GENTLEMEN INVITED TO GOVERNMENT HOUSE ARE REQUESTED TO OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS WITH REGARD TO DRESS:—THE HEAD DRESS SHOULD CONSIST OF A TURBAN. THE EXTERNAL DRESS SHOULD BE A LONG ROBE; A WAIST-BAND OR GIRDLE SHOULD BE WORN OVER OR UNDER THE ROBE; AND THE LOWER LIMBS SHOULD BE CAREFULLY COVERED. LOOSE SHAWLS ARE INADMISSIBLE. THE FEET NEED NOT BE COVERED, BUT IF SHOES OR BOOTS BE WORN, THEY MUST BE OF BLACK POLISHED LEATHER.

THE INDIAN CHARIVARI.—APRIL 14, 1876.

Fig 2:13

" Origin of Species "
OR
Improvement by " Natural Selection."
After Darwin.
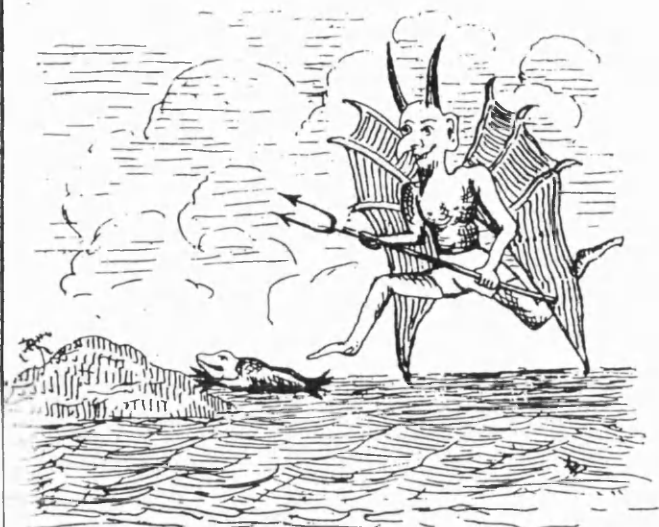
1st Geological Period.

First Protoplasm, shapeless thing,
From which all Human kind did spring ;
A spirit, jealous at the sight,
Gave it a kick, just out of spite,   *

* Note.—See introduction to Moore's " Lalla Rookh."

2nd Period.

Now Protoplasm lives on dry land,
" Baboon " he's called, with club in hand ;
Baboons, however, talking shirk,
For fear they might be made to work !

3rd Period.

Immense improvement now he shows,
He takes on human shape, and woes ;
He drops the " n," and tail at once,
And calls himself " Baboo the dunce."

4th, or Modern Period.

The scanty dress he used to use,
He now casts off for pants and shoes ;
From " dunce " to scholar, man of parts,
He's changed, and " Master " is of " Arts."
This, and more titles all combined,
In Baboos of our day you'll find.

Fig 2:14

There were plenty of reasons why Indians might not have wanted to adopt European dress. It was heavy, restrictive, unsuitable to India's climate, expensive by comparison to Indian dress, and comparatively difficult to obtain. Furthermore Western clothes did not fit into the existing classifications of appropriate caste, regional or religious styles. A number of Hindus felt that dressing in European clothes, like eating foreign food or travelling abroad, was a violation of caste. Those who succumbed to such foreign influences risked being excommunicated. Certainly many of the first Indians who crossed the seas to Europe and returned with the unclean foreigner's customs and dress were regarded as a category apart from other Hindus. They became known as the "England- returneds", a sort of ritually impure group with a peculiarly high status in secular terms. Their ritual impurity was born out by people's unwillingness to intermarry with them, despite their prestigious educational qualifications.

There were other risks in adopting European dress. Not only did it make an Indian man look different from his fellows, it also meant that he behaved differently. With the clothes of the European there was a whole new etiquette which often conflicted with accepted Indian ideas of respectable behaviour. This was particularly clear in the case of rituals surrounding headwear and foot wear (Cohn 1989). Whereas Indians normally removed their shoes on entering a building, the British kept theirs on. They thought naked feet disgusting while Indians thought shoes inside the house polluting. Similarly, the Indian idea that the head should be covered as a sign of respect conflicted with the British idea that a man should uncover his head as a sign of respect.[14] The adoption of European dress was not therefore merely a sartorial concern. It involved changes in lifestyle and values. A man in a suit would not for example sit on the floor Indian fashion or eat with his hands. He would expect his house or at least his quarters of the house to be equipped with the appropriate furniture to suit his clothes. But the adoption of all these foreign customs risked alienating a man

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14 Cohn discusses these differences in terms of a clash of cosmologies. He shows how the functionalist British failed to recognise the symbolic importance of the head and feet in Hindu thought. He suggests that the head, as the seat of pure substance and knowledge, and the feet as the seat of pollution, required covering in Hinduism (Cohn 1989:346). This is undoubtedly the case, although it should also be pointed out that the British also perceived the head as the locus of knowledge and viewed their own headwear in more than functional terms.

from his own people and often invited criticism from members of his own society.

The decision to adopt European dress was therefore a risky one for it implied a change of identity and lifestyle. Yet the emergence of Western clothes in India could not be ignored by educated Indians any more than the emergence of the British themselves, for, as I have shown, British dress represented all the values which the British boasted: superiority, progress, decency, refinement, masculinity and civilization. These values came to be shared by some members of the Indian elite, particularly those educated in the Western fashion. If they wanted to be modern and participate in this civilization, wearing the correct clothes was surely one of the means of doing so.

The problem of whether or not to adopt Western clothes revolved then around the conflict between two sets of values, an Indian set[15] and a European set, both of which seemed incompatible and unreconcilable. What was honourable and polite according to one set was dishonourable and impolite according to the other. But for many there was no clear-cut boundary between Indian and Western dress. They incorporated elements of Westernisation by degrees. The problem of what to wear for elite Indian men in the 19th century can perhaps best be defined as the problem of how much foreignness to allow into one's clothes.

Some Indian Solutions to the Problem of What to Wear

Foreign Fabrics in Indian Styles
The simplest and least controversial way of resolving the difficulty of how to modernise one's dress without appearing to desert one's "traditional" identity was to adopt European fabrics but to retain Indian styles. This option was common in towns and cities and to some extent in villages where cloth was hawked by itinerant traders. The British, as we have seen, had taken care to reproduce cloth of the Indian type in order to capture the popular market. By producing cheap machine-made versions of the finely textured fabrics,

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15 In speaking of an Indian set of values I do not intend to imply that these values were in any way cohesive, nor that they were necessarily perceived as "Indian" by the people who held them. Within the Indian set of values were numerous smaller sets of values which could be more or less conflictual. Yet in relation to the British, these other sets may be regarded as Indian.

previously worn only by the higher echelons of Indian society, they attracted enthusiastic customers (Bayly 1986).

Although British cloth was made in the land of the "unclean" foreigner it does not appear to have been tainted with the negative aspect of foreignness. Silberrad wrote of the United Provinces in 1898: "There is hardly a trace of preference for hand-woven over machine-woven articles on caste or sentimental grounds" (Bayly 1986:308). Quite the contrary, many were attracted to the new variety that foreign cloth offered. The aniline dyes used in Europe introduced a whole new range of colours which had an exotic appeal in India. According to Billington it was shear brightness that attracted buyers: "It is the gaudiness of rose-pink, of emerald green, of royal blue, or amber-yellow which constitutes a leading attraction of our European piece-goods, and commends them to native purchasers when they are displayed in native bazaars (Billington 1973 (1895):185-6).

For some, it was the very "foreignness" of European cloth that made it appealing. The Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) writer, J. Vijayatunga, has described the local people's excitement when European goods were hawked to his village by itinerant traders at the turn of the century. Their merchandise varied from cloth to safety pins to Pear's soap. All of them had a special value because foreignness was itself a value:

> "Among us anything that is better, or considered better, has the adjective *Rata* (signifying abroad) fixed to its name....The merchandise of Europe is definitely *Rata Badu* (abroad goods) and that is why they are better than good" (Vijayatunga 1970:38).

The decision to adopt European fabrics while retaining Indian styles was a particular favourite with Indian women, both rural and urban. Those women whose husbands adopted European dress rarely followed suit by adopting European women's styles, for these contravened ideas of female modesty and respect too grossly.[16] At most, Indian women added accessories such as shoes, blouses, petticoats and jackets to their Indian dress.[17] But while they retained the distinctive sari, they simultaneously followed European fashions in fabrics,

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16 For a discussion of the relationship between women's dress and notions of female modesty, see chapter 5 of this thesis.

17 The wide adoption of the blouse was probably the most noticeable effect of British influences on Indian women's dress.

colours and designs, thereby incorporating the latest trends from Europe and giving them a new Indian form. Documentation of this process may be found in the Indian Ladies Magazine (published in Madras), one of the first English language journals for women in India. In the 1920's and 1930's it ran a weekly editorial in which contemporary fashions were discussed and suitable clothes recommended to women readers. Sometimes Indian women were accused of paying too much attention to the West, as in the following extract:

"The Indian woman never gives up her sari; but how often does she change the fashion of it, or its accompaniments, in accordance with European fashion. Changes of the bodice of various kinds, fashions in footwear and in coiffeur, alterations in the style of the sari, often detract from the grace of the Indian woman's dress, sometimes even looking ridiculous" (ILM 1934,VII,1:77)

At other times women were encouraged to take note of Western trends:

"The latest European fashion for afternoon wear seems to be fine voiles and muslins with large tendrilly designs on them. I cannot help thinking that this will be very effective when carried out on sarees..." (ILM 1930,III,8:380)

Whether women were thought to be too fashionable or insufficiently fashionable is less significant than the fact that the "fashion" was always defined in Western terms. Through constant comparisons and suggestions, the Indian Ladies Magazine processed the latest ideas from Europe into a new Indian form providing continual reassurance that the Indian woman could be fashionable without sacrificing her traditionalism.[18]

There were many men who followed a similarly safe solution to the problem of what to wear, adopting not only Western fabrics, but also tailoring various Indian garments until they took on a European veneer. The historian, Abdul Halim Sharar has provided a detailed account of the gradual incorporation of

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18 Indian women's reluctance to adopt European styles was indicated in a debate that arose in the 1930's concerning what Indian women should wear for tennis. It was recognised that the sari was cumbersome and restricted movement. But the European woman's tennis frock was not thought decent for the Indian woman. Finally it was suggested that the Indian woman could wear "a blouse and a fairly thick white skirt..., reaching about half way between ankles and knees, and a thin half-sari on top, held in place at the waist with a gold belt." This, it was thought, would indicate "the modesty of the sari" while at the same time allowing scope for movement (I. L. M.: 1933 vol6,3:146). Rather than rejecting suitable Indian styles, Indian women found means of adapting their habitual clothes to suit the occasion.

European elements into men's dress in Northern India. He shows how the Persian cape (*balaba* or *chapkan*) was gradually given a more Indian form (*angarkha*), and finally developed into the *sherwani* which had buttons down the front, following the European fashion. In their early stages men's robes were made from the luxury fabrics of muslin and silk and were often embroidered. But, as they became more Europeanised, they became increasingly like the Englishman's frock coat, made from heavy dull material with less ornamentation and given tight sleeves (Sharar 1975:169-170). Some men added a white shirt collar to the *sherwani* to complete the look (ibid).

The Westernisation of Indian garments was a gradual and subtle process much less controversial than the actual adoption of European garments themselves. It was, in a sense, a safe compromise. As far as Indian men were concerned it was a means of looking respectable without appearing to desert one's Indian identity. Furthermore by eliminating the more elaborate aspects of their former attire, they could escape the accusation that they looked effeminate. Slim and tailored Indian garments were then a popular solution particularly amongst professional Indians who worked in the Law Courts in the mid to late 19th century. Such outfits were worn with the type of headwear (turban, *phenta*, cap) considered appropriate to an individual's socal and religious standing. The British, as we have seen, admired this type of Indian professional dress for it was smart and decent without being too close to their own dress.

Mixing Indian and European Garments
There were many Indians who wanted more than a European version of Indian dress. They wanted to adopt European garments themselves, not least because they wanted to participate in European civilization. Some such men did not adopt full European dress, but rather wore a mixture of both Indian and European garments simultaneously. In Bombay the wealthy Parsis (fig 2:15) were probably the first men to adopt European shoes and trousers which they wore with their own style of coat and distinctive Parsi hat (*phenta*). Umbrellas and watches also became important adjuncts to the outfit of the smart, educated man.

In India's towns and occasionally her villages maharajahs and local elites also began to invent new combination outfits that consisted of both Indian and European garments. The latter were not always easy to get hold of and this, combined with their expense, made them good status symbols which marked out

a man's superiority and progressiveness to the local community (fig 2:16). The status attached to such clothes has been humorously described by Vijayatunga in a short essay entitled **White Man Passes Through** (first published in 1935). In it he shows how the important leaders of his local area, inspired by the sight of the white man, evolved a new composite style of dressing. Their contact with Europeans was little more than the occasional fleeting glance, but even this had a profound effect on the sartorial hierarchy of this Sri Lankan locality where European clothes were undoubtably tokens of European civilization:

> "It must not be supposed for a moment that we in our village are by any means out of touch with Civilisation. Civilisation passes our way quite often, only it does not stop and stay with us. Nevertheless, we give Civilisation a very good scrutiny each time it passes us....

> "Now and then the White Man himself flits past our village. Some half mile away beyond the bend of our road we hear the approach of his motorcycle. Then spluttering formidably, a cloud of dust in its trail, appears the Machine Wondrous and sitting astride it a figure whose head and face are hidden beneath a "pig-sticker" topee. We are all eyes on the phenomenon....we marvel at him and the Civilisation of which he is so marvellous a specimen.

> "The White Man then,.... is our standard. Once the standard is recognised and accepted, it is easy to emulate....

> "...the President of the Village Tribunal... wears a white cotton suit of the so called European cut and wraps over his trousers a white cloth Sarong fashion in the native style, but leaving a good twelve inches of the trouser ends to be seen. Whether this is an additional respect for the European trousers or the covering up of a shameful lapse I have never fathomed, but all Gansabhava (Village tribunal) Presidents,...in fact all the aristocrats and those who wish to pass as such.... they all sport the mystic masonic all-round apron over their trousers.

> "Much as we appreciate the tranquillity of our village, and its claims to distinction, we are even more thrilled by the knowledge that we are in touch with the secrets of Civilisation, that it flows past us and that we are not wholly isolated or ignored" (Vijayatunga 1970:32-4).

To the local elite of Vijayatunga's region, European dress was clearly a status symbol that enabled them to distinguish themselves from the common people and participate in the mysteries of "civilization". By wrapping a white *sarong* (wrap) over their trousers they were chosing what might be considered a diplomatic solution to the problem of what to wear, for they were able to express their acknowledgment and knowledge of both European and Ceylonese customs simultaneously. They could be modern without appearing to desert local tradition. Furthermore they did not have to worry about British reactions
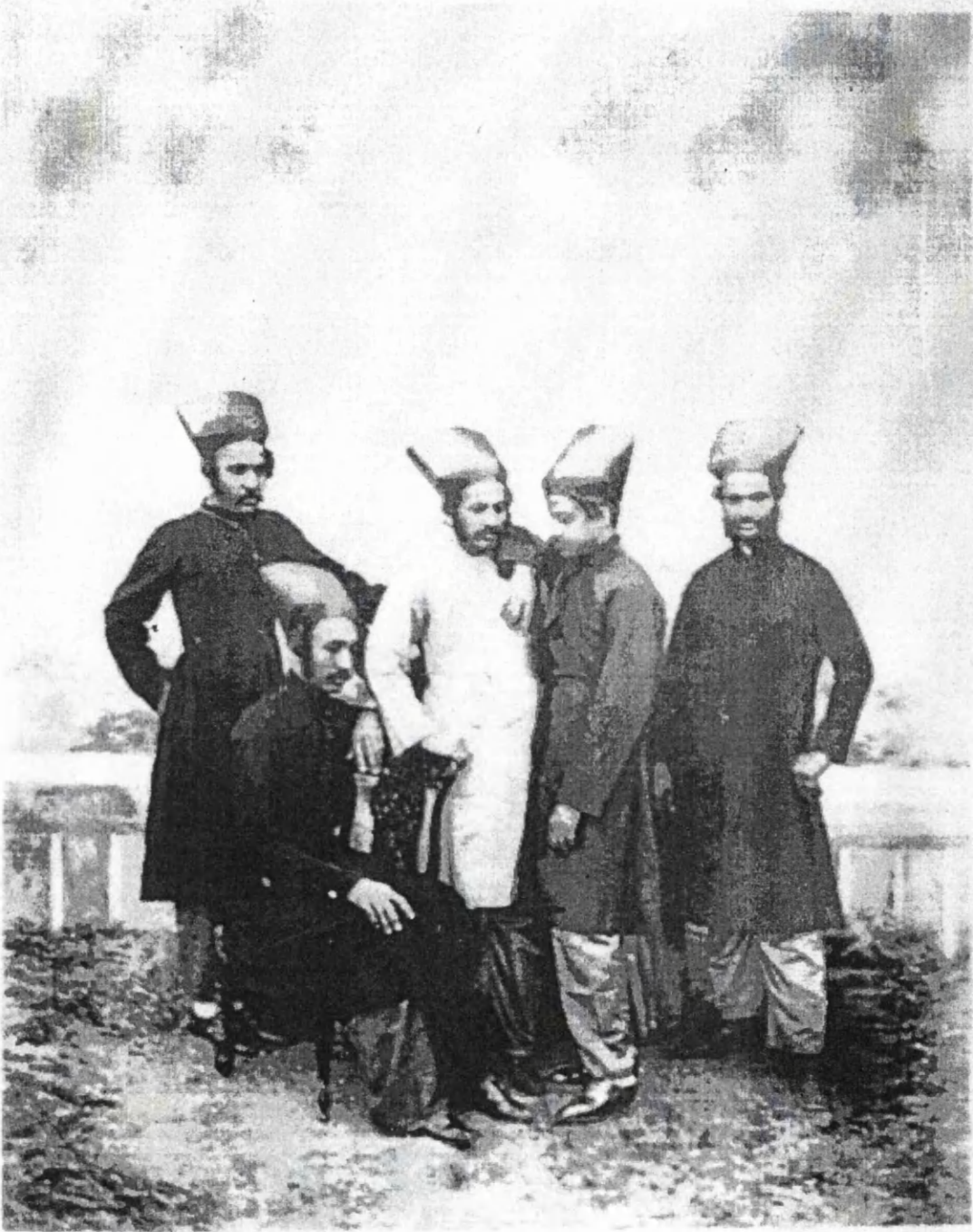
Fig. 2:15 Bombay Parsis, wearing their distinctive hat (*phenta*), combined with tailored collarless coats, baggy trousers and European style boots. From Johnson, **The Oriental Races and Tribes, Residents and Visitors of Bombay,** vol 1, (1863).

Fig. (a)

Fig. (b)

Fig. 2:16 Village headmen from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

(a): Urwick W, **Indian Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil**, (1891).
(b): Schlagintweit E., **Indien in Wort und Bild**, vol 1 (1880).

to their dress because they had so little contact with the British. Their reputation depended more on the opinions of members of the local community. If Vijayanutga's opinion is at all representative, the local community were impressed.

The adoption of a mixture of European and Indian clothes was extremely popular in India's cities, where European garments were readily available for purchasing or for copying. In particular Calcutta, the heart of British administration and home of many British residents, became the centre for these composite fashions. The various forms that such outfits took at the turn of the century have been described by Nirad Chaudhuri:

> "In my boyhood the European dress-shirt in its stiff version was by itself a recognised formal wear for men. Wealthy people went to visit and even to parties in these shirts, looking very imposing with their starched fronts, gold 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" (Chaudhuri 1976:6).

Other popular combinations described by Chaudhuri were the European coat worn over a *dhoti* with no shirt, and the European shirt, worn without a collar or tie but with an embroidered shawl draped over the top (ibid:6-7). In other words, Bengali men invented their own new fashion which retained what they liked of Indian garments while adding what they admired from Europe. It enabled a man to be "in fashion" without having to Westernise his appearance completely. Furthermore, it was an excellent solution for those Indians who could not afford full European dress. But one disadvantage of wearing such composite fashions was that they incited the disdain and ridicule of the British. By the late 19th century, men who wore such hybrid outfits were dismissed as "baboos". Their dress and language were a constant source of ridicule in literature and in the press (fig. 2:17).

One aspect of this British loathing of the "baboo" was that he transgressed the boundary line which separated the British from the Indian, a boundary which, as we have seen, the British were increasingly anxious to maintain. Fears of the chaos that might ensue from the rise of unchecked baboodom are expressed in fig 2:18 which portrays a reversal of Anglo Indian societal norms when king Baboo takes the British throne.

The extent to which Indians were aware of British disdain and the extent to which they cared about it must have varied from individual to individual. But British mockery was difficult to ignore in a place like Calcutta where many Indians were actually employed as officials, clerks and bankers under the British. The fact that Indians later struggled to stamp out the use of the word "baboo" suggests that many *were* aware. The decision to wear a mixture of Indian and European dress was not then without its consequences. Though largely accepted and welcomed as fashion by many Indians, it was treated with contempt by the British and by some more fully anglicized Indians. Many self aware Indian men who wished to be respected by both their own people and the British took care to avoid such combinations. But there were other possible solutions to the problem of how to retain Indian garments while at the same time adopting European ones.

Changing Clothes: A Solution to Cultural Dualism?

Changing one's clothes to suit the occasion allowed an Indian man to maintain, if necessary, two distinct sartorial identities, an Indian one and a European one. The advantage of this approach was that it enabled a person to dress according to two different and often incompatible standards of cultural correctness. Rather than incurring the ridicule of the British by wearing hybrid combinations, a man could wear full British dress when acting in an official capacity and full Indian dress in the presence of his family and Indian friends. By changing back into Indian clothes before entering his own home, he could express his ultimate loyalty to his own people. In the same way that Hindus had protected the sanctity of their houses from the threatening and polluting "Muslim dress", so they began to protect their homes from the clothes of the European:

> "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 courtyard, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the family deities and the women" (Chaudhuri 1976:57).

The advantage of this solution was that a man could be suitably dressed wherever he went. But he had to decide where to draw the line between his European appearance and his Indian appearance, a decision that was not always simple. The threshold of the house was, as we have seen, a popular transformation point between one sartorial identity and another, but even here there was the problem of what to wear when people one normally mixed with outside the house came inside the house. The wealthy and fashionable lawyer

A FACT.

SEEN IN THE BAZAR.

Baboo thinks he's got the right "thing" in Boots this time.

—JANUARY 23, 1874.
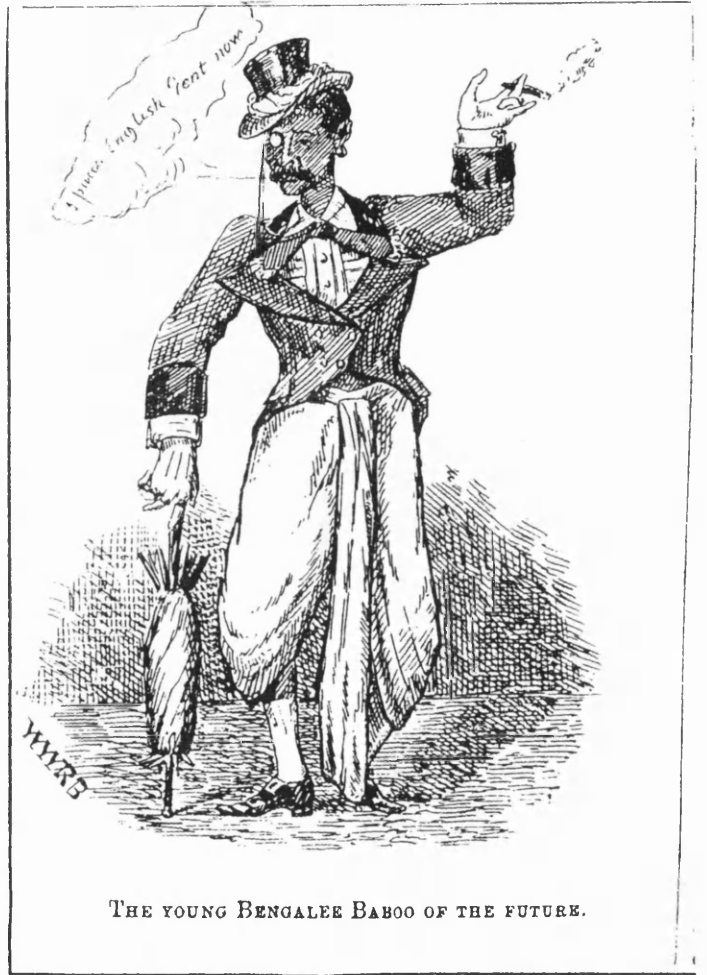
THE YOUNG BENGALEE BABOO OF THE FUTURE.

.—OCTOBER 3, 1873.

THE INDIAN CHARIVARI.

Fig. 2:17

THE BABOO'S PROGRESS
WHAT WE ARE COMING TO

Fig. 2:18   THE COMING K——.

Motilal Nehru, who was renowned for his tastes in European fashion, usually wore a fine muslin *kurta pyjama* inside the house, reserving his European suits for public life. But there were various occasions on which he felt obliged to keep up his Western appearance even inside his own home. In 1907 he wrote to his son Jawaharlal who was at school in Harrow:

> ".. the special correspondent of the Daily Chronicle and other English newspapers has been my guest for a whole week and has proved a most exacting one. Imagine the inconvenience of having to remain dressed from morning to night in my own house!" (Nehru M, 1982, vol 1:136).

Motilal does not say why he felt it necessary to dress like a European in the presence of Europeans even in his own house, but it is possible that he felt he would not be taken seriously enough in Indian apparel. There were, then, times when the private self had to be sacrificed to the public image even in the private space of one's own home.

Some men confined their European image to a work context only and continued to wear Indian dress in private and in other public contexts not related to work. To them, the office or the work place was the boundary line between an Indian and a European image. Some would change their clothes whilst still at home. Others would perform the act in public. Elwin describes how Poona policemen, going off duty, would actually take their trousers off in the street and walk home in "just tunic and undergarments fluttering in the wind" (Elwin 1907:45). More recently, a Nayar man informed the anthropologist Kathleen Gough: "When I put on my shirt to go to the office, I take off my caste, and when I come home and take off my shirt, I put on my caste" (Srinivas 1968:123)

Sometimes the sartorial border was drawn in wider geographical terms. A man employed in an urban setting would often wear European dress in the city, but revert back to Indian clothes when returning to his natal village, a custom not uncommon even today. He could choose whether to draw the boundary line at the entrance to the village or the entrance to his state or anywhere in between, but failure to draw it at all, could cause considerable offence. Ramanujan writes:

> "My father, on his annual trips to his home state of Kerala, in the 1940's, felt compelled to remove his Western suit at the border town of Alwaye. On one occasion he forgot to take off his suit and ran into ridicule everywhere he stopped. People who waited on him made it clear that they found his suit an affront" (Ramanujan 1984:32).

Drawing the boundary wider still, many Indians maintained distinctive European and Indian sartorial identities according to the country they were in. For most Indians, visiting Europe involved wearing European dress and for some returning to India involved returning to Indian dress. Dadabhai Naoroji, otherwise known as the Grand Old man of India, wore immaculate European clothes throughout his time in London in the 1880's, but when he returned to India in 1893, he stepped from the Boat in Bombay harbour "dressed in the Parsi style, in black coat and turban and red silk trousers" (Masani 1960:122). But even the solution of changing one's clothes according to the country was not without its complications. A man travelling to Europe had to decide at which point to change his clothes. Should he, like the young Gandhi, buy his European apparel in India and wear it throughout the voyage or should he, like Mahendra Pratap, buy his new clothes on reaching England, thereby travelling in Indian dress? In his autobiography Pratap describes the self conscious sartorial anxiety he felt on his trip to England in 1911:

> "I started this trip in pure Indian costume and though the eyes kept gazing on my Indian uniform I managed to pass through in full dress to London via Paris. In London, however, I made a sudden change to European dress. I bought everything ready made all in a hurry" (in Walsh 1983:35-6).

Pratap's solution was perhaps more advisable than Gandhi's for Gandhi had the appropriate European clothes without the knowledge of when to wear them. His friends had rallied around in Bombay, equipping him with suitable outfits before his departure from India in 1888. Recalling his somewhat embarrassing arrival in England, Gandhi writes:

> "On the boat I had worn a black suit, the white flannel one, which my friends had got me, having been kept especially for wearing when I landed. I had thought that white clothes would suit me better when I stepped ashore, and therefore I did so in white flannels. Those were the last days of September, and I found I was the only person wearing such clothes" (Gandhi 1989:38).

One of the major problems with changing one's clothes to suit the context, was that one had to decide where one context ended and another began. This involved some kind of prior knowledge of the contexts in which one was going to move. And even if this knowledge was readily available, there was still the problem of the awkward moment of transformation itself. Where and how should a man actually perform the act of changing his clothes and how could he avoid being caught embarrassingly in the middle of the act? This problem has

been pinpointed by the Bengali artist, Gogonendranath Tagore, in a satirical drawing of a man caught in the very act of transforming himself into an English gentleman (fig. 2:19). The cartoon was probably a jibe at the fact that Indians were sometimes thrown out of first class railway carriages if they were not dressed in civilized European attire, but it also highlights the peculiarly schizophrenic existence lead by those people who were constantly switching identities so as to be appropriately dressed on each occasion.

There were plenty of reasons why a man might have chosen to wear European dress, even if it was only a temporary adoption. For being dressed in European clothes was not only a means of self-presentation, it was also the means by which other people judged you. There were undoubtedly privileges in being dressed like the proverbial English gentleman. Even if the British did not actually want Indians to wear European dress, they none the less treated them more respectfully if they did. This was revealed by an incident in 1917 when the Maharajah of Bikaneer returned to Bombay from Europe and was immediately ordered to show his passport. His passport had not been demanded when he left Bombay, so he wanted to know why it should be demanded on his return. The police officer on duty apparently explained that the Maharajah had been in "European garb" when he left the country but that now he was dressed in "native costume" (Hindi Punch 22,7,1917).

Clearly, to many Britons Indian clothes were a mark of inferior status. Chaudhuri demonstrates this with reference to the rhetoric of lavatory signs in Calcutta where the local Corporation replaced blatant racial discrimination with the more subtle discrimination by clothes:

> "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" (Chaudhuri 1976:88).

But Indian men were not merely the victims of these prejudices. They also used them to their advantage. In the same way that young boys deliberately dressed to look impoverished and so dupe the local memsahib into giving them clothes (see Introduction), so some men adopted Western dress as a strategic move. Elwin tells how a young boy at the Mission School successfully disguised his humble background by learning good English, wearing European dress, *sola*

topi and all, and adopting an Indian name. He got immediate admission into Government Office and advanced rapidly (Elwin 1907:49). By contrast a boy in a *dhoti*, who turned up at the railway office for an interview, was roughly ordered outside (ibid).

The British were not alone in their discriminatory judgments. Members of the Indian elite who had adopted Western dress were often equally prejudiced against their own people whom they now considered insufficiently dressed. Rabindranath Tagore suffered in his youth when he went on holiday near the Ganges but was not allowed to accompany the elders into a nearby village, on account of his "indecent" dress. He recalls:

> "My feet were bare, I had no scarf or upper robe over my tunic, I was not dressed fit to come out; as if it was my fault! I never owned any socks or superfluous apparel, so not only went back disappointed for that morning, but had no chance of repairing my shortcomings and being allowed to come out any other day" (Tagore 1917:48).

Rabindranath's nephew, Gogonendranath, was highly critical of the European style of snobbery that some Indian men had adopted towards their fellows. In fig. 2:20 he shows Westernised Bengalis turfing orthodox Hindus out of a club on account of their unsuitable attire.

By the early 20th century an increasing number of Indian men had travelled to England, attended British universities (usually Oxford or Cambridge), and become accustomed to a British standard of living. As these "England-returneds" took up important professional posts and became reincorporated into the Indian elite (who had at first shunned them), they set new standards for the Anglicised Indian male. Instead of changing back into Indian apparel for domestic life, some began to retain Western standards even within their own homes. Amongst these men, Indian clothes were kept largely for ceremonial use on religious occasions. Such men no longer felt the need to wear their Indian identity on their sleeves. While their wives maintained an Indian appearance, they succumbed to a full European look. But the number of men who adopted full European dress was surprisingly few.

Full European Dress
It was perhaps a combination of British prejudice against Indian dress and an Indian desire to be taken seriously and participate in "civilization" that motivated some Indians from the educated elite classes to adopt full European dress.

রূপান্তর—Metamorphoses.
Don't disturb me now, I am about to become a Sab.

Fig 2:19 Satirical drawing by Gogonendranath Tagore. From Tagore G., *Virup Vajra* (1917).

THE EXPULSION

Fig. 2:20 From Gangoly O.C. (ed), **The Humerous Art of Gogonendranath Tagore** (n.d.). Original drawings appeared in the National Guardian (c.1890)

Madhusudan Datta is said to have been the first Indian to wear a complete European outfit into the High Court in Calcutta. The year was 1866 when other professional "England-returned" Bengalis were wearing *chapkan* and a cap (Radice 1986:202-3). Not only did Dutta flout this convention, but he also "let it be known that England-returned Bengalis would not be welcome at his house unless they dressed similarly" (ibid:203). This upset some of his more orthodox contemporaries. The Bengali writer, Bhudev Mukhopadhay, for example, frequently lamented what he called "Madhu's despicable inclination to imitate" (Raychaudhuri 1988:30) which manifested itself in his dress, his life style and his later conversion to Christianity.

Datta's behaviour was judged particularly harshly by his fellows because he was the first to break the unspoken code that an Indian must look Indian within his own home and with his fellows. For second and third generation "England-returneds" it became easier to break the rule. It also became increasingly common for Indians to wear European dress at social functions, even when there were no Europeans present. But the desire to wear full European dress was by no means shared by all educated Indians. There were always some who maintained a critical distance. Gogonendranath Tagore, for example, feared that too much Westernisation would result in a complete loss of Indian identity (see fig.2:21).

There were surprisingly few Indian men who went for a whole hearted Western look. Many continued to change their clothes on entering their houses. Comfort may have been a consideration here as much as culture, for European clothes were hot and heavy for the Indian climate. But there was also an implication of cultural loyalty that was rarely abandoned. This was most often expressed in a man's headwear. Many Indian men who wore European dress maintained some form of Indian turban or cap. As Cohn has pointed out, the head was the centre of purity in Indian culture and a man's headdress was also his most distinctive badge of affiliation to different caste or religious groups (Cohn 1989, Crill 1985). The fact that many Indians retained Indian headwear not only implied a desire to protect themselves from wholehearted identification with the British, but it also suggested that they may have wished to retain their own sense of caste, religious or regional identity while wearing the otherwise secularising European dress. In an article in Hindi Punch in 1917, it was argued that those Indians who had adopted European hats were not only disloyal to their countrymen, but had also started treating their fellow Indians with the contempt

normally displayed by Europeans. Through resigning themselves to the white man's hat they had come to adopt the white man's sense of superiority. The article was accompanied by a drawing in which European hats were seen sneering and jeering at disgruntled Indian turbans and caps of various kinds (fig. 2:22). Throughout the difficult relationship between Indian and European dress the head usually emerged as the most sensitive of sartorial issues. Not many Indians adopted the *sola topi* which seemed too closely identified with the British (Cohn 1989:334). It amounted to a British equivalent of caste headwear.

But if loyalty to one's culture was one reason why "England-returneds" rarely adhered to full European dress, there were also other reasons. In particular, there was the development of an increasing awareness that however like the proverbial English gentleman they looked, Indians would never quite be accepted in British society. European dress might be a passport to respectability, but it was not a passport to full integration. An Indian could only *look* the English gentleman; he could never actually *be* one, even if he wanted to be. Furthermore there was the colour of his skin - that last stamp of Indian identity. Even when the shade of his skin was in fact close to that of the European, the Indian remained, it seemed, "coloured" in the eyes of the British.[19]

The reality of British attitudes to Indian skin, and hence to Indians, was brought home to many by an incident in the life of Dadabhai Naoroji. Being a Parsi and therefore of Persian descent, Naoroji's skin was pale by Indian standards, but not it seems quite pale enough. In 1886 this much respected man was the first Indian ever to stand as a candidate for the British Parliament. Dressed in impeccable European style, he addressed a meeting in the town hall at Holborn. An eye witness recalled:

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19 This was particularly clear in British attitudes to Eurasians, (those born of a European father and Indian mother). If their skin was pale enough and if they dressed in suitable European clothes, they could "pass" as Italians, Greeks or Spaniards, gaining access to the exclusive British social milieu with its European only clubs (Younger 1983). Here, looking convincingly European was not merely a matter of "imitation", it was a matter of cultural and social integration. But if a Eurasian's ancestry were known, then, despite pale skin, (s)he was no longer accepted in British society. Eurasians were notorious for dressing in European styles and for wearing the *sola topi*, even after the British departed from India. Even today Eurasian men and women cling to European styles as a means of demonstrating their difference from Indians (cf. Gaikwad 1967).
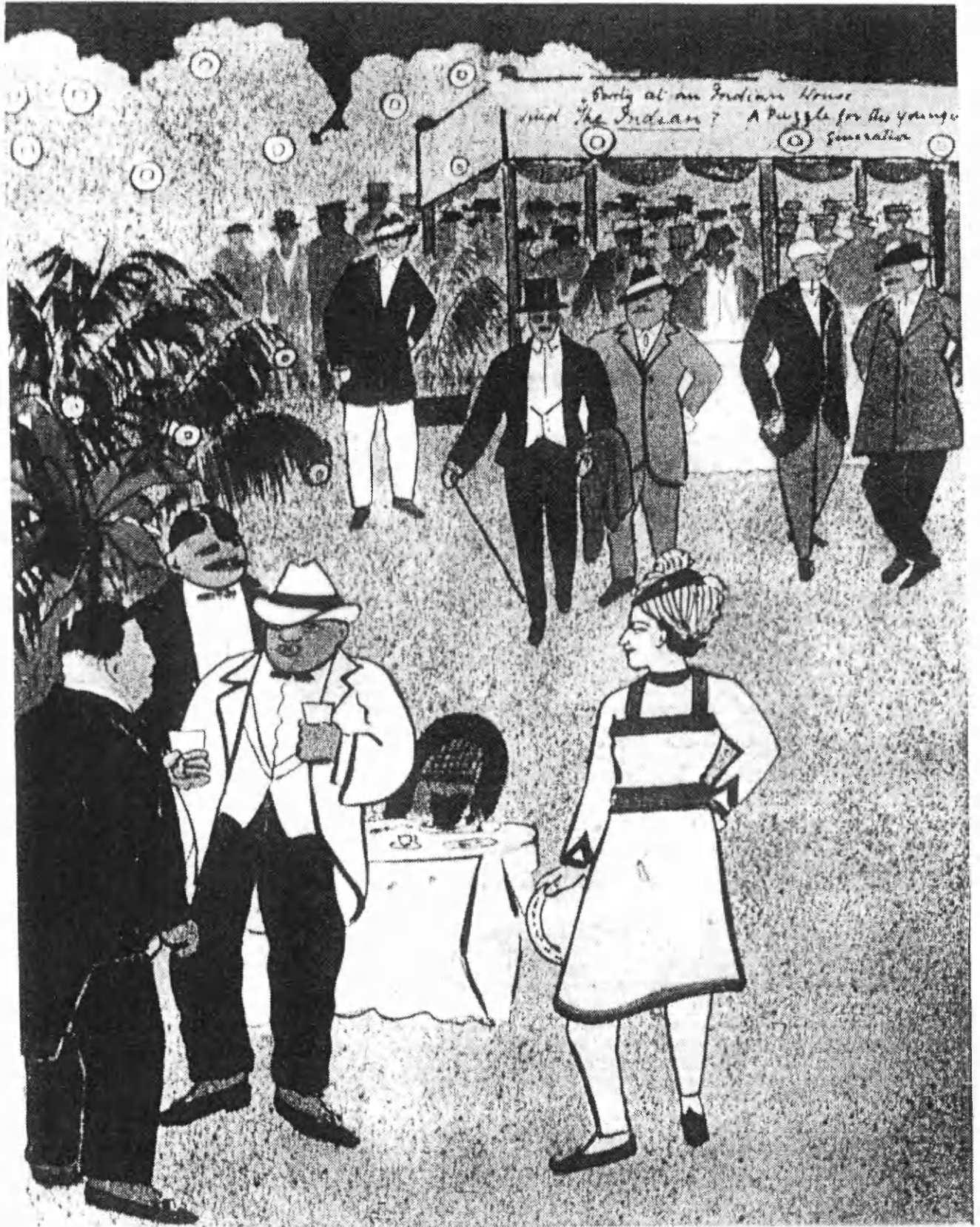
Fig 2:21 Satirical drawing by Gogonendranath Tagore. From Gangoly (op. cit.). Original inscription reads:

"Party at an Indian House. Find the Indian?
A Puzzle for the younger generation."

THE EUROPEAN HATS *VS.* THE INDIAN *PUGBEES.*

Fig. 2:22 A Battle of Headwear.

From **Hindi Punch** 22.7.1917.

> "Had Mr. Naoroji changed his name to Mr. Brown or Mr. Jones, no one would have known him to be a Parsi.... Naoroji....has the appearance of a cultured English gentleman, his face a shade or two off colour perhaps, but certainly not darker than many an Australian, tanned from long exposure to the tropical sun. If physiognomy be any indication of intellectual merits, Mr. Naoroji is shrewd and penetrating, with a large leaven of benevolence....The regulation frock coat fits him like a glove, and a better platform figure it would be difficult to find" (in Masani 1960:100-1).

Yet despite the regularity of his frock coat (fig. 2:23) and the closeness of his skin to the Australian, if not quite the true British colour, Mr. Naoroji was metaphorically "black" as far as the British Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury was concerned. In 1888 he explained that it would have been quite impossible for Naoroji to have been elected:

> "...however great the progress of mankind has been, and however far we have advanced in overcoming our prejudices, I doubt we have yet got to the point of view where a British constituency would elect a black man. I am speaking roughly and using the language in the colloquial sense, because I imagine the colour is not exactly black, but at all events, he was a man of another race" (ibid:106).

Those two words "black man" kicked Dadabhai into fame (ibid:106). They outraged Indians at home and overseas. Many, like Naoroji, had received personal insults from the British, despite their dress. And their realisation of the fact that racial prejudice went beyond clothes was often a turning point in their clothing habits. Gogonendranath Tagore, always critical of the Westernised Indian, has portrayed this painful moment of realisation (fig. 2:24). He demonstrates the futility of Indian attempts to "pass" as English.

But if an Indian man wanted to avoid wearing Western dress, this still did not solve the problem of what he should wear, for there were many different types of Indian apparel to choose from. Furthermore most of these were now considered old fashioned by educated Indians themselves who were not used to wearing them and sometimes thought them indecent. A growing awareness of the inappropriateness of British dress, was then linked to a second, but equally difficult problem of deciding on an appropriate Indian dress. In the final section of this chapter I shall examine three different attempts to formulate an appropriate Indian dress that could be respectable without being European.

Redefining Indian Dress

One young man who took up the problem of redefining Indian dress in the 1870's was Jyotirindranath Tagore, brother of the poet, Rabindranath. His sartorial experiments resulted in one of the most valiant attempts to unite the Indian with the European without privileging one type of dress over another. Not content with the solution of wearing European garments with Indian garments, nor the solution of opting for either European or Indian dress, he tried to invent a national dress which combined both Indian and European features within a single garment.

Jyotirindranath Tagore, always an innovator, had started up a political association in the mid 1870's and felt that a change of clothes could be a starting point for political change. His brother Rabindranath, who was only fourteen at the time, later recalled Jyotirindra's sartorial experiments:

> "My brother Jyotirindra began to busy himself with a national costume for all India, and submitted various designs to the association. The dhoti was not deemed business-like; trousers were too foreign; so he hit upon a compromise which considerably detracted from the dhoti while failing to improve the trousers. That is to say, the trousers were decorated with the addition of a false dhoti-fold in front and behind. The fearsome thing that resulted from combining a turban with a sola-topee our most enthusiastic member would not have had the temerity to call ornamental. No person of ordinary courage would have dared it, but my brother wore the complete suit in broad daylight , passing through the house of an afternoon to the carriage waiting outside, indifferent alike to the stare of relation or friend, doorkeeper or coachman. There may be many a brave Indian ready to die for his country, but there are but few, I am sure, who even for the good of the nation, would face the public streets in such pan-Indian garb" (Tagore R, 1917:143-4).

Jyotirindra's invention was not, it seems, a great success. Though ideologically sound, it failed dismally to fulfil either Indian or British notions of aesthetics. Unable to convince even members of his own political association to wear these composite garments, he was certainly unable to persuade the nation to adopt them. But Jyotirindranath was ahead of his time in realising the importance of dress. He was one of the first Indians to suggest that a redefinition of Indian dress could bring about a sense of political unity. He was also one of the first to link his own personal problem of what to wear to the national problem of Indian identity.

His brother Rabindranath later took up the challenge. He found a very different solution to the problem of defining national dress. He felt that members of the
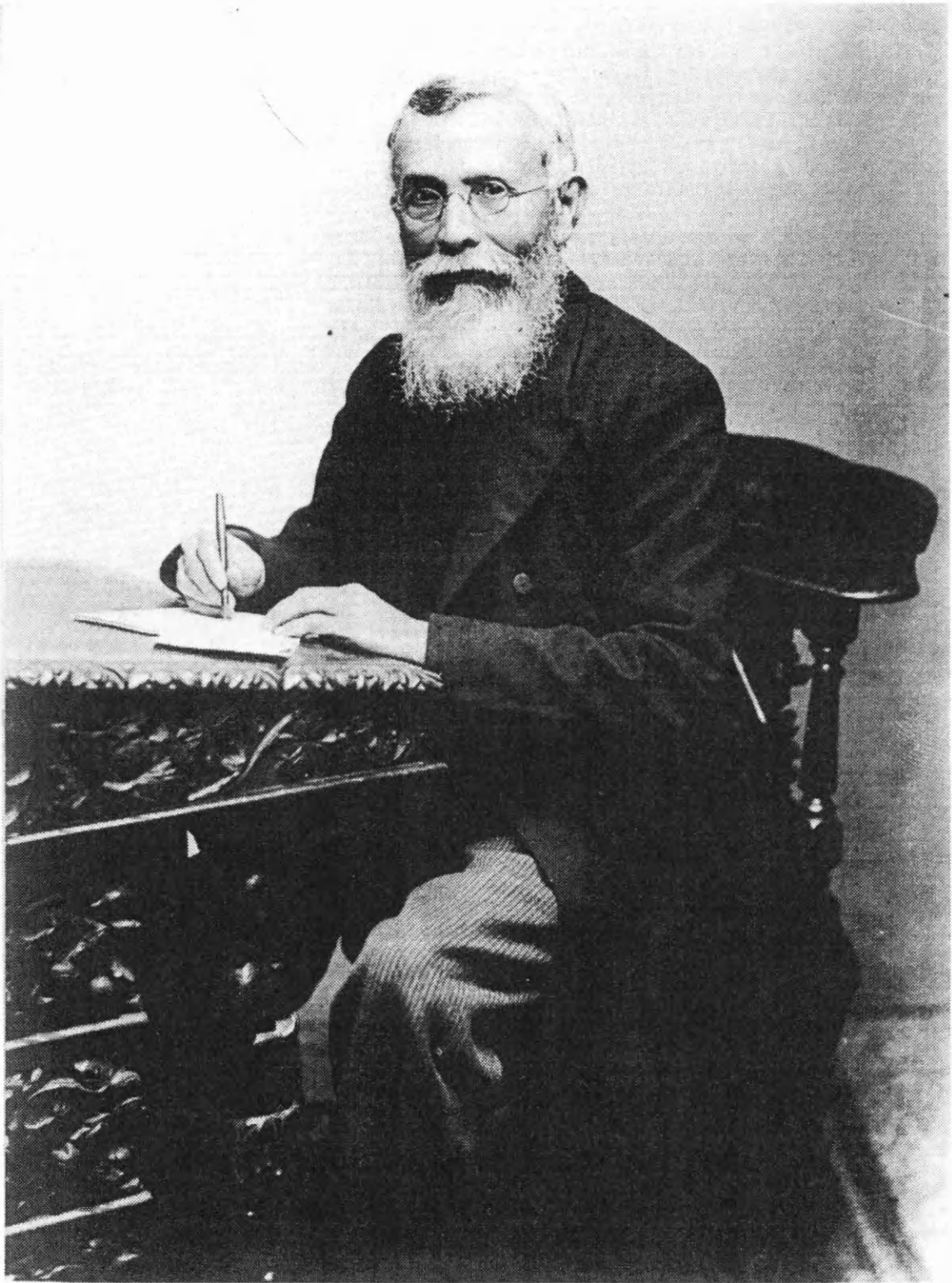
Fig. 2:23 Dadabhai Naoroji wearing the "regulation frock coat" in England in 1885.
From Vadgama K., India in Britain (1984).

সর্বাঙ্গের অশ্রুপাত।

By the sweat of my brow I tried to be mistaken for a Shaheb but still that man calls me Baboo.
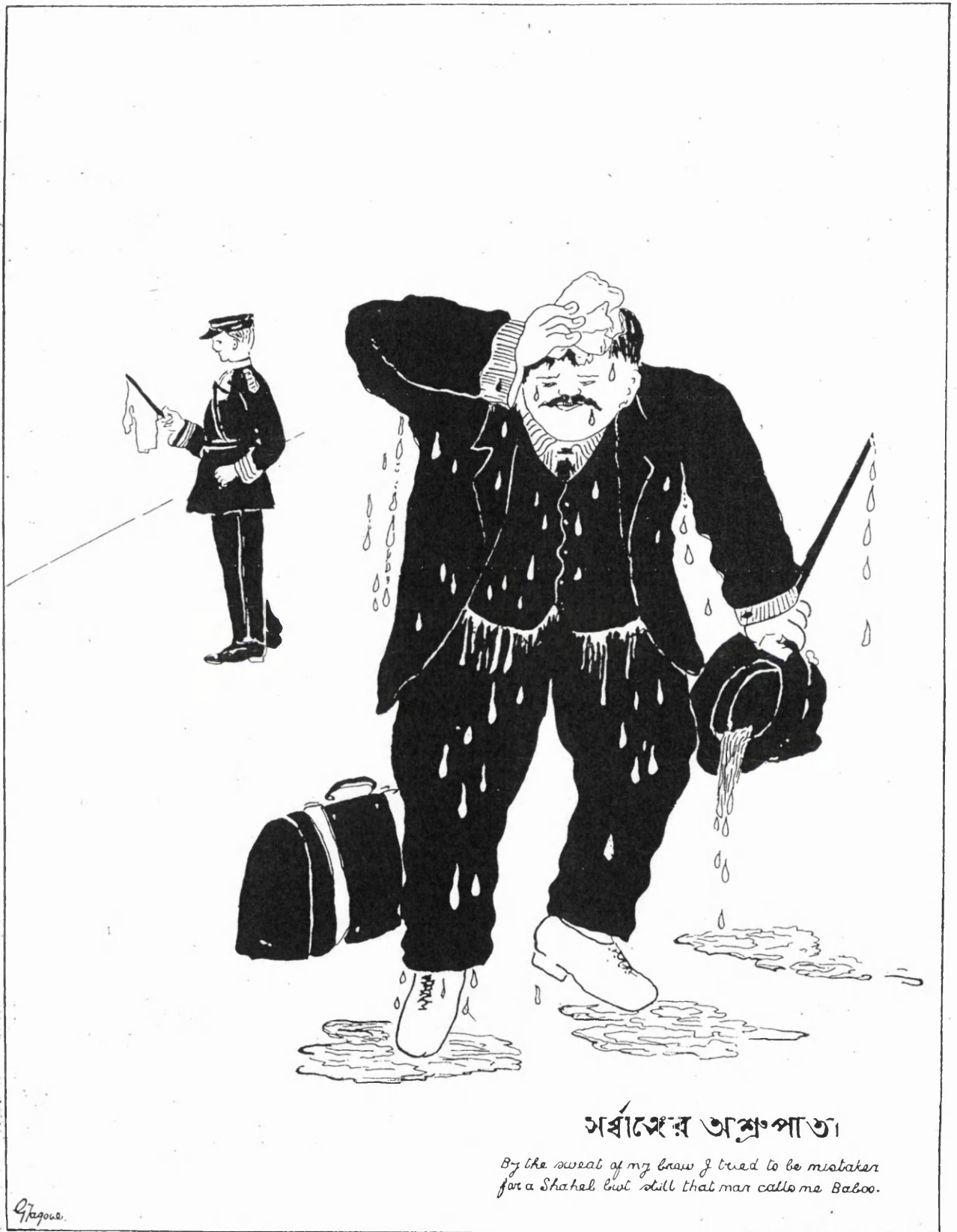
Fig. 2:24 Drawing by Gogonendranath Tagore.
From Tagore G., *Virup Vajra* (1917).

Indian elite had isolated themselves by deserting their own people but at the same time failing to become integrated with the European community:

> "The mischief with us is that we have lost what we had, but have not the means of building afresh on the European standard, with the result that our home-life has become joyless" (Tagore 1917:124)

He criticised the British for their insularity as much as he criticised the Indian for emulating the British. He felt that unlike the Moghuls, the British had remained aloof from Indian culture and had contributed little to it. Since their contribution to India had been so little there was no reason to include them in the Indian definition of national dress. Therefore, rather than seeking an Indo-European solution to the problem, he sought what he called a Hindu-Muslim combination which excluded any British component altogether. His aim was not so much to invent a new Hindu-Muslim style, but rather to prove that the *chapkan*, often regarded as Muslim dress, was in fact a Hindu-Muslim combination and was suitable as Indian dress:

> "The chapkan is the dress of Hindus and Muslims combined. Hindus and Muslims have both contributed to all the changes it has gone through to make up its present form. And still in Western India, in various princely states, one can see a lot of variety in the chapkan. And in this variety one does not only see Muslim inventiveness but also the creativity and freedom of the Hindus....If a race is forming that can be called an Indian race, then by no means can the Muslim aspect of that race be omitted....So the dress that will be our national dress will be a Hindu-Muslim dress" (Tagore 1960:227-8).

Tagore expressed these thoughts early in 1905. At that time it seemed unlikely that Indian men would revert back to the Indian *dhoti*, and Tagore even suggested that the *dhoti* was unsuitable for work in the office or the courts. It was no doubt also unsuitable for combining Hindu and Muslim elements for it was associated primarily with Hindus. Yet only a few months later, *dhotis* were reemerging on the streets of Calcutta with a vengance. Sparked off by Lord Curzon's announcement of the partition of Bengal in 1905, *dhotis* became for a period of approximately five years the symbol of *swadeshi*[20] (home industry) and of the Bengali man's opposition to British policies.

Swadeshi was not a new idea when it emerged in Bengal in 1905. It was an expression of a brewing dissatisfaction with British economic policies,

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20 The word *swadeshi*, from *swa* (own) and *desh* (country) refers to home industry, that is all things that are produced in India.

particularly those relating to the decline of the Indian textile industry. As early as 1872 Justice Ranade had delivered a series of lectures popularizing "the idea of swadeshi, of preferring the goods produced in one's own country even though they may prove to be dearer or less satisfactory than finer cotton products" (Chandra 1966:122-3). Some members of his audiences had vowed to wear Indian made textiles. In particular Ganesh Vasudeao Joshi began to spin yarn daily for his own *dhoti*, shirt and turban (ibid). For him, the *dhoti*, despite its backward associations amongst both the British and elite Indians, was a suitable means of expressing patriotic sentiment.

When the *dhoti* reemerged in Bengal in 1905, it was as a sign of protest concerning British policies. Those who adopted *dhotis* expressed the incompatibility of mixing Indian and Western styles which were as incompatible as Indian and British interests in India's future. True allegiance to the Indian people was expressed in the boycott of foreign cloth and in the burning of European clothes (Bayly 1986:313). Hindu protesters organised mass processions which ended with cleansing dips in the Ganges from which people emerged in the pure, preferably hand woven cloth of the Indian peasant (ibid). The British may have had little respect for these "indecent" *dhotis*, but as Motilal Nehru pointed out in a letter to his son, they had no choice but to accept the Bengali *despite* his *dhoti*. Motilal writes with his characteristic enthusiasm:

> "The Bengali reigns supreme throughout Bengal. He goes to office barefooted in his dhoti and chaddar and refuses to use anything of English manufacture at the risk of losing his employment. His employees cannot do without him and give him free admittance. Bengali High Court judges, barristers, solicitors, noblemen, merchants, have all discarded English costume. Thousands of indigenous industries have sprung up. We are passing through the most critical period of British Indian history (letter 16.11.1905. in Nehru M. vol I, 1982:91)

By 1910 the presence of the *dhoti* was subsiding again in the streets of Calcutta, and many wealthy Indians returned to a European or semi-European look. For the next fifteen years most respectable educated and professional Indian men wore European dress or extreme forms of Europeanised Indian dress in their public life.[21] But the seeds of a search for a national dress had been planted.

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21 There were of course always a few Indian patriots who never converted to European dress, such as B. J. Tilak.

Conclusion

The clothing dilemmas of the Indian elite in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were but one expression of a more general growing discomfort with colonialism. They revealed the impossibility of respectability or neutrality in an environment in which all sartorial options were loaded with negative implications of one kind or another. How significant a role this sartorial dissatisfaction played in the development of an early critique of British rule, it is difficult to assess. For many, the problem of what to wear remained largely a personal problem and not one that was widely discussed in the public sphere. The pain and confusion it caused were recorded mainly in private letters, autobiographies and journals rather than in speeches and political meetings. And although clothing came briefly into the political foreground with the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal, this was largely a regional struggle and failed to have any effect on the sartorial choices of the nation at large. From this we may conclude that while clothes were recognised as a medium through which dissatisfaction with the British could be expressed, they were not central to public political debate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was soon to change with the emergence of Gandhi on the political scene. He succeeded in raising the issue of clothes to the very centre of public consciousness (cf.Bean 1989). By stripping off the raiments of European civilisation, he tried to create a new Indian identity based on new criteria of value. His successes and failures will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

GANDHI AND THE RECREATION OF INDIAN DRESS

> "Only their insularity and unimaginativeness have made the English
> retain the English style (of dress) in India, even though they admit that it
> is most uncomfortable for this Indian climate. I venture to think that
> thoughtless imitation is no sign of progress. Nor is every reversion to
> old habits tantamount to accepting back the hand of time. Retracing a
> hasty erroneous step is surely a sign of progress" (Gandhi, Young India
> 22.6.1921, CWMG vol 20:251).

No Indian leader took the problem of what to wear more seriously than
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and probably no other leader changed his
clothes so dramatically. The story of his rejection of the European suit in favour
of a simple loincloth has attained almost folkloric proportions.[1] Yet the image of
Gandhi in his loincloth is so reassuringly familiar that its significance is rarely
analysed in a systematic way. It is somehow assumed that we all understand
what Gandhi meant by his loincloth. It is one of the facts of history that by its
very familiarity remains unexplored.

There has of course been wide recognition that clothes were significant to
Gandhi (cf.Brown 1990:161, Kumar 1984). Those who met him rarely failed
to mention his outward appearance. As early as 1949, Millie Graham Polak,
who spent some years with Gandhi in South Africa, commented: "What
different phases in Mr. Gandhi's mental career had been proclaimed by the
clothes he wore! Each costume, I think, denoted an attitude of mind." (Polak
M.G. 1950:142)

More recently Susan Bean has provided the first thorough analysis of the role of
clothes in the struggle for Indian Independence. Like Polak, she argues that
"Gandhi's changing sociopolitical identity can be traced through his costume
changes" (Bean 1989:355). In particular, she points to Gandhi's role as a
"semiotician", showing how he experimented with clothes until he "achieved an
understanding of the role of cloth in Indian life" (ibid). She concludes that by

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1 In India the image of Gandhi as the loinclothed saint is kept alive in popular
representations on calendars and religious posters. In Britain, Richard
Attenborough's film, Gandhi, rekindled the image of the thin loinclothed man who
threw aside European dress in favour of the clothes of Indian poverty and
simplicity.

finally adopting the loincloth Gandhi was able to communicate all his most important messages through the medium of dress. She also shows how by encouraging hand spinning, weaving and the wearing of Indian *khadi* (hand spun, handwoven cloth)[2], Gandhi raised the issue of cloth to a matter of primary economic and political importance in the struggle for freedom from British rule.[3]

Bean's work has provided valuable documentation and analysis both of Gandhi's clothes and of his economic policy. Bayly meanwhile has highlighted the symbolically charged moral language that Gandhi employed when speaking of *khadi*. Bayly suggests that in using such language, Gandhi was reviving the semi-dormant "magical" and "moral" beliefs that had always been attributed to cloth in Indian society (Bayly:1986). Yet, despite these valuable contributions to our understanding of the role of clothes in the rise of Indian nationalism, there remain a number of questions unanswered. Did Gandhi really rediscover the significance of cloth in Indian life, as Bean and Bayly suggest, or did he rather create his own symbolism and theory of cloth and clothes? And if clothes were symbolic to Gandhi, what exactly did they represent? Was he able to fix their meaning and did he even endeavour to do so? Furthermore, if Gandhi hoped to use clothes as a means of communication, how successful was he in actually achieving this communication through his dress?

Much of the confusion revolves around the question of whether, to understand Gandhi's clothes, we should interpret their visual effect, or whether instead we should interpret Gandhi's written and spoken "intention". Bean begins by tracing Gandhi's clothing changes and interpreting them according to what Gandhi wrote about them in his autobiography.[4] But by the time he adopted the

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2 The term *khadi* refers to handwoven cloth. By 1920 Gandhi used it in the stricter sense to refer to handwoven cloth that had been woven from handspun yarn.

3 The original version of this chapter was written before the publication of Bean's article (1989). It has since been substantially rewritten and it is hoped that it is now complementary to her work. I have retained a brief summary of Gandhi's clothing changes, as these provide the necessary backgound for understanding his theory of dress.

4 Gandhi's autobiography, otherwise known as The story of my Experiments with Truth was first published in 1927. It contains a number of personal details concerning Gandhi's clothes. But it must be remembered that it was written retrospectively and with the self consciousness of one who recreates his own history. In this respect it differs from his speeches and letters concerning his

loincloth, which is little mentioned in the autobiography, Bean favours her own interpretation of what she thinks Gandhi meant by his clothes. She concludes:

> "He used his appearance to communicate his most important messages in a form comprehensible to all Indians. Engaged in the simple labor of spinning, dressed as one of the poor in a loincloth and chadar, this important and powerful man communicated the dignity of poverty, the dignity of labour, the equality of all Indians, the greatness of Indian civilisation, as well as his own saintliness. The communicative power of costume transcended the limitations of language in multilingual and illiterate India. The image transcended cultural barriers as well. His impact on the West was enhanced by his resemblance, in his simplicity of dress and his saintly manner, to Christ on the Cross" (Bean 1989:368).

Here, the meaning of the loincloth appears clear and easily readable to Indians and Westerners alike. But if we actually examine the way it was interpreted by his contemporaries, it is evident that the meaning was by no means clear and that interpretations were varied and confused. Was Gandhi a saint, a lunatic, a pauper or a fraud? All of these were common explanations. And if we turn to Gandhi's own speeches about his dress, we find that what he wrote and said about the loincloth was invariably different from all the above interpretations. It is precisely this discrepancy between intention and interpretation that made clothes a highly problematic issue throughout Gandhi's life. For the fact remained that however much he tried to control interpretations of what his clothing meant, he invariably found that people interpreted them differently.

Gandhi was not unaware of the discrepancy between intention and interpretation. It was precisely because of this discrepancy that he considered all his clothing changes with such "deep deliberation" (CWMG vol 21:225) before putting them into practice. It was also his awareness of the possibility of "misinterpretation" that lead him to proclaim the meaning of his dress in speeches and in letters to the press. If dress were really capable of communicating his message clearly, there would have been little need for such explicit verbal explanations. But, as Gandhi well knew, dress, like other symbolic phenomena, was polysemic, capable of signifying a variety of different things simultaneously.

While Gandhi struggled to control interpretations of his own dress, he found that he had to be more flexible when expounding the meaning of clothes in

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clothing changes. The latter were written without hindsight and do not reveal the same overall sense of consistency or certainty (cf. CWMG vols 1-90).

general. For if Gandhi wished to convert all Indians to spin and to wear *khadi*, he had to accept and even encourage the idea that clothes meant different things to different people and that one person's reason for adopting *khadi* might be different from another's. In his attempts to persuade the maximum number of people to re-Indianise their dress, Gandhi ended up juggling with a number of alternative and often contradictory explanations of the significance of clothes. Central to his arguments were the paradoxical beliefs that clothes were at once a useful strategic device (a means to an end) and at the same time an expression of truth (an end in itself). His changing emphasis and inconsistencies invited a number of criticisms as well as numerous letters from the public demanding sartorial advice. The problem of what to wear, whether it was his own problem, or the problem of how to clothe the Indian nation, was to preoccupy Gandhi throughout his political career.

In this chapter I explore the development of Gandhi's very particular theory of clothes and examine his attempts to convince the Indian nation to comprehend and share his sartorial beliefs. After giving a brief overview of his most significant clothing changes, I concentrate on the subject of his loincloth, the garment he wore for the last twenty-seven years of his life. In particular I focus on the discrepancy between Gandhi's professed intention and other people's interpretations of his dress. This same question of the multiple meanings of clothes will then be considered in relation to Gandhi's attempts to control the clothing of the nation.

GANDHI AND HIS CLOTHES: A BRIEF HISTORY

From Kathiawadi boy to English Gentleman

Unlike many Indian men who adopted European dress in the late 19th century, Gandhi was not from a particularly elite family, neither was he brought up in an environment with a strong British presence. Born in 1869 into a middle caste *Bania*[5] family, he was raised in Kathiawad (now Saurashtra), a region slow to realise the impact of British influences. There is little information about Gandhi's own clothes in his youth. A photograph of him aged seven pictures him in a *dhoti* with stitched long coat and wollen cap (fig. 3:1). At seventeen he is pictured in an Indian turban and *dhoti*, worn with a European shirt and shoes.[6]

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5 *Baniya*: a commercial caste, including many subcastes.

Gandhi does not appear to have been impressed by European clothes in his youth and did not express any particular desire to wear them. On the contrary he was somewhat disgusted when he heard that a well known Hindu man who had converted to Christianity now went about "in a European costume including a hat" (Gandhi 1989:29). Nonetheless when Gandhi heard that he was to go to London to study law, he seemed keen to adopt European clothes, although he admitted to finding his short jacket "immodest" (ibid: 35). He was anxious not to look out of place and, as we have seen, asked a friend to equip his wardrobe. To Gandhi London was "the very centre of civilization" (CWMG vol 1:54) and he was willing to compromise any external signs of his Indianness in order to fit in. He even removed his *shika* (tuft of uncut hair worn by Hindus) on the eve of his departure for fear it would expose him to ridicule and make him look a "barbarian in the eyes of the Englishmen" (Gandhi 1989:327).

Although the nineteen year old Gandhi was inexperienced in European customs and shy of Europeans on board the ship, he clearly felt that he had mastered sartorial matters and even lent his black coat to a fellow Indian passenger who seemed less well equipped than himself (CWMG vol 1:12). It was therefore a considerable shock and embarrassment when he stepped ashore at Southampton to find he was the only person in white flannels. His intention of blending into the English scene had been sorely thwarted. He looked precisely like the inexperienced young Indian student that he was.[7] And Gandhi's embarrassment was by no means over. On his first evening he was visited by Dr. P.J. Mehta, an Indian experienced in British lifestyle and etiquette. Gandhi, fascinated by the smoothness of the latter's top hat, picked it up and stroked it. Dr. Mehta was angry and chastised him for bad manners. Gandhi recalls: "The incident was a warning for the future. This was my first lesson in European etiquette" (Gandhi 1989:38). The psychological impact of these incidents may be measured by the fact that he bothered to record them nearly forty years later. They were perhaps his first experience of the unfortunate disparity between how he thought he looked and how he actually looked in the eyes of other people.

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6 These photographs tell us little of Gandhi's daily wear for people often dressed up for the camera.

7 This did not stop him commenting rather snobbishly on the clothes of one of his fellow passengers with whom he arrived at a hotel. He recorded in his diary: "Mr. Abdul Majid thought very highly of himself, but let me write here that the dress which he had put on was perhaps worse than that of the porter" (CWMG vol 1:20).

Fig. 3:1 Gandhi, aged 7, wearing a *dhoti*, long coat and woollen cap, commonly worn in North India.

Fig. 3:2 Gandhi as a law student in London.

Gandhi's attitude to English customs and manners changed rapidly during his three year stay in London (1888-1891). His initial attempt to "become" an English gentleman, not only through elaborate dressing, but also through learning dance, French, elocution and violin, soon proved futile even to him. The vows of vegetarianism he had taken under the influence of his mother seemed to haunt him with a sense of his own Indianness.[8] The dancing, French and violin lasted only a few months, but it was years before Gandhi was to cast off his Western appearance. For although he had lost his faith in the ability of European clothes to transform him into an English gentleman, he none the less felt that they were more "civilized" than Indian dress and he firmly believed in the value of Westernisation (Bean 1989:356- 359). Furthermore, part of his original desire to become "polished" was that it might compensate for his vegetarianism (Gandhi: 1989:43). A Western exterior was becoming a suitable mask for an increasingly Indian interior, which Gandhi first became aware of when he stepped outside his local Kathiawad and into a very foreign Western world.[9]

Gandhi not only preserved his civilized Westernised exterior when he returned to India in 1891, but he also encouraged his family in Rajkot to adopt European dress (Gandhi 1989:77). But like many Western educated Indians he appears to have favoured Indian rather than European headwear while living in India. For when we next read of Gandhi's dress, he is wearing a turban with his European suit (Gandhi 1989:88).

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8 Gandhi's mother, who opposed his visit to England, had persuaded him into taking a vow not to touch wine, women or meat (Gandhi 1989:33). Vegetarianism was, at first, an embarrassment to Gandhi, but later in England he came to see it as a moral and religious virtue. Throughout his stay, however, it singled him out from mainstream meat-eating British culture.

9 Sachchiddananda Sinha's enthusiastic description of Gandhi walking down Piccadilly in 1890, suggests that this shy Indian student was highly successful in covering over his peculiarities with a good set of European clothes: "He was wearing a silk top hat, burnished and bright, a Gladstonian collar, stiff and starched; a rather flashy tie displaying almost all the colours of the rainbow, under which there was a fine, striped silk shirt. He wore as his outer clothes a morning coat, a double-breasted vest, and dark striped trousers to match and not only patent leather boots but spats over them. He carried leather gloves and a silver mounted stick, but wore no spectacles. He was, to use the contemporary slang, a nut, a masher, a blood – a student more interested in fashion and frivolities than in his studies." (in Nanda 1989:24)

South Africa: The simplification of dress

If the self-conscious young Gandhi was embarrassed by the inadequacy of his British image when he first arrived in England in 1888, he was also embarrassed by the efficiency of his British image when he first arrived in South Africa in 1893 where he had been offered a post as a barrister representing Indian rights (Gandhi 1989:88). Other expatriot Indians were dressed either in long robes or *dhotis* and Gandhi's immaculate frock coat and expensive Western appearance was, he felt, an instant disappointment to the Muslim merchant who greeted him at the port. The only Indian feature of his attire was his imitation Bengali turban and this soon proved an equal embarrassment when he was asked to remove it by a magistrate in the Durban court. Removing headwear was a gesture of humiliation in India, and being ordered to remove it was an insult (Cohn 1989, Bayly 1986). Gandhi reacted by leaving the court with his turban on but intent on wearing a British hat in the future to avoid "unpleasant controversies" (ibid:90). It was only the patriotic persuasions of the Muslim merchant that convinced him that the incident was worth highlighting (ibid:90-91). Gandhi therefore wrote to the press, exposing the matter.

This incident marked a key turning point in Gandhi's attitude to dress as it was "much discussed in the papers" and gave him "an unexpected advertisement" in the first week of arrival (ibid:91). From this period onwards, Gandhi, instead of wearing only what was socially acceptable and obligatory, began to adopt clothes which he knew to be socially unacceptable and provocative. It marked the beginning of a period of sartorial experimentation (cf. Bean 1989) and a time when Gandhi began to convert his own embarrassment at being wrongly dressed into a strategy for exposing injustice and embarrassing others. This technique was first employed when Gandhi was imprisoned in Johannesburg in 1908 for failing to register under the Asiatic Law Amendment Act. Along with other Indians, he was stripped naked, then given a prison uniform, consisting of "black trousers, a shirt, a jumper, a cap and socks". To his consternation these were stamped with the letter "N" for Native. Gandhi was horrified:

> "We were all prepared for some hardships....but to be placed on the same level as the natives seemed too much to put up with....Kaffirs are as a rule uncivilized - the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals...The reader can easily imagine the plight of the poor Indian thrown into such company" (Indian Opinion 14.3.1908, CWMG vol.8:135).
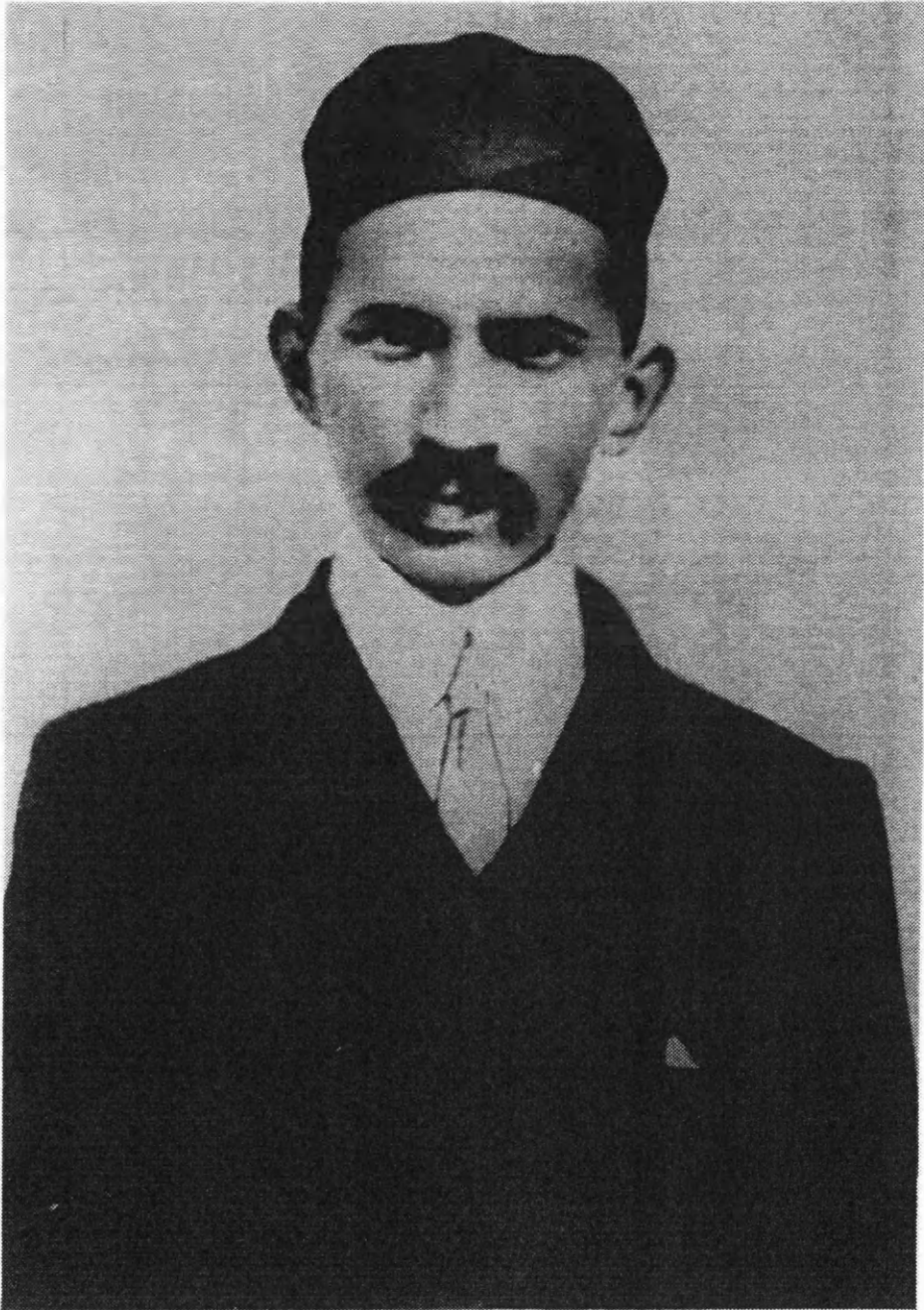
Fig. 3:3 Gandhi in the early years of his legal practice in
Jonhannesburg. He replaced his Bengali turban with a small
black skull cap (1900).
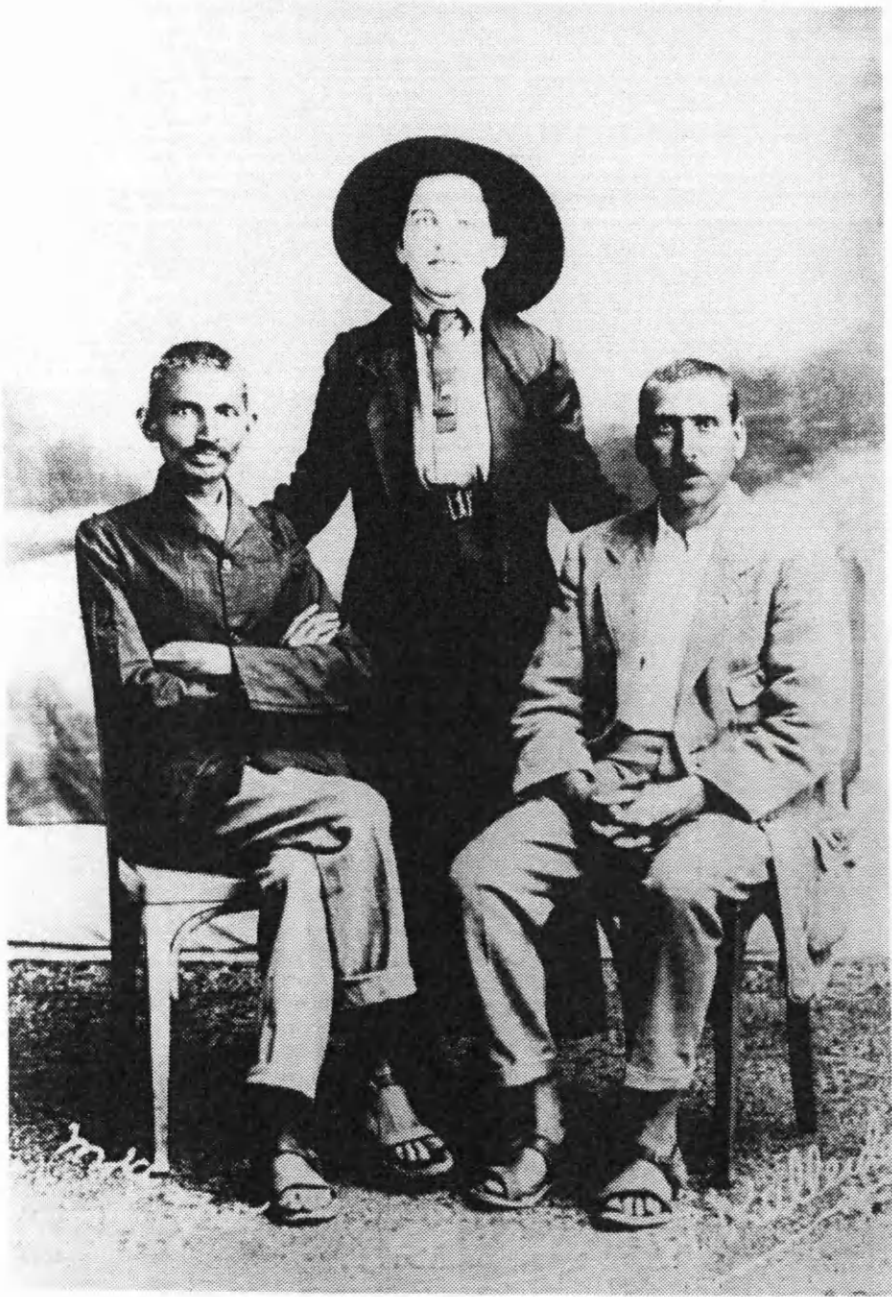
Fig. 3:4 Gandhi (left) with Miss Schle sin and the German
architect, Kallenbach. Gandhi has replaced his suit with
labourer's clothes in imitation of prisoners' uniform,
(South Africa 1913).

After first expressing disgust at being thus mistreated, he then decided to accept voluntarily the rules for natives, rules from which Indians were generally exempt. "It was my intention", he writes, "to go through all the experiences of a prisoner. I therefore asked the chief warder to have my hair cropped and my moustache shaved off." (ibid:141). This the Governor had strictly forbidden, presumably because he did not wish it to appear as if the authorities were maltreating their non-violent Indian prisoners. But, much to the embarrassment of the authorities, Gandhi insisted on removing his hair and even spent two hours cropping the hair of fellow Indian inmates. The incident is interesting as it is the first of a number of occasions in which Gandhi chose to adopt visual signs of public humiliation.

Throughout his period in South Africa (1893 - 1914), Gandhi's dress was becoming increasingly humble. By 1910 he had replaced his smart lounge suit, stiff collar and tie with a ready made "rather sloppy" lounge suit and "clumsy" shoes. This in turn gave way to trousers, a loose cotton shirt and sandals (Polak M.G.:1950: 142-3). He began to model his dress on the clothes of the working class labourer rather than the spruce barrister, but he continued to wear European styles throughout most of his stay (Nanda 1989:74-5). His adoption of an increasingly simple life style, in which he washed his own clothes and cut his own hair, was greatly influenced by Ruskin's book, **Unto us Last**, which Gandhi read in 1904. He was impressed by Ruskin's condemnation of industrialisation and of his praise of the simple life. Gandhi wrote his own critique of Western civilization some five years later, calling it *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Self Rule). In it he expressed disdain for a society based on the fulfilment of bodily rather than spiritual satisfaction, and he criticised the idea that European dress could have a civilizing effect on the Indian people (CWMG vol 10:19). He also suggested that the importation of Manchester mill cloth to India was the cause of India's impoverishment and had resulted in the virtual disappearance of Indian handicraft (ibid:57). He expressed his delight in reading about the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal (ibid:57) where people had cast aside Machester cloth in favour of Indian garments.

As early as 1911 Gandhi was recommending that "every intelligent person" should learn weaving (CWMG vol 10:398-9) but he continued to dress in European rather than Indian styles of dress. And it was not India's economic distress but rather the shooting of Indian coal-mines by the South African

authorities that finally prompted him to make his first public appearance in Indian dress in 1913. The occasion was a meeting in Durban of some 6000 to 7000 persons, including a number of prominent Europeans. Gandhi appeared with a shaven head, dressed in a *lungi*[10] and *kurta* (fig. 3:5). It was a gesture of sorrow. Realising that people might be confused by his appearance, he immediately explained his dress. His speech was recorded the following day in the Natal Mercury. Gandhi told his audience:

> "They (the audience) would notice he had changed his dress from that he had formerly adopted for the last 20 years, and he had decided on the change when he heard of the shooting of his fellow-countrymen....He felt that he should go into mourning at least for a period, which should be co-extensive with the end of the struggle, and that he should accept some mourning not only inwardly, but outwardly as well, as a humble example to his fellow countrymen....He was not prepared himself to accept the European mourning dress for this purpose and, with some modification in deference to the feelings of his European friends, he adopted the dress similar to that of an indentured labourer".[11] He asked his fellow countrymen to adopt some sign of mourning to show to the world that they were mourning, and further to adopt some inward observance also. And perhaps he might tell them what his inward observance was - to restrict himself to one meal a day" (CWMG vol 12:274-5).

This was the first of a number of speeches in which Gandhi was to advocate the reduction of dress as an outward sign of inner grief. It was also the first time that he called on other Indians to participate in this visual display of sorrow. He wanted harmony between a person's innermost feeling and their exterior appearance. For him a reduction in dress was the visual equivalent of a reduction of food. He believed that through suffering, self sacrifice and renunciation of physical comfort, wrongs could be purged. This aspect of Gandhi's dressing has often been neglected by historians. Brown, for example, has interpreted Gandhi's reversion to Indian clothes in South Africa as a "gesture of solidarity" without any mention of the more complex issue of inward and outward "mourning" (Brown 1990:37). Yet these ideas were to become central to Gandhi's perception of dress, particularly in later life.

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10 *Lungi*: stitched waistcloth, usually worn by Muslims.

11 "Indentured labourer" was the term used to refer to Indians who came to South Africa under an agreement to serve there for five years. Many remained there as labourers for the rest of their lives. They usually dressed in *lungis* or *dhotis*. When Gandhi claimed that he had modified his dress in deference to Europeans, he was probably referring to the fact that he was wearing a *kurta*. Many labourers would have gone bare chested.

Fig. 3:5 Gandhi dressed for the Satyagraha struggle in South Africa (1914). It is the dress he first adopted at a mass meeting in Durban in 1913 when he referred to his clothes as a sign of mourning.

Fig. 3:6 Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba, photographed shortly before leaving South Africa for India (1914). Gandhi was still wearing European styles.
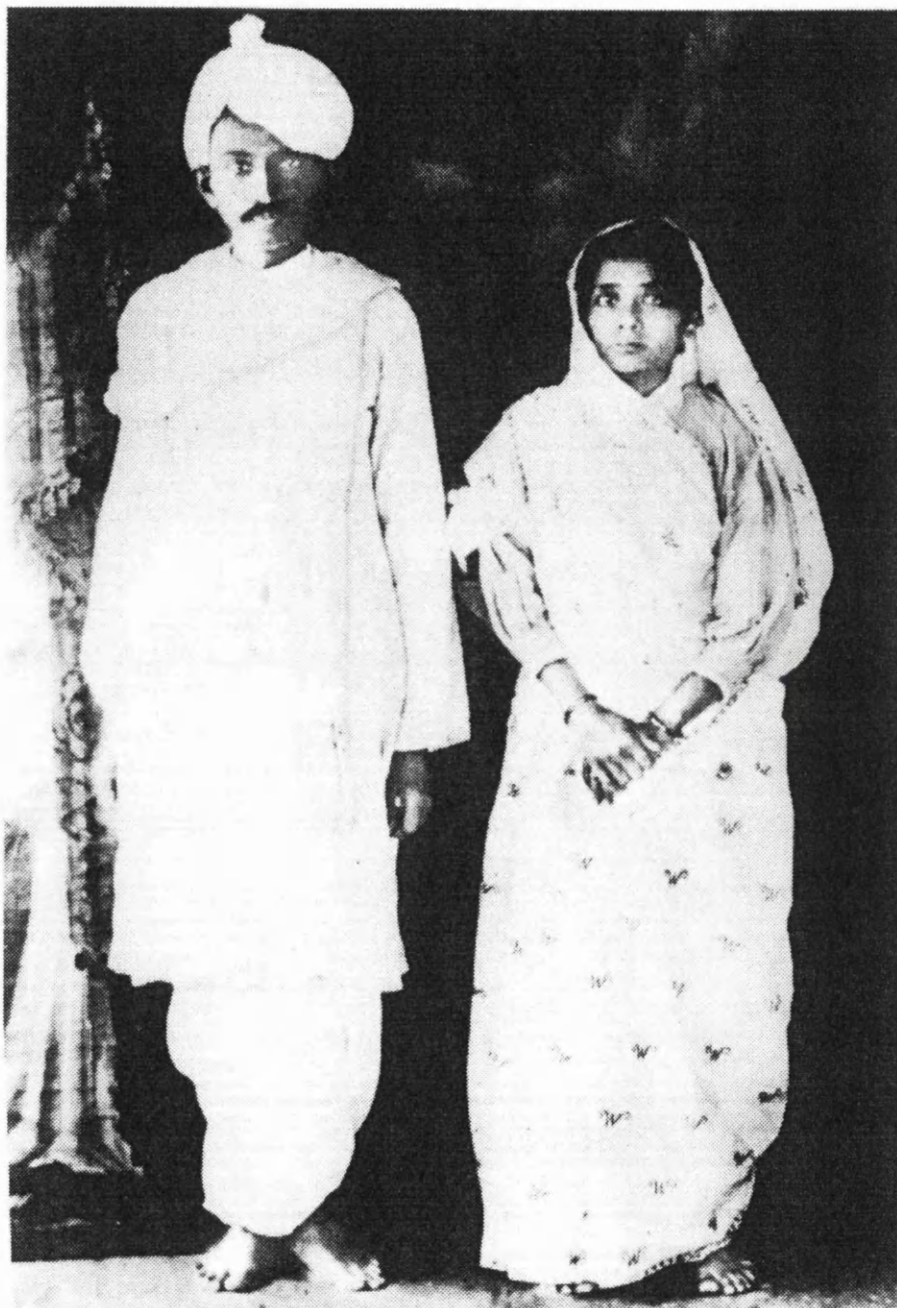
Fig. 3:7 Gandhi and Kasturba, photographed on arrival
in Bombay (January 191 5). Gandhi has replaced his suit
with the dress of a Kathiawadi peasant , thereby staging a dramatic
return.
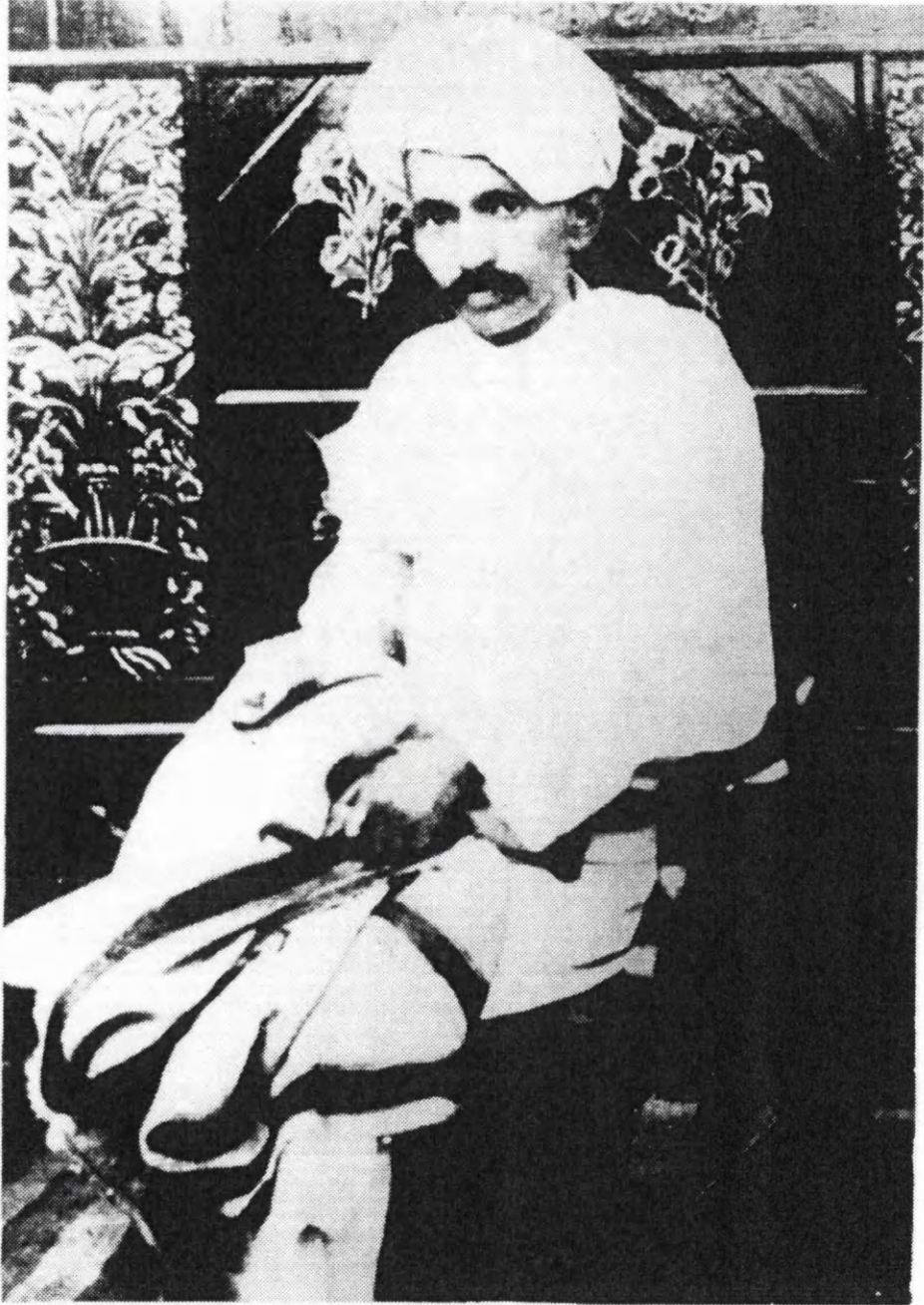
Fig. 3:8 Gandhi in 1918, wearing *khadi* and carrying a decorative shawl.

Returning to India: Symbolic dismissal of Western Civilization

When Gandhi finally left South Africa, with the success of his *Satyagraha*[12] campaign murmuring, if not resounding back in his homeland, he chose to make his Indian return conspicuous by dressing as a Kathiawadi peasant (Fig. 3:7). Having first arrived inappropriately dressed both in England (1888) and later in South Africa (1893), he knew the level of attention that unexpected clothing could attract. Now, in Bombay in 1915 he tried to turn this public attention to his advantage by revealing his decision to favour the clothes of the Indian peasantry above the clothes of Europeans.

Gandhi must have ordered his peasant outfit whilst he was still in South Africa or in England where he spent four months[13] before arriving in Bombay. His decision to identify with the Kathiawadi peasantry was a highly self conscious and somewhat peculiar choice, particularly since he had spent so little of his adult life in Kathiawad, and was not from a peasant family in the first place. The question is, how did people react to his choice of clothes and did they understand what he was trying to convey by them? Some Indians clearly were impressed. The young Jamnadas Dwarkadas, for example, wrote:

> "....there was something extraordinarily simple and unique in Gandhiji's mode of dressing, which made a very deep impression on me and a vast number of young people in the country" (Dwarkadas 1969:3).

But there were many, like J. B. Kripalani and Gaganvihari Mehta, who found him more peculiar than inspiring. The latter described him as a "crank" when he met him in Shantiniketan in 1915 (Mehta 1949:180). While the former recalled:

> "He was only Mr. Gandhi then, and rather an eccentric specimen of an England-returned-educated-Indian. Everything about him appeared queer and even quixotic" (Kripalani 1949:118).

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12 *Satyagraha*, literally "truth force", was the name Gandhi gave to non-violent resistance which he saw as superior to aggressive revolution. His last *satyagraha* campaign in South Africa had involved organising a strike of Indian miners and leading them illegally across the border into the Transvaal in 1913.

13 During this period Gandhi worked in the Indian Ambulance Corps. and helped to nurse soldiers wounded in the war. For this he did, of course, wear a regulation uniform.

Sometimes his rustic appearance failed to have the desired effect simply because it was altogether too convincing. Dr. Bhagwam Das recalls seeing Gandhi at a National Congress meeting at Lucknow in 1916. Two grandly dressed landlords, apparently unfamiliar with Gandhi's face, were shocked see a peasant amongst the politicians and one demanded: "Who is this village clown that has strayed in here?" (Lal 1969:52).

Clearly people's appreciation of Gandhi's dress depended to some extent on their prior knowledge of who Gandhi was. There was a profound difference between the man who chose to reject alternatives in favour of peasant dress and the peasant who wore the same dress without premeditation simply because he was a peasant. The effectiveness of Gandhi's clothes depended on a certain amount of knowledge about why he had chosen to wear them. If Gandhi was to communicate effectively through his dress, he had simultaneously to explain what it meant. Gandhi alternated between sometimes publicly explaining his clothes and sometimes enjoying the anonymity of being mistaken for any old pauper or a religious ascetic in his private life (Gandhi 1989:335).

During his first few years back in India Gandhi frequently experimented with his clothes (Bean 1989:366-7). Sometimes he wore a *dhoti* with a decorative border, sometimes *pyjamas* and a loose shirt, and sometimes a simple plain *dhoti* with a shawl (Polak 1950:142-3). He frequently alternated between his large Kathiawadi turban and a small cheap Kashmiri cap. And in 1917 when touring villages to collect recruits for the British war effort, he even took to wearing a *sola topi* with his Kathaiwadi *dhoti* and cloak (Dwarkadas 1969:240). He apparently received a number of abusive letters, including one addressed to "Traitor Gandhi" (ibid). Such letters were presumably objecting to Gandhi's support of the war effort but the fact that he was wearing a *sola topi*, that potent symbol of British imperialism, cannot have added to his popularity.[14] Gandhi himself had a particular liking for the *sola topi* on practical grounds (CWMG vol 41:25). His fellow Indians' objections were however yet another indication to Gandhi of the symbolic importance of headwear in India. Two years later he was to exploit this symbolism by inventing his own personalised form of

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14 It is interesting that Gandhi does not mention wearing the *sola topi* in his autobiography, particularly since he mentions a variety of other headwear: the top hat, the Bengali turban and various caps.

Fig. 3:9 Gandhi, dressed in a *kurta* and wearing the so called Gandhi cap which he invented (1920).

Fig.3:10 Gandhi addressing a crowd of Muslims in a
mosque in Bombay, (1919).

headwear which later became known as the "Gandhi cap". It was a white folding *khadi* version of the Kashmiri cap. Gandhi wore it for less than two years (see fig. 3:9) but it became one of the key symbols of the nationalist struggle and was worn by many Indian men, particularly in the early 1920's. His creation of the cap will be discussed in relation to Gandhi's attempts to reclothe the nation. For the moment I continue with Gandhi's personal sartorial struggle.

Gandhi's experiments with clothes were not merely concerned with visual effects. They were also intrinsically linked to his desire to restore the Indian hand weaving and hand spinning industries (Bean 1989, Cohn 1989:343). In 1915 he established the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad and immediately began to experiment with weaving, and later spinning. He wanted India to be able to boycott foreign goods and he wanted the Indian people to wear *khadi* cloth, spun and woven by her own people by hand. He himself "grew impatient for the exclusive adoption of khadi" in his own dress (Gandhi 1989:411) which was until this point hand woven from machine spun yarn. It was with great difficulty that the ashramites finally located some people who still knew the much declined art of hand spinning. From them they purchased hand spun yarn and began to weave it, initially into strips of cloth only 30 inches wide. Gandhi threatened one woman that if she could not weave a 45 inch strip within a month, he would make do with a short *dhoti*. She fulfilled his demand and relieved him from what he claims would have been "a very difficult situation" (ibid).

Gandhi later embraced this "difficult situation" when in 1921 he adopted a short *khadi* loincloth. I shall first examine his motivations for doing so and the reasons for his lengthy hesitation. I shall then analyse what his loincloth meant to him and how it was perceived differently by other people.

The Loincloth[15]

Gandhi first mentioned the idea of wearing loincloths in April 1919, when he looked forward to the time when men will say "we shall confine ourselves to pure *swadeshi* cloth, even though we may have to remain satisfied with a mere loincloth" (CWMG:vol 15:199). This comment was addressed to those who

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15 Gandhi's loincloth was usually referred to as a *langoti* in India. It was in fact considerably longer than most *langotis*.

argued that they could not afford to discard their foreign cloth in favour of the more expensive Indian *khadi*.[16] Gandhi himself was still dressed in the comparatively respectable *dhoti* at the time and did not express any intention to adopt a loincloth himself. During the Khulna famine, however, he was criticised for encouraging people to burn foreign cloth whilst others were dying from starvation and lack of clothes. Moved by the accusation, Gandhi contemplated sending his shirt and *dhoti* to relief workers and contenting himself with a "mere loincloth". But he seems to have mistrusted his own motives: "I restrained my emotion. It was tinged with egotism. I knew the taunt was groundless" (The Hindu 15.10.1921, CWMG vol 21:225).

The next occasion on which he contemplated the gesture was after he had witnessed the arrest of his Muslim co-worker, Maulana Mahomed Ali in mid-September 1921. Gandhi recalls: "I addressed a meeting soon after his arrest. I thought of dispensing with my cap and shirt that moment, but then I restrained myself fearing that I might create a scene" (ibid:225).

Why was Gandhi so hesitant? Clearly he was attracted to the idea but was not quite sure how other people would react. The thing that finally precipitated him into action was his realisation in Madras of the failure of his *khadi* programme. In September 1920 he had launched the Non Cooperation Programme, aimed at attaining *Swaraj* (Home Rule) in one year. He had hoped that by the end of September 1921 every Indian would be wearing *khadi* and that there would be a complete boycott of foreign cloth, but instead the year was nearly up and he found that there was not even enough *khadi* available and that many poor Madrassi labourers could not afford it. These things disturbed him:

> "The plea of the poor overpowered me...I began telling people in my speeches: "If you don't get khadi, you will do with a mere loincloth but discard foreign cloth. I know that I was hesitating whilst I uttered those words. They lacked the necessary force, as long as I had my dhoti and shirt on" (ibid:225-6).

But Gandhi was not prepared to set the drastic example of wearing a loincloth until he had discussed it at length with some of his closest followers. He knew that it could be misinterpreted and was aware of the connotations of indecency

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16 Cost was always one of the major problems with *khadi*. It was considerably more expensive to buy than mill cloth, owing to the time required to produce it by hand. Many economists have argued that this was the main factor which prevented a more substantial *khadi* revival.

and primitiveness that a loincloth would imply. Maulana Azad Sobhani was sympathetic to the idea but Krishnadas and other friends were highly sceptical and viewed the prospect with "a feeling of indefinite fear" (Krishnadas 1928:203). Gandhi recalls: "They felt that such a radical change might make people uneasy, some might not understand it; some might take me to be a lunatic, and that all would find it difficult, if not impossible to follow my example" (CWMG vol 21:225). Some of Gandhi's associates also feared that this was the beginning of his life as a Hindu ascetic and that he might renounce everything (Krishnadas 1928:203).

Despite the lengthy attempts of his friends to dissuade him from such a step, Gandhi finally decided to take the risk and on the 22nd September 1921 he wrote a declaration of his intention (published 23.9.1921 in The Hindu). In it he proposed to wear a loincloth for a period of just over five weeks, until the allotted deadline for *Swaraj*:

> "I propose to discard at least up to the 31st of October my topi and vest and to content myself with only a loincloth and a chaddar whenever necessary for protection of the body. I adopt the change because I have always hesitated to advise anything I may not be prepared to follow.... I consider the renunciation to be also necessary for me as a sign of mourning....That we are in mourning is more and more being brought home to me as the end of the year is approaching and we are still without swaraj....I do not expect co-workers to renounce their vest and topi..." (CWMG vol 21:181).

At 10;00 pm. that evening a barber shaved his head, following which Gandhi spent a restless and contemplative night. He was particularly anxious about the reaction of his fellow Gujaratis who would find his loincloth a "sore trial" (Krishnadas 1928:204). More generally he worried that people might think it indecent (CWMG vol 24:456). He nonetheless set out the next morning, dressed in his scanty attire, to deliver a speech to some Madura weavers. On his third day of wearing the loincloth, Gandhi was clearly still a little apprehensive about people's reactions. He wrote in The Hindu:

> "The masses in Madras watch me with bewilderment....But if India calls me a lunatic, what then? If the co-workers do not copy my example, what then? Of course this is not meant to be copied by co-workers. It is meant simply to hearten the people and to make my way clear. Unless I went about with a loincloth, how might I advise others to do likewise? What should I do where millions have to go naked? At any rate why not try the experiment for a month and a quarter? Why not satisfy myself that I left no stone unturned?....

I want the reader to measure from this the agony of my soul.... I do wish they may understand that swadeshi means everything" (15.10.1921 The Hindu, CWMG vol 21:226).

It is clear from Gandhi's speeches that when he first adopted the loincloth he was not intending to wear it all his life as a definitive statement of his beliefs. It was another of his "experiments" and an expression of his inner most grief and "mourning". It was intended to make it easier for the poor to discard their foreign cloth without feeling ashamed of their nakedness, and it was intended to provoke people into spinning more yarn. But it was never intended to communicate the "dignity of poverty" or the "greatness of Indian civilization" as Bean suggests (Bean 1989:368). If a "mere loincloth" was the habitual dress of the Indian masses, this was more a cause of pain to Gandhi than a matter of pride. Back in 1919, he had told a crowd in Baroda: "If we go naked in these days, it is for want of cloth" (CWMG vol 16:225). The loincloth was the dress of necessity not desire, and Gandhi was ready to revert to his "normal dress" if only people would adopt full *swadeshi* (CWMG vol 21:277). In a sense his wearing a loincloth was a form of moral blackmail, intended to provoke action in others. Through mass spinning and the wearing of *khadi*, he hoped all Indians would be reclothed. He never wanted his followers to reduce their own dress to a loincloth unless they were too poor to afford *khadi* in any other form. Neither did he intend to remain in a loincloth himself. To a Muslim who wrote to him in 1924, accusing him of indecency , he replied:

"It (the loincloth) will go when men and women of India help me to discard it....I wish to be in tune with the poorest of the poor among Indians....How can these poor people afford a long shirt with a collar? Who will give them a cap? If we wear so many garments, we cannot clothe the poor, but it is our duty to dress them first and then ourselves, to feed them first and then ourselves....When Hindu and Muslim sisters have adopted the spinning-wheel and come to look upon khadi as their adornment, I shall feel that I have got all I wanted. I shall then certainly please my correspondent by wearing a dhoti and a long shirt and collar" (CWMG vol 24:456).

In Gandhi's own perception the loincloth was a sign of India's dire poverty and of the need to improve the country's wealth through *swadeshi* and through a wholesale rejection of European civilization.[17] It was a rejection not only of the material products of Europe, but also of the European value system with its

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17 It is important to make the distinction here between European civilization and Europeans, a distinction which Gandhi always kept very firmly. It was not Europeans themselves he opposed, but rather their civilization with its emphasis on materialism and egoism (Gandhi CWMG vol 10:174).

Fig. 3:11 Gandhi in his loincloth, spinning.
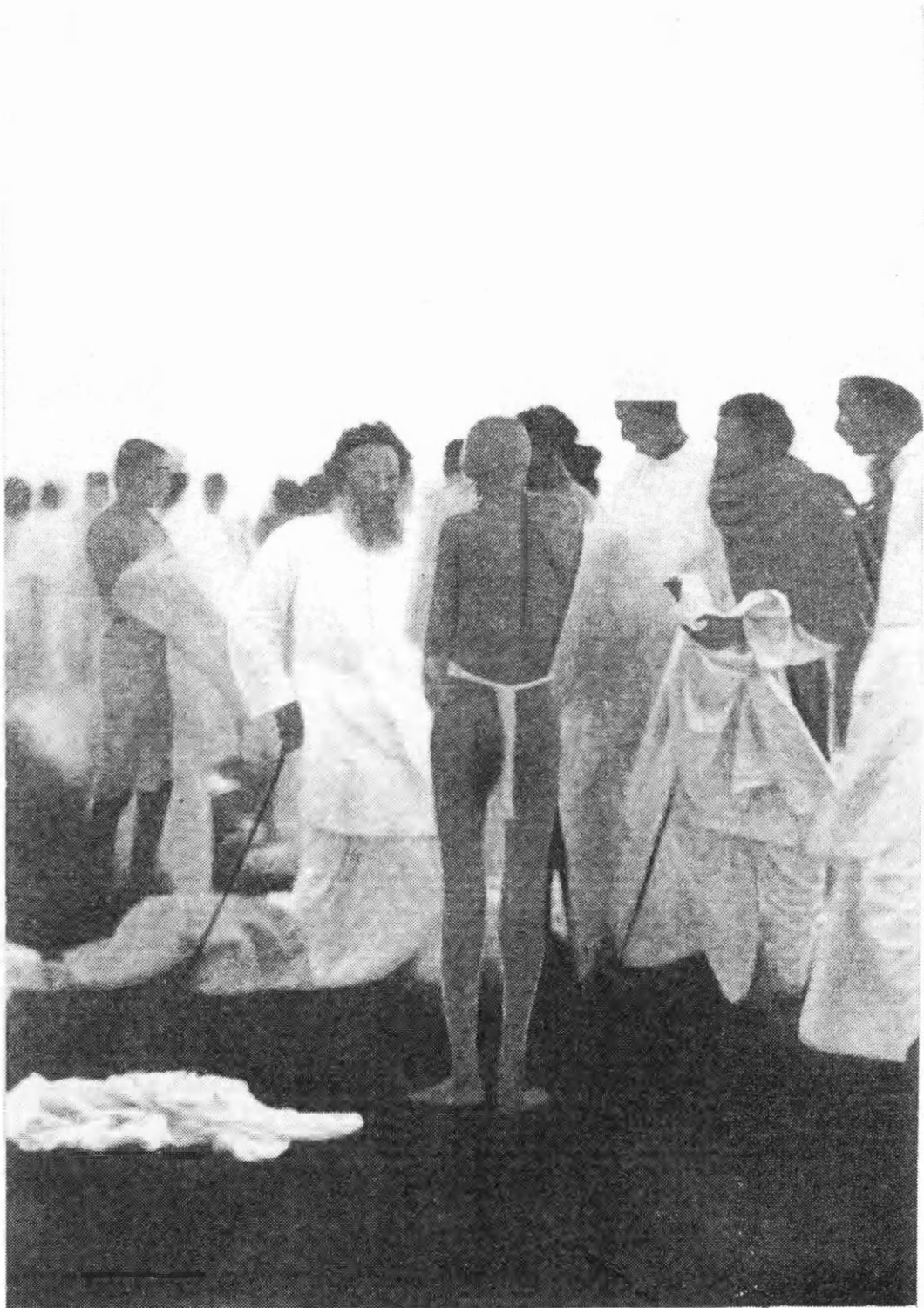
Fig 3:12 Gandhi after bathing in the sea at Dandi (1930).
From Tendulkar D.G., **Mahatma**, vol 3 (1952).
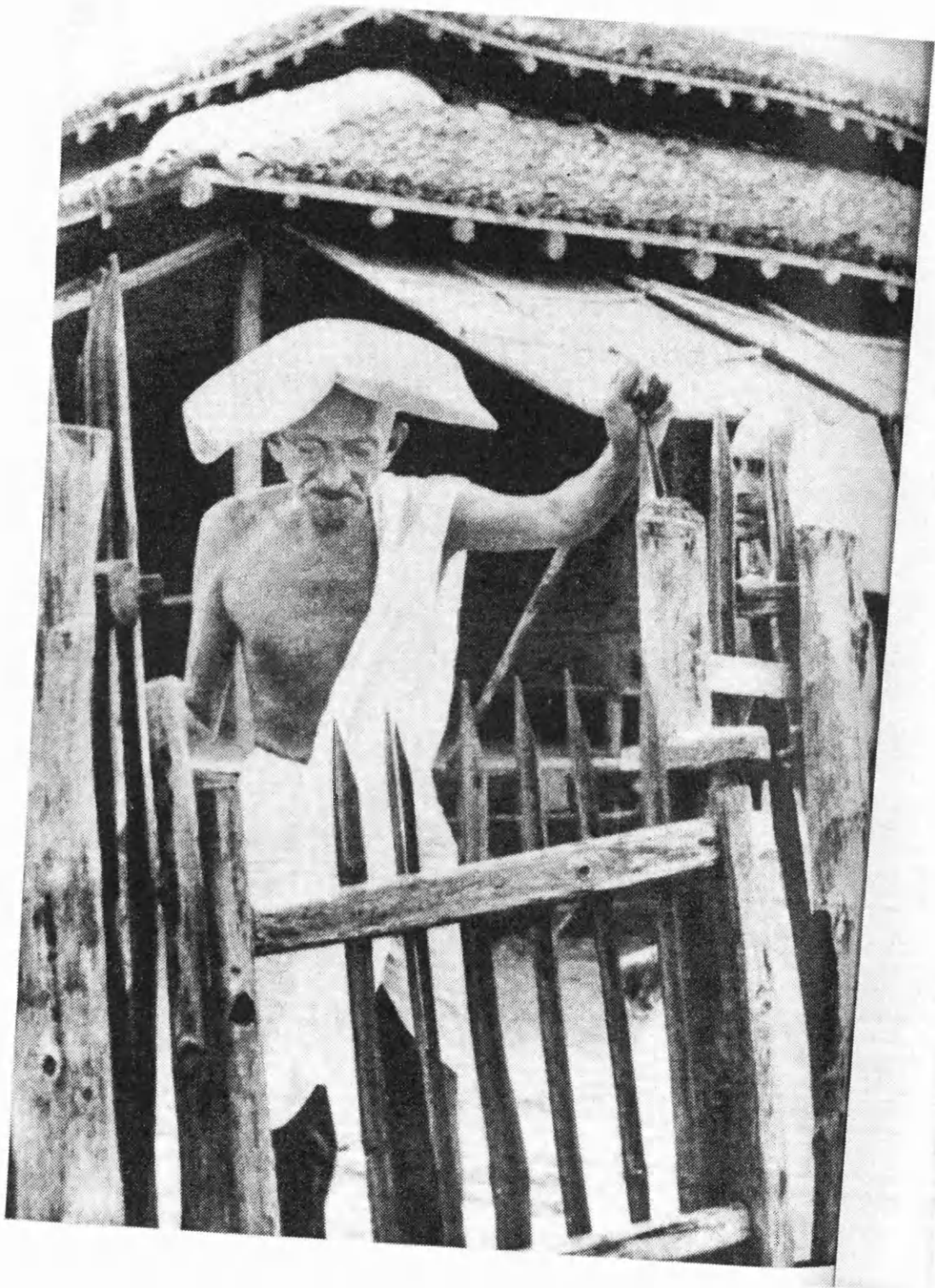
Fig. 3:13 Gandhi with a mud-pack on his head at Sevagram during the hot summer of 1940. From Tendulkar D.G., **Mahatma**, vol 5 (1952).

Fig. 3:14a Gandhi, besieged by London crowds as he leaves a taxi on his way to
Charlie Chaplin's house (1931).

Fig. 3:14b Gandhi with Lancashire mill workers. Miraben recalls:

"Bapu said a few words, then two women
workers suddenly hooked him by the arms, one on each side,
and throwing up their unengaged arms shouted "Three cheers
for Mr. Ganddye, hip, hip -" (in Hunt 1978:209).

criteria of decency. It was better for the poor to wear scanty loincloths than to clothe themselves in garments from abroad. It was also a full-scale promotion of Indianness but it was never a glorification of poverty. Rather, through his nakedness, Gandhi hoped to visually expose Indian poverty while simultaneously suggesting its resolution through spinning, weaving, and freedom from British rule. When in 1931 Gandhi insisted on wearing his loincloth to London where he had been invited to participate in the Round Table Conference, he argued that it was because of his duty to the poor that he refused to wear more clothes.[18] He was the representative of "Daridranarayana, the semi starved almost naked villager" (CWMG vol 47:119). Defending his loincloth in an article which he wrote for the Daily Herald whilst in England, Gandhi declared:

> "My dress, which is described in the newspapers as a loincloth, is criticized, made fun of. I am asked why I wear it. Some seem to resent me wearing it....But I am here on a great and special mission and my loincloth...is the dress of my principals, the people of India. Into my keeping a sacred trust has been put....I must therefore wear the symbol of my mission" (28.9.1931, The Daily Herald, CWMG vol 48:79-80).

Gandhi stubbornly wore his loincloth throughout his stay in Britain, refusing to compromise his dress, even in front of King George V at Buckingham Palace. In fact, he wore it for the rest of his life[19] because his "mission" was never completed. He never obtained his objective of clothing the entire Indian nation in *khadi* and re-establishing a self sufficient craft based society. So even after the attainment of Independence (1947), he had no reason to return to his "normal dress".

From an outsider's point of view Gandhi's loincloth may be considered one of the most successful and ingenious attempts to symbolically oppose British rule. Yet if we try to evaluate the success of the loincloth in Gandhi's own terms, it is clear that it was a symbol of his ultimate failure to achieve his political dream. It was adopted in 1921 as a desperate measure because *Swaraj* was still far off and the Indian people were still dressed in foreign cloth. It was a temporary "sign of mourning" and he frequently argued that he would reclothe himself if

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18 It is interesting that in 1922 Gandhi had argued that if he went abroad he would discard his loincloth out of respect for foreign notions of decency. He claimed that to wear it was tantamount to lack of consideration for others and would be "a form of violence" (CWMG vol 23:40).

19 Gandhi was assassinated in 1948.

everyone would spin, weave and clothe the poor. The fact that Gandhi was still wearing the loincloth when he died was a symbol of the fact that the Indian people had rejected his version of progress and national development. On August 15, 1947, while others were celebrating India's new Independence in the streets of Delhi, Gandhi was sitting alone in Calcutta fasting, praying, and above all spinning "as a mark of identification with the poor" (letter to Agatha Harrison, 15.8.1947, CWMG vol 89:43). To him it was a cause of great sorrow that after Independence, those who had once adopted *khadi*, were now returning to foreign cloth (CWMG vol 90:206). Gandhi's loincloth had been unable to effect the national sartorial changes he had hoped for.

I have outlined what I call Gandhi's "intention" in wearing a loincloth. Of course what Gandhi intended and what he actually wrote or declared in his speeches may have differed. What I have outlined is only his written and spoken intention, but it is valuable in providing some idea of what the loincloth meant to him and of how he tried to construct its meaning publicly. I have suggested that Gandhi wrote and spoke about his dress because he wanted people to comprehend it and because he realised that it could be misinterpreted.[20] Misinterpreted it was, but the question is, were these misinterpretations detrimental to Gandhi or did he actually benefit from the ambiguity of his symbolic gesture?

Some Misinterpretations of the Loincloth

When Gandhi first announced his intention to shed his *dhoti* and cap, a cartoon appeared in the Hindi Punch showing Gandhi sweeping back the tide of civilization with the broom of "old time barbarism" (fig 3:15). Clearly, to many, Gandhi's loincloth was a backward step, a return to nakedness which, as we have seen, meant "barbarism" and "primitiveness". This idea was shared by many Britons and educated Indians alike. Even Gandhi's closest followers were, as we have seen, concerned to dissuade him from taking such a drastic step. They also feared that they too might be expected to shed their own clothes. Since Gandhi discussed his decision with them at length, they became the people closest to understanding his intention. Maulana Azad Sobhani immediately reacted by reducing his own dress, replacing his pantaloons with a *lungi*, his shirt with a waist coat, and removing his cap which from then on he

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20 Misinterpretation, in this case, is any interpretation at variance with Gandhi's proposed intention.
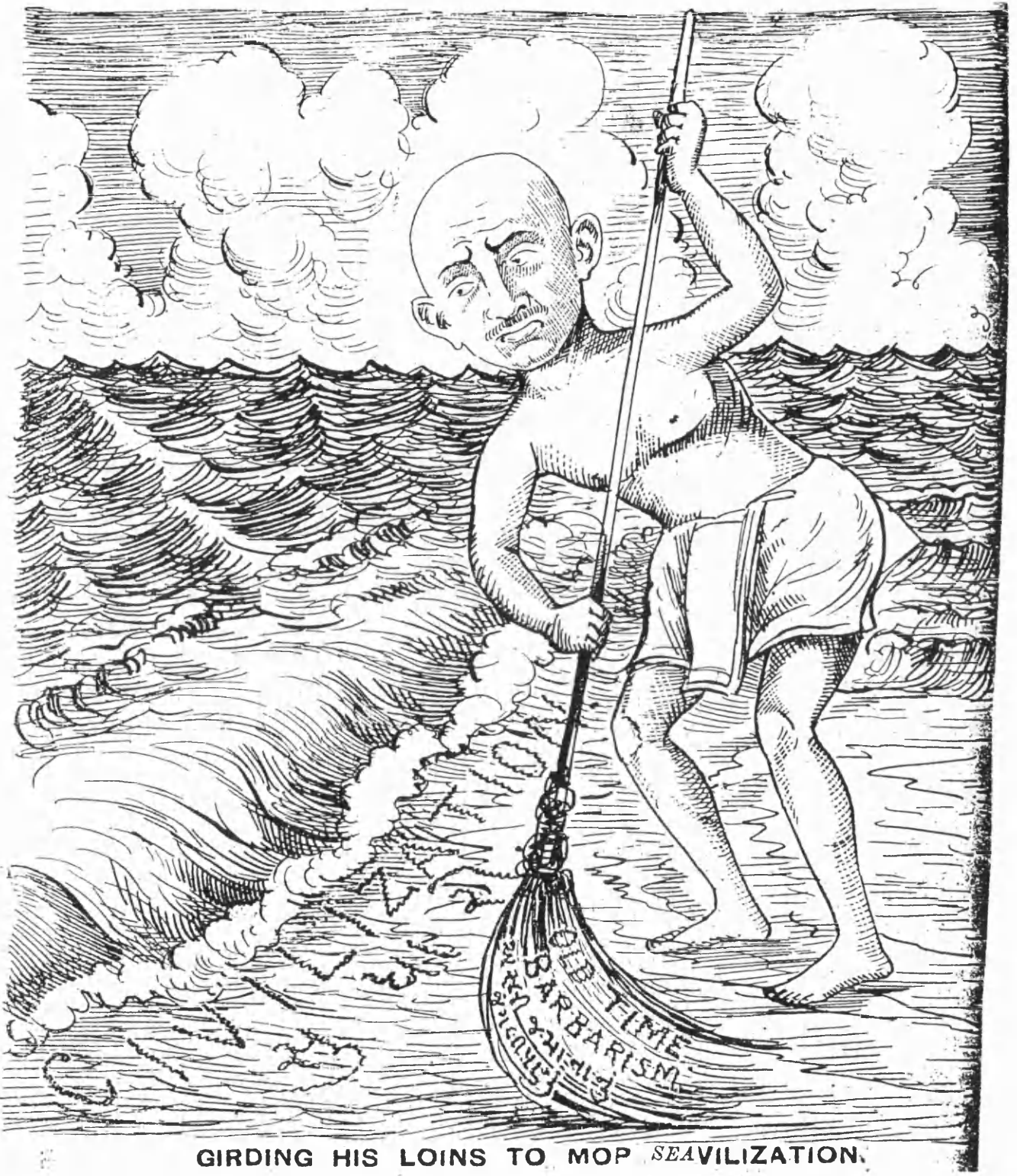
GIRDING HIS LOINS TO MOP SEAVILIZATION.

HINDI PUNCH. [BOMBAY, OCTOBER 2, 1921.

Fig. 3:15

Gandhi, bare headed, having recently re-grown his *shikha* (early 1920's).
He had first removed his tuft of hair the night before setting sale for England for fear
that it might expose him to ridicule and make him look barbarian in the eyes of the
English. Later, in South Africa, he had even persuaded his *shikha*-wearing cousin to
remove his own lock of hair for fear that it might stand in the way of public service.
Returning to India Gandhi was criticised by a Swami for not wearing the two outward
symbols of Hinduism (the *shikha* and the sacred thread). Gandhi refused to wear the
latter since Sudras ("untouchables")were prohibited from wearing it, but he agreed to
re-grow his *shikha* since he had removed it out of "a false sense of shame"
(cf. Gandhi 1989:327-8).

On meeting Gandhi for the first time, the artist recalls:
"I found him sitting on a *toktaposh* (wooden-bed) with only a loincloth tied round his waist, talking to several people who sat round him on the floor. His hair was closely cropped, but he had a *shikha,* the Vaishnava Hindu's tuft of hair at the back of his head. It struck me that he was a great saint and a political leader at the same time" (Dey 1948: Preface).

Figs. 3: 17 Portrait of Gandhi by Mukul Dey.
From Dey M., **Portraits of Mahatma Gandhi** (1948).
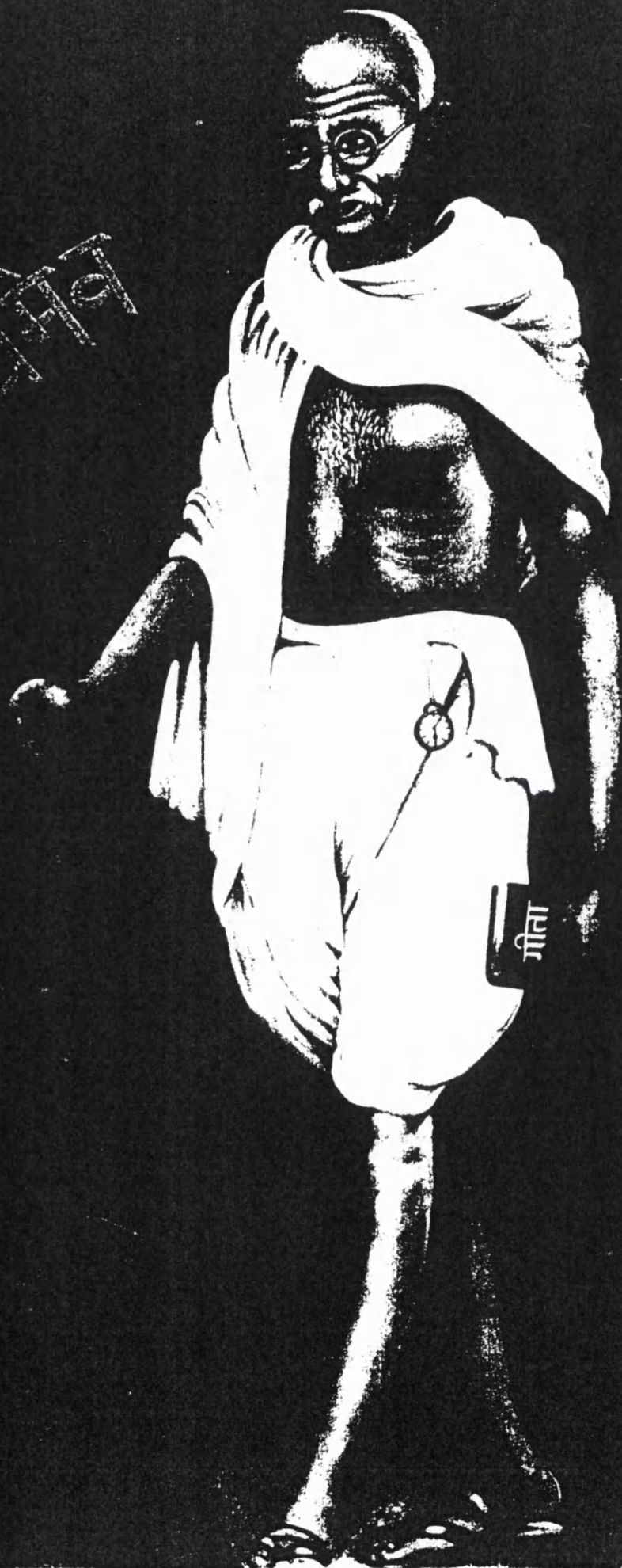
Fig. 3:18 Contemporary Oleograph of Gandhi as Saint.
Caption reads: "The Way of Truth Triumphs"

wore only at prayer time (Krishnadas 1928:210). Krishnadas, after agonising reflection, finally decided to discard his vest but not to adopt the more drastic and "humiliating" loincloth (ibid:207).[21]

First reactions to Gandhi's change of dress from those outside his immediate circle varied from puzzlement to fear and misapprehension. Some, like the ex-Chief Justice of Baroda, Abbas Tyebji, laughed.[22] Others, like the Muslim, Mulana Abdul Bari, feared that Gandhi's loincloth violated Islamic codes of decency.[23] But whatever the reaction, Gandhi's loincloth certainly attracted attention and drew in the crowds (ibid:245). As it became a well known feature of his identity, people came to interpret it increasingly as a sign of Gandhi's saintliness for he looked like a typical religious ascetic. Gandhi had already been labelled *Mahatma* (Great Soul) some years before he adopted the loincloth and by 1921 he was frequently perceived as a saint (Amin 1984). But somehow his new loincloth garb seemed like the confirmation of his sainthood (Jog 1945:125, see also Fig.3:17). People came from miles around to get Gandhi's *darshan* (holy sight) (Bean 1989, Krishnadas 1928). The loinclothed ascetic was an image that they could relate to and admire. Even today it is the image of Gandhi that many Indian people choose to guard in the posters and calendars on their walls.

But there were two major problems with people interpreting the loincloth as confirmation of Gandhi's sainthood. The first was that Gandhi himself hotly denied being a saint on many occasions and cursed his so-called "mahatmaship".[24] And the second was that by seeing Gandhi's dress as the

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21 Krishnadas felt that Gandhi had adopted the loincloth as a sign of the intensity of his own inner pain at the sight of the naked masses. For others to do likewise, without the same intensity of feeling, would therefore be "mere blind imitation or affection, and nothing else". Nonetheless Krishnadas felt guilty witnessing Gandhi's suffering without sharing it. He claims to have "suffered a good deal under the stress of these conflicting emotions" concerning whether or not to adopt a loincloth himself (Krishnadas 1928:206-7).

22 Tyebji's words at the time were: "See, Mahatmaji has turned mad, but not merely that; he has devised a new way of making others mad also" (Krishnadas 1928:253).

23 His words were: "We have all come to see you, but it is against our scripture to keep the knees bare in this fashion (Krishnadas 1928:252).

24 See his declaration in the British press in 1931: "Some call me a saint. Others call me a rogue. I am neither one nor the other" (CWMG vol 48:79). See also his speech in Sholapur in 1927: I assure you the words *darshan* and *Mahatma* stink in my nostrils (CWMG vol 33:101).

clothes of a Hindu ascetic, people "naturalised" his loincloth and accepted his poverty. It was after all what you would expect of a holy man. If these interpretations are judged according to Gandhi's own criteria of the meaning of the loincloth, they are quite clearly wrong. For Gandhi did not want people to accept his nakedness passively as if it were a purely religious act or a sign of asceticism. He wanted them to "measure the agony of his soul" (CWMG vol 21:226) and to spin in order that he and the poor whom he represented might be clothed. In communication terms the people who saw his loincloth merely as an act of renunciation, were failing to receive his message. But the situation was highly ambiguous for although religious interpretations deconstructed Gandhi's message, they also simultaneously helped to bring the crowds to Gandhi and furthermore Gandhi himself frequently used religious terminology in relation to dress.

Another common interpretation of Gandhi's loincloth was that it was purely strategic. The most famous statement of this was Winston Churchill's description of Gandhi as "a seditious Middle temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a well known type in the East,.... half naked"[25] (quoted in Templewood 1954:54). There was some astuteness in Churchill's insult for he recognised that the apparently religious garb was not Gandhi's natural attire but a political gesture. Gandhi would probably have agreed thus far. But he would not have agreed with some of the more extreme strategy-based interpretations that were circulating in Britain, such as Beverley Nichol's assertion that Gandhi was really a fascist and that *khadi* was the equivalent of the Nazi shirt and swastika (Nichols 1944:164-5). Fig. 3:19 plays on this idea that Gandhi, like other world leaders, had created his own uniform which was all the more distinctive for being shirtless. But there were those who were suspicious of his very nakedness. One communist group, on hearing of Gandhi's imminent arrival in Britain, issued a statement warning that "the dramatic tactics of his not putting on a shirt and living on vegetables and goat's milk should not mislead the working class. Such tactics are adopted to serve the ends of capitalist interests in the East" (Lester 1932:35).

Clearly people were capable of reading all manner of things into Gandhi's loincloth regardless of what he himself said about it. It was partly because of

25 Following this statement the journalist and liberal M.P., Robert Bernays, published a book about Gandhi entitled Naked Fakir (1931). Churchill's phrase gained legendary fame and is quoted in most biographies about Gandhi.
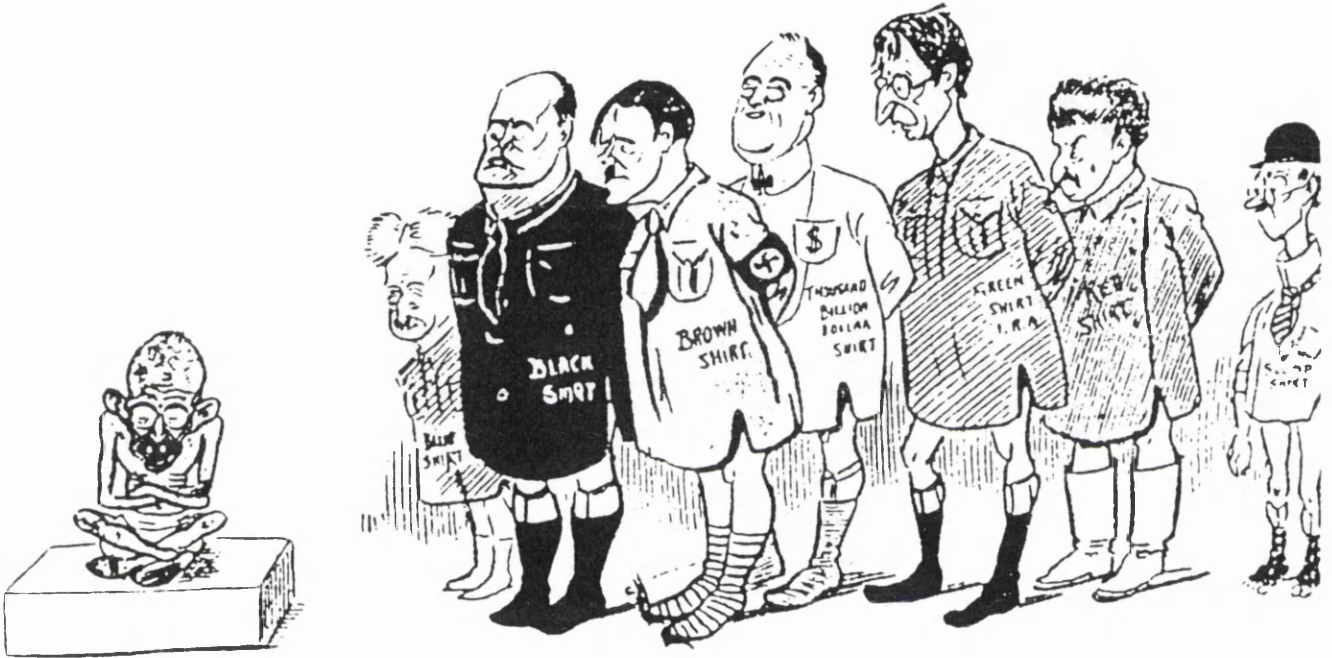
THE SHIRTED AND THE SHIRTLESS

Fig. 3:19 From Das S. (ed), Gandhi in Cartoons (1970).

EXPERIMENT WITH MAHATMA GANDHI

In view of Mahatma Gandhi's pronouncement that it will be an insult to his Majesty the King, if he appears in any dress other than his Loin-Cloth, this American camera-trick shows him as he will not appear.   1931 U.P.S.

Fig. 3:20 (ibid)

MEET THE KING

Fig. 3:21 (ibid.)

this ambiguity that so many people tried to persuade him to reclothe when he visited Britain in 1931. Apart from anything else they worried that Gandhi would not be taken seriously (Bose 1964:137) and that "he may become a music hall joke" (Bernays 1931:300). Even before his arrival, there was much talk of Gandhi's appearance in letters and in the British press. Sometimes he was described as "Christlike". On one occasion he was dismissed as a "naked nigger" (Lester 1932:36). But to the British authorities, he was largely an embarrassment, particularly when it came to the question of whether he should be invited to afternoon tea at Buckingham Palace. King George V had intended to welcome all the Indian delegates from the Round Table conference but he was reluctant to invite "the little man" with "no proper clothes on, and bare knees" (Templewood 1954:59). The situation was awkward since Gandhi's dress was a blatant breach of court etiquette but Gandhi had already announced in a speech that even if he met the King he would not reclothe whilst the Indian poor were still naked at Britain's expense (CWMG vol 48:72-3). Finally the King relented and Gandhi appeared in his habitual loincloth and a large white shawl which he turned inside out since he had not had time to wash it (Slade 1984:138). The event was much enjoyed by journalists and cartoonists (see figs. 3:20 and 3:21) and Gandhi himself participated in the general air of sartorial amusement. Asked if he had been wearing enough clothes for his meeting with the King, Gandhi is said to have replied: "The King had enough on for both of us" (Lal 1969:20). It was a joke with a powerful sting, for Gandhi had always argued that Britain's greed was one of the major causes of India's poverty and nakedness.

But while it was important for Gandhi to remain naked, thereby exposing and representing Indian poverty, it was not always easy for him to do so, for there was always a number of well wishers wanting to reclothe him. This was true not only of children[26], but also of some of his closest followers. Gandhi's frustration at their lack of understanding was revealed in an incident on the boat bound for England in 1931. Unbeknown to Gandhi, many of his supporters, anxious that he might be cold or uncomfortable, had offered him gifts of stockings, shawls, mufflers, bags, wallets and even an American made folding

26 Children both in England and in India seemed to have an instinctive desire to give Gandhi clothes. To a young Indian boy who wanted to ask his mother to make Gandhi a shirt, Gandhi replied that he would only accept it if she could provide shirts for every poor man in India (Kalarthi 1960:14).

camp bed (Slade 1984:129). These had been packed on board the ship by Gandhi's closest associates who were accompanying him to Britain. Gandhi was furious when he discovered them, remonstrating that he was a representative of a poor country and could not possibly arrive in England with a collection of "swanky suitcases". It was an embarrassing situation which was finally resolved by posting all the most expensive looking luggage back to Bombay from Aden so that Gandhi could still arrive in Britain, looking the poor man.

Not only was Gandhi's nakedness physically difficult to maintain but it also became problematic in the metaphorical sense, particularly amongst some of his Western admirers. Out of their immense respect for Gandhi, they could not resist reclothing him in their minds, thereby making him more decent in Western terms. Bernays, for example, preferred to describe Gandhi as "not half naked, but three quarters naked" (Bernays 1931:299). And the American Haynes Holmes talked of his "royal air", saying he looked and spoke "like a king" (Haynes Holmes 1945:101). It is difficult to imagine any description of Gandhi that is further away from what Gandhi was trying to portray: the poverty and needs of his naked, illiterate countrymen. Yet, like the religious interpretations of Gandhi's dress, these interpretations were well meant, even though they entirely deconstructed most of what Gandhi was trying to communicate. The ambiguity of his symbolic dressing did not necessarily harm Gandhi's reputation. On the contrary, the fact that he looked like a Hindu ascetic, or Christ or even a "king" actually served to increase his popularity. Furthermore his nakedness and simplicity remained a powerful contrast to the pedantically clad European image. And even if he did not recommend nakedness as an ideal, he nonetheless advocated a complete rejection of the previously idealised European look.[27]

I have examined the evolutionary changes in Gandhi's dress, bearing in mind the difference between Gandhi's intentions and other people's interpretations.

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27 The rejection of the European look was, of course, part of a more general rejection of a European way of life. Gandhi wanted people to change not only their appearances but also their very physical composition and life style. His advocation of an extreme form of strict vegetarianism, of fasting and celibacy were all part of an attempt to decolonize the body and to re-Indianise it. They were also part of the "purification" process. Gandhi felt that "self-purification" and "penance" were essential to India's well-being. In 1927 he argued: "I must go on purifying myself and hoping that only thereby would I react on my surroundings" (CWMG vol 33:100).

In historical terms the manner in which he was perceived is just as important as the manner in which he wished to be perceived. But a study of his written and spoken intention is useful in providing insight into Gandhi's personal beliefs about his dress. For him, humble clothes came to hold a special significance as a sign of mourning, an expression of sorrow, a moral duty, and a means of identification with the Indian poor. He believed that clothes should be in tune with a person's inner being for they were but an outward expression of the moral integrity of the wearer. He first expressed these ideas in South Africa, but later came to concretise them after his return to India. They became a consistent theme for Gandhi and in later life he usually described his own dress in these terms. In this sense, it can be argued that Gandhi developed a specific theory of dress. But if one examines his attempts to encourage the Indian nation to adopt *khadi* and the so-called Gandhi cap, one finds Gandhi utilizing a number of different, often contradictory arguments about the meaning of clothes. In the final section of this chapter, I explore Gandhi's elaborate rhetoric in his attempts to fulfil his ambition: "The whole country will be clothed in khadi. That is my dream. This is a fight to finish" (in Bakshi 1987:173).

THE MAHATMA AS CLOTHING MANAGER OF THE INDIAN NATION

Designing the Gandhi Cap

In a little known conversation Gandhi explained to his friend Kaksahib Kalelkar how he came to choose the form of the Gandhi cap[28]:

> "I considered carefully all the caps and head-coverings which obtain in the various parts of Bharat. I bore in mind that it is a hot country, and therefore, our heads need to be kept covered. The Bengalis and some South Bharati Brahmins go bare-headed of course, but, as a rule, Bharatis always wear something or other on their heads. The Punjabi phenta (turban) looks fine, but it takes up too much cloth. The pugree is a dirty thing. It goes on absorbing perspiration, but does not show it, and so seldom gets washed. Our Gujarati conical Bangalore caps look hideous to me. The Maharashtran Hungarian caps are a little better, but they are made of felt. As for the U.P. and Bihari caps, they are so thin and useless that they can hardly be considered caps at all! They are not even becoming. So, thinking over all these various types of headgear, I

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28 Lack of information has hitherto lead to a number of speculative guesses about the origins of the Gandhi cap. Ashe, for example, thought it derived from Gandhi's prison uniform in South Africa (in Bean 1989:367) while Bean has suggested it was linked to Gandhi's interest in Hindu-Muslim unity (ibid).

came to the conclusion that the Kashmiri cap was the best. It is light as well as elegant; it is easy to make; it can be folded, which makes it easily portable. One can put it in one's pocket, or pack it comfortably in one's trunk. The Kashmiri cap is made from wool. I thought it should be made of cotton cloth. Having thus chosen the form, I then began to consider the colour. Which colour would be most suitable for the cap? Not a single colour appealed to me. So I fixed upon white. White shows up dirt and grease, so white caps would have to be frequently washed (A great recommendation!). Also, white cloth is easily washable. The cap, being of the folding sort, it would be quite easy to press after washing, and iron out into a fresh, clean, smooth, white cap! What could be better or more becoming? So, having thought this out, I made this cap. As a matter of fact, the climatic conditions of our country render the sola topee the most suitable headgear for Bharatis. It affords perfect protection for the head, eyes, and back of the neck from the burning sun, and, being made of pith, is delight. fully light and cool. It lets in a little air, too. The only reason why I do not advocate the sola topee is that it does not harmonize at all with our bharati dress. Moreover, people these days dislike anything that has a European flavour. If our craftsmen would evolve a head-gear which combined all the qualities of the sola hat with a Bharati shape, they would be doing a great service to the whole country. It only needs a bit of thought. I am sure they would not find it difficult" (Kalelkar 1950:97-8).

Although it is clear that Gandhi was deliberately searching for a suitable national cap, the fact that he wished to combine the *sola topi* with an Indian form[29], suggests that he was not fully aware of how important a symbol of opposition to the British his invention would become. His primary motif was to invent a form of pan Indian headwear which anyone could afford and wear. As we have seen, a man's headwear was important for revealing his social and religious identity. By promoting this small *khadi* cap, Gandhi hoped to attain a level of visual uniformity which had never existed in Indian headwear. Such uniformity was very important to Gandhi who argued:

"One who is eager to dress himself in khadi from head to foot should begin with the head straight away. The khadi cap can be used by all, the rich and the poor....the idea that all should have the same kind of cap on their heads is well worth considering" (CWMG vol 20:386).

When coloured imitations of the cap were sold in Bombay, Gandhi reiterated the importance of keeping all hats identical: "A swadeshi cap should be one that can be identified even by children" (CWMG vol 20:385).

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29 This is, of course, precisely what Jyotirindranath Tagore had invented when he combined the *sola topi* with the Indian turban with somewhat unsuccessful results (see previous chapter).

Gandhi himself was wearing the cap by 1919 by which time he was already vigorously promoting *khadi* and hand spinning, and was encouraging people to burn their foreign cloth. The cap spread quickly amongst Gandhi's supporters and Gandhi made it an obligatory part of the Congress uniform (Cohn 1989:344). Furthermore during the Non Cooperation movement, the cap was sold at all major political meetings and on street corners. By 1920 substantial numbers of the Indian male population were wearing it. The British authorities were unhappy about this sudden mushrooming of white caps on Indian heads. As we have seen they had long been trying to control Indian headwear and they now began to clamp down on Gandhi cap wearers by dismissing them from Government jobs, fining them and at times physically beating them.

Fig. 3:22, drawn in response to the British decision to ban Government servants from wearing Gandhi caps in the Central Provinces, criticises the British for their cowardice. The cartoonist recognised that the significance of the Gandhi cap was created as much by British responses to it as by Gandhi's personal attempts to promote the cap.

Once the cap had gained symbolic importance from a combination of Indian and British uses and abuses, Gandhi himself took up the symbolic challenge. What is interesting is the language that he employed in defending and promoting the cap. Aware that his invention could be interpreted as anything from an innocent piece of headwear to a potent symbol of subversion, Gandhi made substantial use of this ambiguity and started emphasising different aspects of the cap's significance according to the situation and event. His rhetoric shows a certain mastery in exploiting the ambiguity of symbolic phenomena.

At times the arguments Gandhi employed were in tune with his own personal belief in the moral, political and economic importance of dress. He described the Gandhi cap as a garment of "truth" and argued that if everyone followed the truth, the Government would be forced either to respect public opinion, put everyone in jail, or to leave the country. (CWMG vol 19:482). When the Chief Justice of the High Court at Ratnagari declared in 1922, that "any pleader wearing a Gandhi cap in court" would be considered "guilty of disrespect to the Judge", Gandhi responded by highlighting the cap's vital symbolic value:

"...the principle underlying this war against khadi caps is of the highest importance. It shows how innocent but moral and economic movements are attempted to be killed by their adversaries.....Nor do pleaders who adopt the national cap do so out of any disrespect for the court, but they do it out of respect for themselves and the nation to which they belong. They do it because they do not wish to conceal their religion or their politics, whichever way one regards the adoption of the khadi cap" (CWMG vol 22:16).

But while Gandhi considered his new cap so important that he hoped that "thousands will be prepared to die for the khadi cap which is fast becoming a visible mark of swadeshi and swaraj" (vol 21:507), he claimed at other times that it was really nothing more than a "beautiful, light, inoffensive" garment, valued for its practicality more than its political significance (CWMG vol 20:105). This was a vital part of Gandhi's political technique.[30] By emphasising the apparent innocence of the cap, he was able to make Government suppression of the garment appear both unnecessary and unreasonable. He even went so far as to suggest that the symbolic significance of the Gandhi cap was less his own doing than the product of the Government's overcharged imagination. In response to a cap prohibition, introduced by the Peshi Officer of the Gwalior state who saw the cap as a symbol of non-cooperation, Gandhi wrote:

"I am sorry for this unnecessary prejudice against a harmless and cheap cap. I venture to inform the Gwalior authorities that, whilst it is true that many non-co-operators wear what are known as "Gandhi caps", there are thousands who wear them simply for convenience and cheapness, but who are no more non-co-operators than the Peshi Officer himself" (Young India CWMG Vol 23:35).

But although Gandhi sometimes argued the political neutrality of the cap when it came under persecution, it is clear that he himself saw cap wearing as an important statement of a person's political belief. This was poignantly revealed when, journeying to Calcutta in April 1925, he was disappointed to see from his train window, not "a forest of white khaddar caps", but "provoking black foreign caps on almost every head" (CWMG vol 26:574). When a black

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30 Gandhi invariably chose apparently innocent objects (spinning wheel, khadi, the Gandhi cap and so on) as political symbols. This enabled him to make British repression appear more unreasonable. This was clearly illustrated in his choice of the salt law as a symbol of Government repression. The salt tax was one of the least draining taxes on the Indian economy. But by encouraging people to ignore the British monopoly and to make their own salt, Gandhi chose an action which appeared thoroughly reasonable but which was politically and symbolically subversive. Clothes and salt were also basic human rights, necessary to all which made them accessible symbols to which the Indian masses could relate.
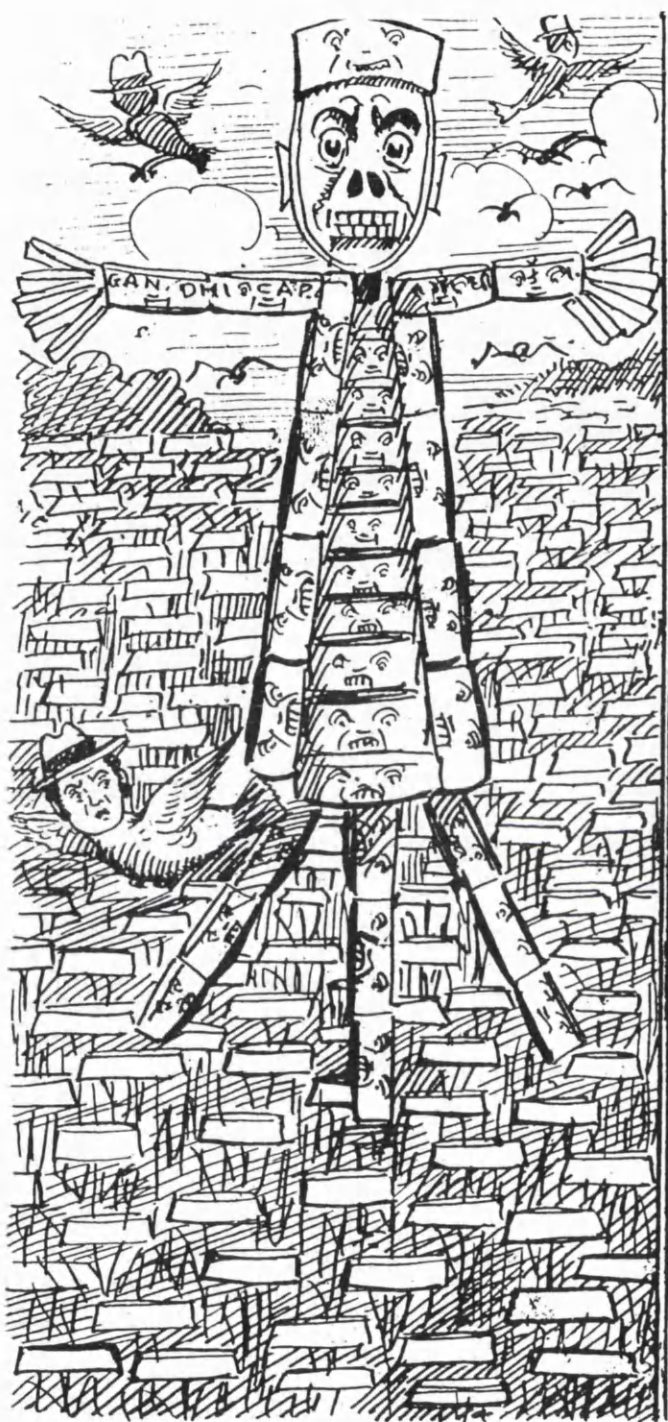
THE SCARE-CROW,

that frightens some white birds!

[Says " The Bengalee " of Calcutta :—"The Judicial Commissioner of the Central Provinces has issued a circular to District Judges prohibiting the wearing of Gandhi caps by Government servants. Perhaps the Judicial Commissioner found time hanging heavy in his hands and, therefore, he engaged himself in the pastime of starting a campaign against that article of head-dress which has come to be called Gandhi cap.]

Fig. 3:22

(a) Gandhi wearing a Gujarati turban, shortly after returning to India (1915).
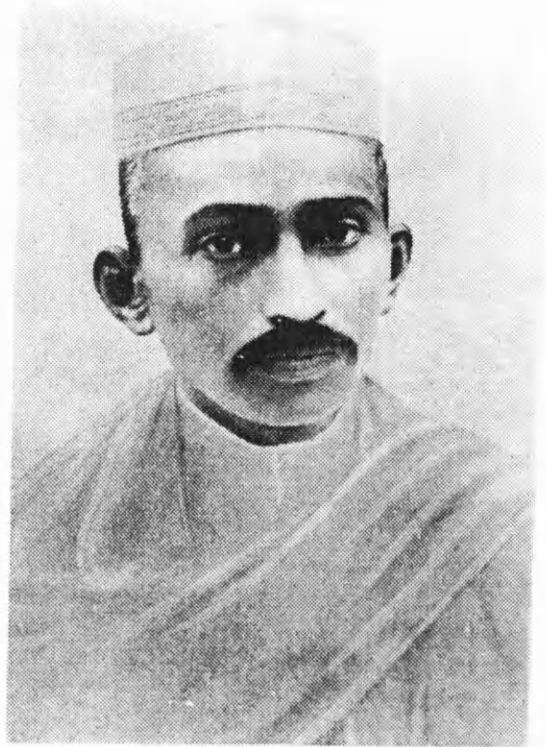
(b) Gandhi wearing an embroidered Kashmiri cap, precursor of the "Gandhi cap" (1915).

(c) Gandhi wearing the "Gandhi cap" (1920).
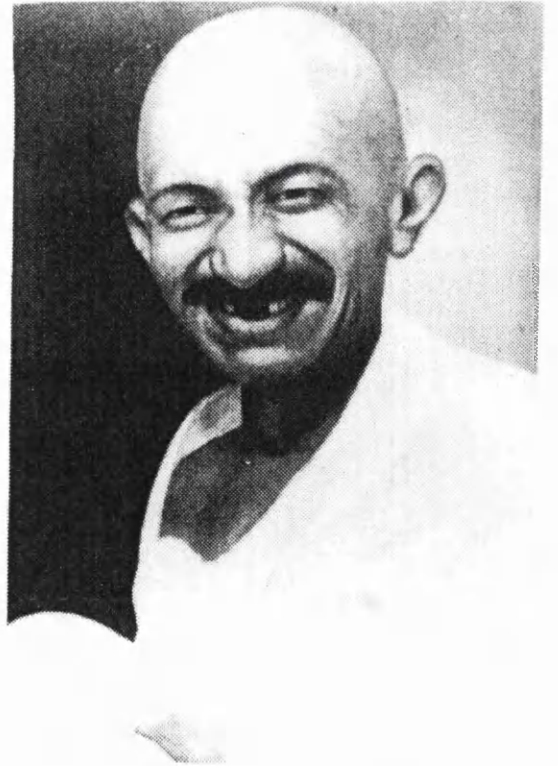
(d) Gandhi, the night before adopting his loincloth, having just removed his cap and had his head shaved by a barber (1921).

Fig. 3:23 The Evolution of Gandhi's headwear (1915-1921).

GANDHI BREAKING THE SALT LAWS: THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN INDIA.

Fig. 3:24 Breaking the Salt Laws on the beach at Dandi where the famous Gandhi cap came in for a new usage. Many protesters removed their caps and used them for collecting and carrying salt. From the permanent exhibition at Teen Murti House, Delhi.

Photograph : Kanu Gandhi

Fig. 3.25 Gandhi, who had renounced his Gandhi cap in 1921, found
alternative means of cooling the head (1940). From Tendulkar (1952, vol 5).

Fig. 3:26 Gandhi, cutting an unusual figure for a world
leader, seen here with one of his favourite forms headwear:
a loose strip of *khadi* cloth (1930).

Fig. 3:27 Unable to wear the *sola topi* which he admired, Gandhi settled for a Noakhali straw hat (1947). From Tendulkar 1954, vol 8.

capped crowd struggled to get a glimpse of his holy sight on the platform at Nagpur, he recoiled at the hypocrisy: "My name on their lips and black caps on their heads,- what a terrible contrast! What a lie! I could not fight the battle of Swaraj with that crowd......I was in agony" (Ibid:575). He demanded their foreign caps, but no more than a hundred caps were thrown and four of these were not thrown by their owners. This was yet another cause of remorse for Gandhi for he wanted *swadeshi* to be peaceful, not coercive. But there were those who interpreted his symbols of "truth force" as symbols of aggressive rebellion and an excuse for violence. Such incidents revealed yet again that Gandhi, master of symbolism though he was, could not persuade others to adopt his own belief in the meaning of dress. This was further revealed in Gandhi's attempts to persuade all Indians into *khadi* clothes.

Converting the Nation to *Khadi*

I have highlighted Gandhi's emphasis on the moral significance of clothes. He hoped to convey this significance to the entire Indian nation, changing people's attitudes to their dress. As with many of his theories, he used the Sabarmati Ashram as the laboratory for his experiments. As early as May 1915, shortly after his return from South Africa, he had written a draft version of the Ashram Constitution which included a "vow of swadeshi" to be taken by all Ashram members. In it Gandhi laid out his beliefs about the moral importance of wearing clothes that were handwoven in India.[31] To Gandhi the place of origin and means of production were the key factors determining a garment's moral

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31 The full vow went as follows: "The person who has taken the vow of Swadeshi will never use articles which conceivably involve violation of truth in their manufacture or on the part of their manufacturers. It follows, for instance, that a votary of truth will not use articles manufactured in the mills of Manchester, Germany or India, for he cannot be sure that they have involved no such violation of truth. Moreover, labourers suffer much in the mills. The generation of tremendous heat causes enormous destruction of life. Besides, the loss of workers' lives in the manufacture of machines and of other creatures through excessive heat is something impossible to describe. Foreign cloth and cloth made by machinery are, therefore, tabooed to a votary of non-violence as they involve triple violence. Further reflection will show that the use of foreign cloth can be held to involve a breach of the vows of non-stealing and non-possession. We follow custom, and for better appearance, wear foreign cloth in preference to the cloth made on our own handlooms with so little effort. Artificial beautifying of the body is a hindrance to a brahmachari (celibate) and so, even from the point of view of that vow, machine-made cloth is taboo. Therefore the vow of Swadeshi requires the use of simple clothing made on simple handlooms and stitched in simple style, foreign buttons, cuts, etc., being avoided. The same line of reasoning may be applied to all other articles" (CWMG vol 13:93).

worth. All machine-made cloth, even if it was made in India, violated his concept of truth, non-violence, non-stealing, non-possesion and celibate living. Once he had revived the hand spinning industry, making the spinning wheel (*charka*) a national symbol, Gandhi added another criterion to his *swadeshi* vow: that the cloth should be woven from handspun yarn. It was a *swadeshi* far stricter than that practised by the Bengali nationalists a decade earlier. The latter had used the country of origin, not the means of production as their criterion for determining whether or not cloth was *swadeshi*.

By 1919 Gandhi was appealing to all Indians to adopt *khadi* and to take a vow of *swadeshi*[32]. Added to the moral values he attributed to *khadi*, were the social, political and economic benefits of making and wearing *swadeshi* cloth. By the end of his life Gandhi had woven almost all his policies into the concept of *swadeshi*. In brief, he felt that through stimulating the production and use of indigenous cloth he could provide supplementary employment to the masses, remove untouchability, promote the self sufficiency of India's villages, weld together people of all castes and religions, drive out British rule by non-violent means and introduce an improved standard of morality and sense of national unity. *Khadi* and spinning were to become not only the unifying national cause in the peaceful struggle for freedom but also the basis of a new craft-based, non-industrial economic structure in free India. As Gandhi himself admitted, *khadi* to him was something of an obsession: "Of all my foibles, of all my weaknesses and fanaticisms or whatever you like to call them, *khadi* is my pet one....This is sacred cloth" (CWMG vol 23:106).

Gandhi set about converting the nation to *khadi* in a systematic and structured manner. He established numerous organisations and associations for the promotion of *khadi*, as well as training centres for spinning and weaving. He also persuaded the Congress party to give *khadi* an important place at the centre of its policies. By 1920 the Non Cooperation Movement included a boycott on imported textiles and the organisation of pickets at the entrance to foreign cloth shops. Furthermore all Congress politicians were expected to wear white *khadi* (loose shirts with *dhoti* or *pyjama*), and were later requested to spin for a minimum of half an hour a day. And while Congress was to set the example, all Indian men and women were called upon to burn their foreign cloth as part of their acceptance of the *swadeshi* vow. Volunteers hawked *khadi* through the

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32 The precise wording of these vows varied considerably from speech to speech.

streets, providing door to door collections of foreign cloth for burning or distribution to the destitute. Meanwhile, substantial efforts were made to stimulate the production and wearing of *khadi* through constructive education schemes, exhibitions, shops and National schools.

So fastidious was Gandhi about the necessity of wearing *khadi* that he even objected to an actor wearing foreigncloth in a national school production of Shakespeare's **Hamlet** (CWMG vol 29:319-320). He criticised priests for dressing images of the gods in machine made fibres (CWMG vol 16:188). And he attempted to replace the use of flower garlands, traditionally distributed to honourable guests on auspicious occasions, by "yarn garlands", made from handspun cotton thread which could be collected and later used to provide cheap clothing for the poor (CWMG vol 26:74). He also sought to revolutionise women's clothing by trying to persuade women to hand over their jewellery for use in public works (Gandhi 1946:195) and to adopt plain undecorated *khadi* saris, preferably white in colour. *Khadi* and its counterpart, hand spinning, were a potential solution to all of India's problems. For Gandhi they were an act of faith.

In view of Gandhi's personal belief in the moral importance of *khadi*, it is interesting to follow his various arguments as he tried to define and redefine the meaning of clothing for the Indian nation, for it is here that we encounter the many conflicts and ambiguities of his sartorial teachings. For Gandhi, believing in unity of thought and action, chose *khadi* as the fabric of truth par excellance, the ultimate expression of moral duty and personal belief. Yet at the same time, he was forced to acknowledge that it was economically and politically expedient for all to wear *khadi*, regardless of their beliefs, as this saved *khadi* from becoming the freakish garb of a small religious minority. Using the examples of foreign cloth and *khadi*, I shall highlight more closely some of the inescapable ambiguities of Gandhi's theory of dress as his idea of clothing as truth was forced to make concessions to a more practical idea of clothing as strategy.

Khadi versus Foreign Cloth: Battle of Morality and Tactics

There were many reasons why it was difficult to persuade people to adopt *khadi*. Many had internalised the belief that foreign cloth meant civilization and a return to *khadi* was a return to "savage days" (CWMG vol 26:258). Furthermore, fine cloth had always been favoured in India above thick coarse

khadi, even before the invention of mill cloth. Gandhi was aware of *khadi*'s limitations. In 1920, he admitted:

> "that all khadi is not equally good quality; that it easily crumples and coat and trousers do not remain stiff; it shrinks so much that the sleeve recedes from the wrist to the elbow; it looks like a sieve so much that moong grains can easily pass through it: people perhaps have had experience of one or the other or all of these things... " (CWMG vol 17:16).

In economic terms *khadi's* position was equally tenuous for it represented poorer quality at higher prices. This inevitably deterred many from purchasing *khadi* and lead Gandhi to propound an alternative economic theory[33] in which national well-being was the new criteria of value:

> "Life is more than money. It is cheaper to kill our aged parents who can do no work and who are a drag on our slender resources. It is also cheaper to kill our children whom we do not need for our material comfort and whom we have to maintain without getting anything in return. But we kill neither our parents nor our children, but consider it a privilege to maintain them no matter what their maintenance costs us. Even so must we maintain khadi to the exclusion of all other cloth.....When we have studied this (khadi economics) from the point of view of national well-being, we shall find that khadi is never dear" (Harijan 10.12.1938 in Gandhi 1959:70).

Khadi wearing was to become a moral duty both to the nation and to the wearer who should recognise the full implications of the "khadi spirit": "illimitable faith", "illimitable patience", "self sacrifice", "purity of life" and "fellow feeling with every human being on earth" (Gandhi 1959:104-5). In short, it was a matter of "dharma" (religious duty). In order to wear *khadi* a person should, therefore, maintain a lifestyle worthy of *khadi* for "the outward appearance must be fit with the expression within" (CWMG vol 19:345). It was not enough for people to don *khadi* simply because it was coming into vogue for to Gandhi a change of clothes was like a change of religion. It was a question of morality and belief (CWMG vol 27:334). Without this latter aspect, a sartorial conversion was utterly worthless. In 1921, he wrote in Navajivan:

> "Anyone who wears khadi out of ignorance, by way of imitating others or out of hypocrisy, will not be regarded as having taken the vow of

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33 Gandhi altered the emphasis of his economic arguments in later years when he tried to get villagers to spin, not for sale, but for their own use. He wished to decentralise the *khadi* movement and make it an important part of his scheme for village uplift.

khadi, despite the fact that he wears it. Such fashionable khadi wearers
could not be regarded as advancing the sentiment of khadi" (Gandhi in
Bakshi 1987:89).

Directly opposed to *khadi* was foreign cloth which, with its glitsy glamour and
artifice, lured innocent people away from the path of truth and virtue. The battle
between *khadi* and foreign cloth was therefore perceived by Gandhi as a
symbolic encounter between good and evil. The very act of wearing or buying
imported machine manufactured textiles represented a fall to temptation.
Rephrasing one of his favourite passages from the Sermon on the Mount,
Gandhi preached: "It is as sinful to cast covetous glances at imported cloth as it
is for a man to cast lustful glances at another's wife" (CWMG vol 18:409).

He called on mill owners to stop putting "temptation" in the way of men and
women "in the shape of flimsy Japanese dhotis or saris or starchy calico".
Rather, they should seek to cultivate new consumer tastes, where art would be
recognised in *khadi* itself (in Bakshi 1987:18). He even argued that the person
who wears foreign cloth is no longer Indian "since by his dress he has become
a foreigner" (ibid:23). And just as nationality and religion were more or less
permanent features of a person's identity, so the choice of *khadi* over foreign
cloth was to represent a permanent and lifelong conversion. When people were
tempted to give up *khadi* and spinning after Independence, Gandhi remonstrated
that *khadi* represented a way of life, based on non-violence and that people had
misunderstood him if they thought it was merely a strategy for attaining *Swaraj*
(CWMG vol 90:229).

At an ideal level then, Gandhi hoped that people's clothing matched and indeed
expressed their internal moral state. But at a pragmatic level, he was faced with
a number of difficulties. Firstly, there was the fear that through over-
emphasizing the moral requirements of *khadi*, Gandhi might lose support from
people who dared not wear *khadi* or fear that they were morally inadequate to
do so. This would prevent *khadi* from becoming the national cloth it was
intended to be. And secondly there was the problem that *khadi* was only
powerful in the political and economic sense if sufficient numbers wore it on the
streets. In other words, *sheer numbers* were essential to the success of *khadi*.
So too was the idea that rich and poor, high caste and low, Hindu, Muslim,
Christian, Parsi and Jew should be indistinguishable from the fabric of their
dress. These factors forced Gandhi to reject at times his original interpretation
of the relationship between *khadi* and morality. In reply to a letter from

someone who feared wearing *khadi* because he lacked the necessary qualities of "sincerity, purity and self conquest", Gandhi wrote:

> "Its one great merit is that it solves, as nothing else can, the economic problem of India and removes starvation. We want all, irrespective of character, to wear khaddar. Scoundrels, drunkards, the very scum of the land, must clothe and feed themselves. I would not hesitate to urge them to wear khaddar even though I cannot induce them to change their mode of inner life. We must cease to attribute to khaddar virtues which it cannot carry" (CWMG vol 23:458-9).

In other words, he was calling now for all people to wear *khadi*, whatever their beliefs, a plea which directly contradicted his earlier cry for the integrity of the *khadi* wearer. And although clothing was supposed to represent each person's spiritual and mental choice, Gandhi introduced a series of psychological pressures and regulatory measures to ensure that as many people as possible were persuaded to adopt *khadi* regardless of their faith in the "khadi spirit".

Gandhi's most controversial tool of persuasion was his insistence on the "transformative" qualities of cloth (Bayly 1986:314). Reworking ideas concerning the contagion of purity and pollution, he shifted his original thesis that people must be worthy of *khadi* to a new thesis that through wearing *khadi*, people could actually *become* more worthy. In other words the mere act of wearing *khadi* was so virtuous in itself that it could purify the wearer, whereas foreign cloth was so intrinsically vile that contact with it was physically and mentally defiling. The striking feature of this argument was that Gandhi was utilising the very concept of untouchability which in other contexts, he abhorred.[34]

Gandhi's terminology was highly emotive, arousing mass hysteria from the crowds and stirring episodes where people stripped themselves of foreign garments and tossed them onto communal fires.[35] He referred to foreign cloth

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34 Take for example his damning response, when asked if it was wrong for menstruating women to touch books and paper and things connected to learning: "Such a question can only be asked in a wretched country like India which is disgraced by foolish notions about touching and not touching things" (CWMG vol 31:89).

35 Krishnadas captured the atmosphere of hysteria and excitement that accompanied these fires when he described a fire lit by Gandhi in Assam: "...he set fire to a huge collection of foreign clothes lying in front of the platform. At that time a sort of frenzy seized the whole crowd, and from all sides foreign clothes

PUBLIC MEETING

AND

BONFIRE OF FOREIGN CLOTHES

Will take place at the Maidan near Elphinstone Mills
. . . Opp. Elphinstone Road Station . . .

On SUNDAY the 9th Inst. at 6-30 P. M.

When the Resolution of the Karachi Khilafat Conference and
another Congratulating Ali Brothers and others will be passed.

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All are requested to attend in Swadeshi Clothes of Khadi. Those who
have not yet given away their Foreign Clothes are requested to send them
to their respective Ward Congress Committees for inclusion in the

GREAT BONFIRE.

Fig. 3:28 Poster, brought out during the non-cooperation movement.
From Nanda B.R., **Gandhi, a Pictorial Biography** (1988).

as "filthy", "defiling", "untouchable", "our greatest outward pollution" and called on people to "cleanse" themselves by assigning their garments to the "sacrificial flames". Foreign cloth, he argued, revived "such black memories" and was such a mark of "shame and degradation", that it was not even fit to give to the starving poor, for to wear it was to violate *dharma* (CWMG vol 20:433).[36] Those who refused to burn their clothes, should send them abroad or confine their use to lavatory wearing only, since they were too defiling for any other purpose (CWMG vol 20:342). Gandhi's attitude disturbed the Indian intelligentsia, not least Rabindranath Tagore who was vehemently opposed to persuasion by crowd psychology, and who feared the consequences of the notion of "untouchability", previously confined to the social sphere, spreading to infect economics and politics (Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia 1981:99).

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rained in heaps upon the burning pile. In the crowd, some there were who were seen to cover their nakedness with their towels or their chaddars, consigning their dhoties to the flames. My pen fails to portray the divine enthusiasm that had seized the audience. In such large quantities were clothes offered to the sacrificial fire that it kept on burning till the whole of the succeeding morning" (Krishnadas 1961:26).

36 After being accused many times of confusing his priorities, Gandhi conceded finally that foreign cloth could be sent to the starving in Malabar since one could not afford to be fastidious when clothing the naked (CWMG vol 25:2-3).

Khadi, by contrast, was, according to Gandhi, "sacred cloth" (CWMG vol 23:106). Its radiance influenced other aspects of living and its "fragrance" made public life "clean and wholesome" (CWMG vol 22:151). He even suggested that people should seek *darshan*, not from Gandhi himself but from *khadi* (CWMG vol 33:101).

The apparent inconsistencies of Gandhi's arguments were to some extent a product of the varied nature of his audiences. Unlike other politicians of his day, he chose to aim his teachings primarily at the masses but he relied on maintaining some credibility with the intellectual elite who held all the major political posts. Of all his policies, it was Gandhi's obsession with *khadi* and spinning which the Indian intelligentsia found most difficult to stomach and he was forced to modify his arguments when he feared losing their support. While he continued to fill his public speeches with passionate and emotional pleas for *khadi*, his language in press interviews and personal discussions was often considerably more restrained. To a perturbed Rev. Andrews, he stated that although foreign cloth was itself impure, this did not make the wearer of foreign cloth an impure being. Neither did the wearer of *khadi* become a pure being simply through changing his clothes to pure *khadi* (CWMG vol 25:236). At times, the entire transformative argument was excluded altogether and replaced by the idea of economic welfare or national solidarity and duty. Thus in Kolupur in 1927 the virtues of the khaddarite were explained as follows: "the khadi-wearer has distinctly something to his credit inasmuch as he serves both the poor and his country. Khadi immediately takes him up from a lower level and makes him the friend of the poor" (CWMG vol 33:194).Gandhi's many varied explanations of the meaning of *khadi* reveal, not the insincerity of his beliefs, but rather the extraordinary strength of his conviction that in *khadi* lay the foundations of free India. With the zeal of an evangelist, he sought therefore to convert all Indians to *khadi*, at least physically if not mentally. For ultimately he was forced to accept that the mere fact of people wearing *khadi* was more important than people's individual motives for doing so. Gandhi hoped that *khadi* dress could act as a blanket, covering internal differences with a facade of apparent sameness, implying national unity whether or not such unity actually existed.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter I examined the clothing dilemmas of the Indian elite in relation to the problem of how far they should Westernise their dress. Gandhi, after experimenting with his own clothes, finally found a solution which theoretically should have put an end to the problem altogether. By suggesting that India should entirely reject foreign cloth and clothes, he was also offering a solution to the problem of the divided self as it was constituted under colonialism. There would no longer be any necessity for people to keep changing their clothes for they could simply wear the clothes of their convictions.

Gandhi led the way by appearing in political meetings in simple styles of Indian dress. Finally he resorted to a loincloth in his attempt to persuade the nation of the need to change its sartorial habits. For Gandhi it was not a problem that Indian dress contradicted the European concept of civilization for he deliberately rejected the concept civilization when he shed his European clothes. His own clothing changes were, as I have shown, intimately linked to his desire to change the clothes of the nation. He advocated that every Indian should wear simple Indian styles, woven from *khadi*, preferably in white or unbleached form. His sartorial solution was in tune with his personal belief in the value of simplicity and in India's need to establish a non-industrial craft based society. *Khadi* dress not only provided a suitable visually consistent front in the non-violent struggle against British rule, but it was also the solution to India's internal problems, for it had the potential of welding together people of different religions and social groups. For Gandhi such harmony in clothing meant social, religious, economic and political harmony. His attempts to convert the nation to *khadi* were part of his more general attempt to establish a new morally improved society.

Under Gandhi the problem of what to wear had been raised to the political foreground. He tried to reduce the problem to the simple choice between foreign cloth (sin) and *khadi* (morality). But for many, the choice was never that clear cut. In the next chapter I shall examine how Indian people responded to Gandhi's deceptively simple solution to the problem of what to wear.

Fig. 3:29 Gandhi's body prepared for cremation. Round his neck he wears, not the customary flower garlands, but garlands of hand spun cotton yarn.

Fig. 3:30 Shrine to Gandhi, covered with skeins of handspun yarn.

Chapter 4

THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO WEAR UNRESLOVED

> "I have done my packing racked with conflicts as to what to take and
> what not to take with me - whether to wear *khaddar* dress there while
> addressing the audience or *swadeshi* silk, the point of which will not be
> so well understood ..... whether to be smart and fashionable as of old
> or to be simple and common only. I have at last chosen to be the latter.
> But it is taking time and trouble to assimilate the new method"
> (Sarladevi Chaudhurani, 3.5.1920, letter to Gandhi, CWMG vol
> 17:429)..

Sarladevi Chaudhurani[1] was preparing for a conference in May 1920 when she
experienced this sartorial anxiety. Her letter to Gandhi reveals that the problem
of what to wear was still a thriving issue in India despite Gandhi's attempts to
resolve it. But the problem had taken a new form. Rather than worrying about
the extent to which they should Westernise their dress, the Indian elite were
now worrying about the extent to which they should simplify and re-Indianise
their dress. Far from effacing the problem of what to wear, Gandhi had in fact
raised it to unprecedented heights for he had drawn it out of the political closet.
It was no longer relegated to private journals; it was now a much discussed
public issue. Furthermore Gandhi's particular emphasis on the morality of
khadi gave the problem a new flavour. Whereas in the past it was considered
morally and culturally acceptable to alter one's dress to suit the occasion or to
wear a combination of Indian and European dress, it was now, according to
Gandhi, immoral to wear anything but *khadi* on a permanent and daily basis.
Any hope of finding a neutral solution to the problem of what to wear seemed
now to have been completely eradicated for Gandhi actively encouraged people
to interpret one another's clothes as signs of personal and political belief. The
result was that people became increasingly self conscious about their public
image for they found their clothing choices the subject of more rigourous
criticism and public scrutiny than ever before.

In this chapter I explore the clothing choices of different individuals and groups
as they responded to Gandhi's plea for sartorial change. I have already

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1 Sarladevi Chaudhurani was the wife of Pandit Rambhoj Dhutt Chaudhurani, a
nationalist leader in the Punjab, and the niece of Rabindranath Tagore. In 1920 she
was the first elite woman to adopt *khadi* and became exceptional for wearing it in
coarse plain white undecorated form.

discussed Gandhi's difficulty in controlling interpretations of his own dress. Here I shall concentrate on the various ways in which the two nationalist symbols of *khadi* and the Gandhi cap became reinterpreted by the Indian public. After giving a brief outline of some of the social and political pressures that encouraged people to re-Indianise their dress, I shall then go on to show how, despite their role as symbols of national unity, *khadi* and the Gandhi cap simultaneously became symbols of divisiveness. I suggest that most of the major social and political divisions of the day did in fact resurface under the apparent uniformity of the *khadi* blanket. The use of *khadi* in contemporary politics will be discussed briefly at the end of the chapter, showing how many of the sartorial preoccupations of the Gandhian era have their echo in modern day India.

Khadi or Else

There were numerous pressures encouraging people to adopt *khadi*. Not only were there Gandhi's constant speeches, but there was also, as we have seen, a vast network of people and institutions spread from towns to villages, dedicated to the propagation of *khadi*, both the textile and the ideology surrounding it. As the ideology spread, it took on a variety of forms as different individuals chose to emphasise certain aspects, ignore and invent others.

Propaganda from *khadi* extremists ranged from the humorous to the physically threatening. In Jabalpur in Central India, the local Congress Committee organised a parade of one hundred and eleven washermens' donkeys dressed in English coats, trousers, waistcoats, hats and scarlet neckties, each donkey representing a different Indian who had been favoured or knighted by the "satanic" Government. The intention behind the demonstration was to encourage all Indians to return British honours and decorations, and to adopt instead humble, simple Indian *khadi* (Times 7.5.1930). Public ridicule of those still wearing foreign cloth did not always take such an elaborate form, but it acted as a constant reminder to wear *khadi*, especially when ridicule sometimes turned from mild intimidation to physical violence. *Khadi*--clad pickets not only prevented those wearing foreign cloth from entering foreign cloth shops but at times they even barred them from entering Hindu Temples (L:1/2/14).

In their attempts to persuade the nation into *khadi*, those with *khadi*- faith employed arguments far removed from Gandhi's own. In April 1930 one of Gandhi's so-called "lieutenants" made a speech in Gujarat, telling people not to

touch foreign cloth since cows' fat was used in its manufacture.[2] By June the rumour had spread and leaflets were printed in Bombay explaining that in Manchester, three hundred pounds of cow and pig blood was used in the production of every one thousand pounds of coloured foreign cloth (ibid). The implication of cows' blood was designed to upset Hindus for whom the cow is sacred, whilst the implication of pigs' blood was intended to disgust Muslims for whom the pig is unclean. If such rumours had ever gained wide circulation they could have provided a very powerful opposition to foreign cloth and a forceful incentive towards the adoption of *khadi*.[3]

Apart from anti-foreign cloth propaganda, and the emotional pressure of public scrutiny, there were, as we have seen, actual rules and regulations which acted to constrain people's choices of what to wear. This applied especially to Congress politicians and all those attending National schools who were, according to membership regulations, obliged to wear *khadi* on a permanent basis. For women the pressure was less institutionalised but came instead from the authority structure of the family. The degree to which women participated in the nationalist movement often depended on the degree to which the men of their family were involved (Kishwar 1985:1698). A woman who was married to a *khadi*-wearing husband, would often have little choice but to adopt *khadi* (see fig 4:1). Such a situation has been described by the writer Kamla Das whose mother was forced into *khadi* by her husband:

> "My father, soon after the betrothal stipulated firmly that his wife was not to wear anything but *khaddar* and preferably white or off-white.

> "After the wedding he made her remove all her gold ornaments from her person, all except the *mangalsutra*[4] To her it must have seemed like taking on widows weeds, but she did not protest. She was mortally afraid of the dark stranger who came forward to take her out of the village and its security" (Das 1976:4).

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2 This was of course a reworking of the famous old rumour in which it was claimed that cows' fat was used to grease the sepoys' cartridges. The rumour is thought to have sparked off the famous Mutiny of 1857.

3 These rumours were not entirely without basis. Animal fat was used in Manchester in the sizing process, but it was cheap mutton fat, not pig or cow fat. Colours were fixed using egg albumen, not blood (L/1/2/14).

4 *Mangalsutra*: type of necklace worn by married women.

Fig 4:2 shows a woman trying to resist her husband's plea that she should dress plainly. Clearly some wives did resist. One woman, trying to escape the fate, even went so far as to threaten suicide if her husband continued to refuse buying her foreign cloth (Navajivan 5.7.1925, CWMG vol 27:333). Such an extreme reaction was surely the exception rather than the rule, but it none the less illustrates the level of anxiety that clothing dilemmas had attained.

The success of clothing as a political symbol lay, of course, in the fact that, with the exception of certain religious ascetics and poor beggars, everyone in India wore some sort of clothing and so everyone was drawn automatically into this national debate. Once dress had attained such elaborate symbolic importance, there was no escape from participation in the battle of clothes, no matter whether a person actually wished to participate in it or not. As always headwear was a central issue.

Gandhi Cap Games Continued

One of Gandhi's objectives in designing the Gandhi cap was, as we have seen, that all Indians should share the same form of headwear, thereby creating the effect of visual uniformity. What is interesting is the manner in which this one material symbol, despite its visual consistency, was used by different groups to represent their own interests. For as the cap emerged on an increasing number of heads, so it was subject to an increasingly wide range of symbolic interpretations. Ultimately it participated not merely in British-Indian power struggles (Cohn 1989), but also in inter-Indian struggles where it became the material focus of wide spread communal tension. Even in England it became a provocative issue, used to define alternative attitudes to British administrative policy in India. Central to this symbolic warfare was the technique of capping the capless and decapping the capped, a game which was played out at varying levels, ranging from verbal persuasion to physical force. Most of these cap incidents took place during the Non Cooperation Movement (1920-1921) and during the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1931), although isolated incidents were not uncommon.

Just as forceful as British attempts to curb the wearing of the cap through prohibition, imprisonment and sometimes the violent assault of Gandhi cap wearers, were the attempts made by cap-wearing Indians to remove foreign headwear from non-Gandhians and to force them into wearing the Gandhi cap. Occasionally this took the simple form of a regulation, such as the rule in

> *As the husband is, the wife is;*
> *Thou art mated with a clown;*
> *And the grossness of his khaddar*
> *Will have weight to drag thee down.*

Here is Premkore grieving over the Royal Visit, not because she is disloyal, but because her husband, who is Swadeshi to the core (his own and Prem's), wants her to appear at the functions in *khaddar*.

Fig. 4:1   HINDI PUNCH.   [BOMBAY, OCTOBER 2, 1921.]

HINDI PUNCH.

ALO, a briefless but hitherto fashionable lawyer, now courting Swadeshi clients,

to

ALI, his still fashionable wife :—

" *Be plain in dress, and*
  sober in your diet,

In short, my deary, kiss
  me, and be quiet ! "

Fig. 4:2

Lahore insisting that all cab drivers and similar municipality employees wear *khadi* caps (CWMG vol 20:488). More often, however, the obligation to wear a Gandhi cap took a more imperative form. In August 1921 there were reports of gangs of *khadi* capped Gandhians rampaging Chowpatty sea front in Bombay (see fig. 4:3), insulting and at times physically attacking anyone who was not wearing a Gandhi cap (Statesman 5.8.1921). Under such pressure, people were more or less forced into buying and wearing caps which were sold at high prices and some of which, though they looked like Gandhi caps, were not in fact made from *khadi* (ibid). That same month, Madan Mohan Malaviya was delayed in addressing a meeting on *Swadeshi* in Poona, owing to the uproar caused by Gandhians at the sight of a finely woven turban on the head of one of the local landlords in the audience. Attempts were made to seize the turban which was made from foreign cloth and to burn it. Malaviya refused to speak until the crowds reluctantly agreed to allow the accused to remain in the audience with his turban firmly planted on his head (Statesman 11.8.1921).

Many accounts of the bonfires of foreign cloth report also the forcible seizure and burning of foreign headwear by Gandhi cap wearers. Under the powerful intimidation of Congress volunteers, people would often hand over their foreign headwear out of "a sense of shame" (Krishnadas 1928:116).

Both internal and external cap conflicts came to a head in Bombay in November 1921 during the official visit of the Prince of Wales. As part of Non Cooperation policy, Congress was encouraging a boycott of all official events linked to the Prince's arrival. After a peaceful mass meeting of largely *khadi*-clad protesters at Elphinstone Mills where Gandhi spoke and lit a pile of foreign cloth, violence broke out amongst members of the vast crowd returning to the city centre. People determined one another's loyalties through the type of cap or turban they had on their heads. Clothes, and in particular headwear, soon became the central focus of this serious outbreak of communal violence, commonly known as the Bombay Riots.

According to Gandhi's bitter report of the events (cf. CWMG vol 21:462-5), fighting began when a "swelling mob" of *khadi* capped aggressors began "molesting peaceful passengers in tramcars....forcibly depriving those who were wearing foreign caps of their head-dresses and pelting inoffensive Europeans". The primary targets of these attacks were Parsis and Eurasians, most of whom had attended the Prince's reception and sported foreign cloth

CAP-ITAL.

(A scene at the Chowpatty Beach during any
meeting day of the N. C. O s for the boycott
of foreign piecegoods.)

ગાંધી કેપની ખલીહારી !

ગાંધી કેપ કેવી " કેપ-ઇટલ " છ ̈ !

(પરદેશી કાપડનો બહીષ્કાર કરવાને લગતી અસહકારીઓની
મળેલી સભાઓના કોઈપણ દીવસે ચોપાટીના દરયે થીનાર
જવામાં આવેશા એક દેખાવ.)

Fig. 4:3   H I N D I P U N C H.   [BOMBAY, August 7, 1921.

often in European styles. In Bhindi Bazaar the angry mob started beating up all those who refused to surrender their foreign headgear and at least one old Parsi was seriously maltreated for holding on to his turban which was made from foreign cloth. Yet even as these atrocities were going on, reports were emerging of counter attacks in Anglo Indian quarters of the city where those wearing Gandhi caps were forced to uncover their heads and beaten if they refused to do so (ibid). It was essentially a battle between bands of white capped khaddarites (mainly Hindu and Muslim) and opposition forces (mainly Christians and Parsis), beturbaned and behatted in foreign cloth of varying colours and styles. Both sides subjected the other to humiliation through seizing items of opposition headwear which had become so imbued with symbolic potency that the mere sight of them could incense people to murder (cf. Krishnadas 1961:123-40).

Gandhi, realising the extremities that clothing conflicts had reached, was full of self reproach for not having curbed cap violence earlier, for he had frequently witnessed over zealous supporters casting other people's headwear into his sacrificial fires. From this time onwards, he always condemned the forcible seizing of headwear, even if it were foreign. Such acts were in conflict with his notion of non-violence.

By 1930 the Congress call to Civil Disobedience brought the cap back into public focus. There were reports in May of British soldiers in Sholapur, parading the streets, armed with hooked sticks with which they whipped the caps off passers by (L/1/2/14). Later that year a series of incidents in the Kaira district of Gujarat resulted in an investigative enquiry by Lord Brailsford. He claimed that local police and revenue officials were not only using the Gandhi cap as an excuse for indiscriminate beatings, but were also encouraging social divisions in the area by inciting landless labourers to attack the wealthier *khadi-*capped peasantry of the region (L:P&J/7/27). Many wealthy peasant land owners in Kaira supported the civil disobedience movement, including the non-payment of taxes and the wearing of *khadi* (Hardiman 1981:125-8, Brailsford 1943:191-6) It was Gandhi cap wearers in particular that were singled out for abuse by frustrated revenue officials and police who confiscated land and offered it for sale at absurdly low prices to those who were prepared to refrain from civil disobedience. In the Borsad region the local subcollector not only tried to encourage poor *Baraiya* labourers to buy up their landlords' confiscated farmland, but also encouraged them to attack their landlords. In one *Baraiya*

dominated village he was reported to have said: "All suits are decided by me. I'll give judgement in your favour. This is a time for revenge. They've suppressed you up to this day. Beat any man who wears a white cap" (ibid).

Brailsford gave considerable publicity to these events in a long letter to the Manchester Guardian and an article in New Republic, whilst in India, the Bombay Chronicle published an emotive piece entitled: "What Mr. Brailsford saw in Gujarat."

Brailsford's report highlighted the controversial nature of cap issues not only in Gujarat, but also among different members of the British Government, most of whom accused him of being gullible to village fables and impartial in his judgement owing to "left wing tendencies". The British authorities wanted to underplay such incidents, especially in view of the recent cap controversies that were still flourishing in Madras and which had gained the British negative publicity in India and at home.

The Madras controversy revolved around an official prohibition on the wearing of Gandhi caps in the Guntur district and surrounding area. The rationale behind the legislation was that the Gandhi cap, being a symbol of sympathy with Civil Disobedience, was a potential disturbance to public tranquillity. A few days after the the announcement was issued (on 20 June 1930), the police raided a local press office in Guntur and seized all copies of pamphlets that had been printed by Congress Volunteers, urging the public to wear Gandhi caps. A total of eight arrests were recorded relating to cap wearing.

Try as they might to curb the wearing of the cap, the British authorities could not escape either its presence or its symbolism. For as fast as they removed caps from Indian heads, new caps would appear, sometimes in surprising places. Most startling of all was its sudden appearance at Westminster on the head of Labour M.P. Fenner Brockway. Disgusted by the arrest of Indians for the trivial offence of wearing the Gandhi cap, he produced his own cap in the middle of a Parliamentary debate, challenging the Secretary for India, Mr. Wedgwood Benn, by asking if he really considered the cap dangerous to British Administration in India. In response to encouragement from the socialist back benches, Brockway put the offensive Gandhi cap on his own head. Three days later he was suspended from the House for his subversive opinions about British policies in India.

Back in India the Madras Government responsible for the cap prohibition received a critical note from the Home Department of the Government of India, warning them that: "the issue of orders of this nature against the use of such emblems or symbols is of doubtful wisdom, save in very exceptional circumstances. The Government of India hope therefore, that it will be found possible to avoid the issue of similar orders in the future" (ibid:144).

One year after the prohibition was introduced, the cap was still a flourishing topic in Madras. At a meeting of the Madras Council in July 1931, the local Government was accused of introducing the prohibition as a convenient justification and useful cover for police violence which would have occurred anyway without the supposed provocation of Gandhi caps (L/P&J/7/27).

The Gandhi cap illustrates the complexity of symbolic formation and interpretation. At some level Gandhi must be regarded as the author of the symbol, as it was he who created the cap and tried to define its significance as a garment of unity for all Indians fighting the non-violent battle for Swaraj. British suppression of the garment enabled Gandhi to heighten its significance as a symbol of political freedom. But neither Gandhi nor the British were entirely responsible for the symbolic developments of the cap.

From the point of view of the British authorities, the cap posed continual problems precisely because its symbolism could not be controlled. They could, of course, have simply ignored the sudden appearance of thousands of *khadi* capped heads in the Indian streets. But while this might have diminished the symbolic value of the cap, it would have done so only at the risk of allowing the number of cap wearers to increase. An alternative policy, which was periodically favoured, was to stamp out the physical presence of the cap but this only encouraged the symbolism of the garment which, under Gandhi's nurturing, became at times a cap of martyrdom. A third technique was to belittle the cap, as Beverly Nichols did when he argued that the "Gandhi cap is a very bad fit indeed for a man with a modern brain" (Nichols 1944:176) or as a correspondent to the Statesman tried to do when he argued that the cap was really only a cross between the Brodwick cap and the cap worn by British prisoners at Dartmoor (Statesman 11.8.1921). But despite providing amusement to anti-Gandhians, such statements did little to disperse either the physical presence or the symbolic value of the cap for its wearers. Since none

of these actions provided a solution to the Gandhi cap problem, the British administration fumbled around with each alternative, trapped in a symbolic bind cleverly initiated by Gandhi.

But if the British were unable to control the significance of the cap, so too was Gandhi himself. For once the cap was in widespread circulation, its meaning could no longer be centralised. By the time Gandhi's teachings had filtered down through Congress organisations, volunteers, local leaders and distant villagers, they emerged, like "Chinese Whispers", in what were sometimes almost unrecognisable forms. Throughout this process of diffusion, individuals and groups picked up on Gandhian symbols and injected them with their own specific values and desired meanings. Sarkar records an incident in Bengal in 1922, when a group of Gandhi-capped Santals attacked the police, demanding the release of Santal prisoners, "shouting all the while that they were immune from bullet wounds as they were wearing Gandhi Maharaj's caps" (Sarkar 1984:301). Three were killed in the process. To them the Gandhi cap had taken on the role of a talisman, capable of protecting its wearer. Yet Sarkar also reveals how for the industrial workers in the area, the same material symbol played more the role of an emblem of unity, like a trade union mascot (ibid:312-319). Similarly for Hindus and Muslims fighting the Khilifat[5] cause in 1921, the cap had been momentarily perceived as a garment of solidarity that cut across religious boundaries. In the Bombay Riots *khadi*-capped men of both religions, had attacked and been attacked by those in foreign headwear and fifty three had died in the process. But by the mid 1920's, after the Khilifat issue had subsided, hardly a Muslim could be found wearing the cap which had regained its reputation as essentially a Hindu cap in a Hindu fight for a Hindu India. Patriotic Muslims began to wear caps modelled on the Turkish *fez* in increasing numbers, sometimes emblazoning them with the crescent moon.

The above episodes of capping and de-capping the opposition reveal that the battle of headdress in the 1920's and 1930's was by no means limited to British-Indian relations. Yet trying to control Indian headwear was undeniably a symbol of the British desire to control Indian identity and there were some

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5 Khilifat was the movement to support the rights of the Muslim khalifah, the religious leader of Turkey who had been defeated by the British in the war. From 1919 onwards Gandhi tried to persuade all Indians, whatever their religion, to join the movement, which could be part of the more general struggle to oust the British out of India.

Indians who got their final revenge. For in August 1947 Fred Burrows, (the Governor of Bengal) was sitting in an office in Government House in Lahore, when a large crowd of *khadi* capped men stampeded the building and, finding their British victim seated at his desk, held him down and forced onto his head a succession of Gandhi caps and into his hand a Congress flag (Swayne-Thomas 1981:92).

The Gandhi cap controversy, like Gandhi's loincloth, reveals how a political symbol can be accepted by many without their necessarily sharing an idea of its meaning. In fact it could be argued that a political symbol is powerful precisely because of its ambiguity which allows a number of different people to respond to a single unified form without necessarily sharing the interpretation of it (cf. Elder and Cobb 1983). But while Gandhi cap episodes reveal how people projected different meanings into a single material form, *khadi* episodes reveal how people projected difference through the material artefact itself: that is, they diversified the material symbol and not merely the interpretation thereof. An examination of various sartorial disputes concerning *khadi* shows how this cloth, which Gandhi hoped would unite all Indians, did in fact become a medium through which social, religious and political differences in Indian society were subtly expressed.

KHADI: FABRIC OF UNITY OR FABRIC OF DIFFERENCE?

United in *Khadi*

Historians have emphasised the fact that *khadi* acted as a fabric of unity, visually uniting Indian politicians and wealthy peasants with the rural poor (Kishwar 1985:1695, Hardiman 1981:126). This was certainly Gandhi's intention, and at some level, he was indeed successful. Photographs of Congress meetings and political activities during the non cooperation movement reveal that the dark European and semi-European suits worn by politicians in the past had been entirely replaced by loose white cotton garments such as *dhotis, kurtas, pyjamas*, turbans and Gandhi caps. To this extent Gandhi's plan for re-Indianisation was visibly successful. Vijayalakshmi Pandit[6] claimed that she could no longer detect the social class of visitors to her home for *khadi* made all Congressmen look the same (Bean 1989:373).

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6 Daughter of Motilal Nehru and sister of Jawaharlal.

This apparent visual uniformity and the choice of a traditional Indian idiom through which to express it, were undoubtedly unnerving for the British, especially since the Congress Party contained some of the most educated and respected men of India who had previously enjoyed the "privileges" of both Western education and Western dress. That anyone could reject the latter in favour of a cotton *dhoti* was both disturbing and farcical for many Britishers. A journalist for the Times of India, horrified by the image of the eminent Motilal Nehru dressed in homespun and hawking *khadi* through the streets of Allahabad, concluded that "even in India it must be recognised that Pandit Nehru is making an ass of himself." He continued:

> "If the British public had learnt that Lord Birkenhead, wearing a Union Jack waistcoat, had been selling true blue Tory rosettes beneath the lions in Trafalgar Square, that Mr. Baldwin had been promoting empire industries by hawking trays of British toys in Piccadilly, that Ramsay Macdonald, attired in corduroys and a muffler, had been disposing of red flags among the workers in Limehouse, or that the Clydeside Bolshevists had set up a stall in Clydeside for the sale of miniature sickles and hammers, the unanimous conclusion of all classes would be that their leaders had gone mad" (CWMG vol 30:288).

Prior to his sudden shift in 1920 to Congress politics and *khadi*, Motilal Nehru had been considered almost a parody of the English gentleman. Although he had always continued to wear Indian styles of dress inside his own home, the public knew him as the extravagant man of European fashion and in the early 1900's he was frequently accused by the Indian press of "being a foreigner" (SWMN vol 1:120). In 1911 he had been invited to the King's Darbar in Delhi for which he ordered a series of outfits including full court dress (fig.4:4b), a number of lounge suits and even a *sola topi* which he requested his son, Jawaharlal to post from England (ibid:164). There were few men in India with a greater reputation for a love of foreign clothes and Motilal's sudden conversion to *khadi* was undoubtedly a shock to many.

From 1920-1921 all members of National Congress appear to have made a similar shift, usually setting fire to their machine spun apparel and replacing it with white *khadi* (fig. 4:5). As with the Gandhi cap, the beginning of *khadi*'s popularity was also the beginning of its oppression by the Government who tried to prohibit its use by Government servants and at times forcibly removed *khadi* from certain sectors of the *khadi* wearing population (CWMG vol 21:204,240). As far as the British authorities were concerned, then, the sudden conversion of Indians to *khadi* did indeed provide a cohesive and threatening image. But the question is, did it provide the intended link between the many

(a) In top hat and tails (London, 1899).
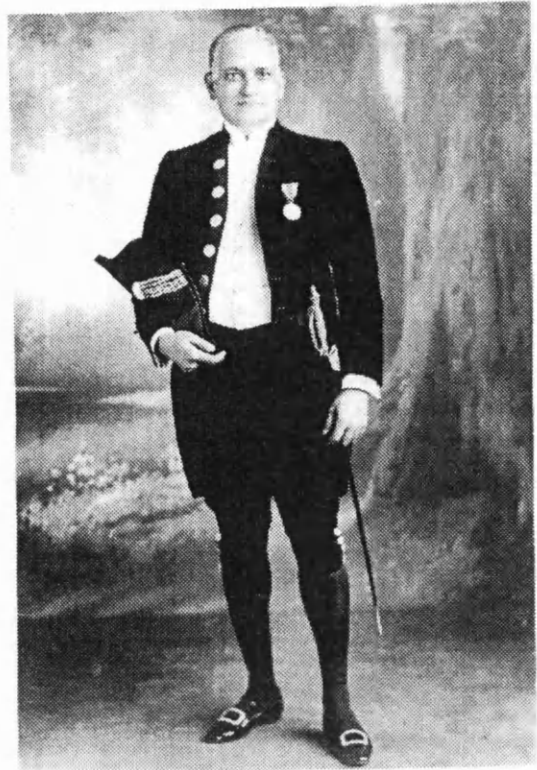
(b) In Darbar Dress, 1911.

(c) In Gandhi cap, *kurta* and *dhoti* after his shift to Gandhian politics.

(d) Wearing a super fine *khadi dhoti*, *kurta* and *chadar*.

Fig. 4:4 Motilal Nehru's changes of dress.
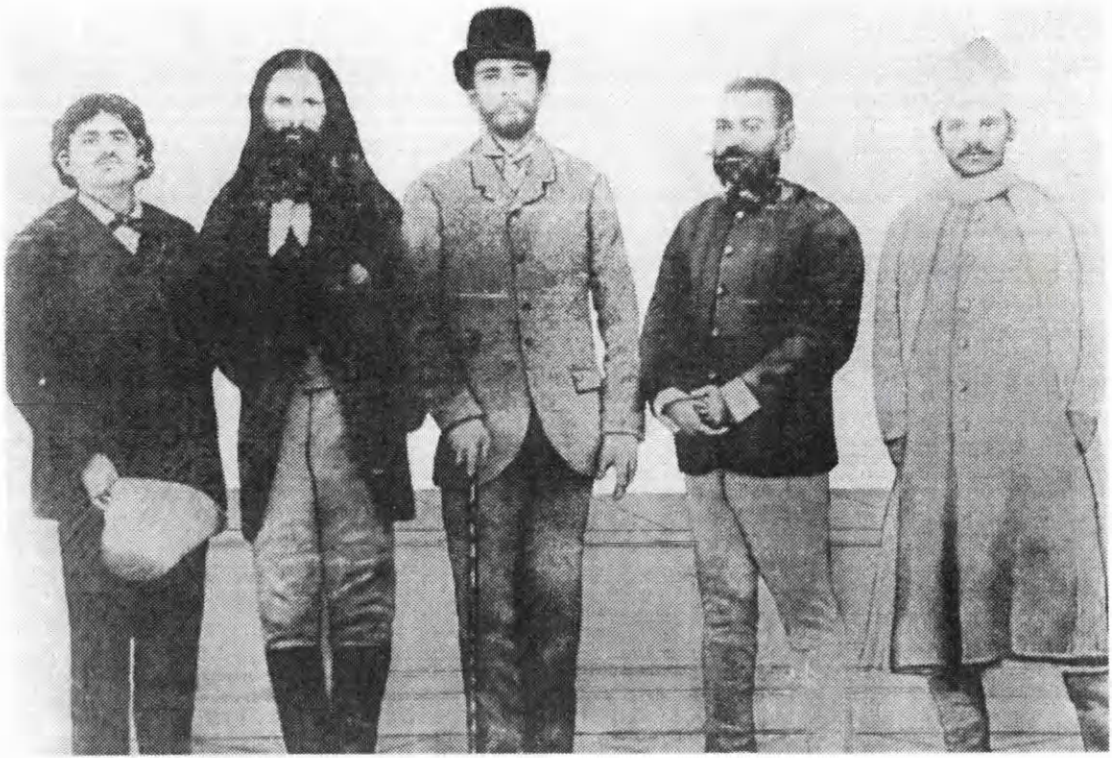
(a) Allahabad Congress (1888). From left to right: Raja Ram Pal Singh, George Yule
(President), Sir. William Wedderburn, Ajudhyanath (Chairman of the reception
committee 1888), Madan Mohan Malaviya, the only member in Indian dress.

(b) Delegates to the Indian National Congress in 1919, Amritsar.
Most men wear European style suits with Indian headwear.
Swami Shraddhanand, seated between Motilal Nehru and Annie
Bessant, is conspicuous in his draped *chadar*.

Fig. 4:5 Transformation of Political Dress.
Photographs (b)-(d) are from **Jawaharlal Nehru: A Memorial Album** (1964).
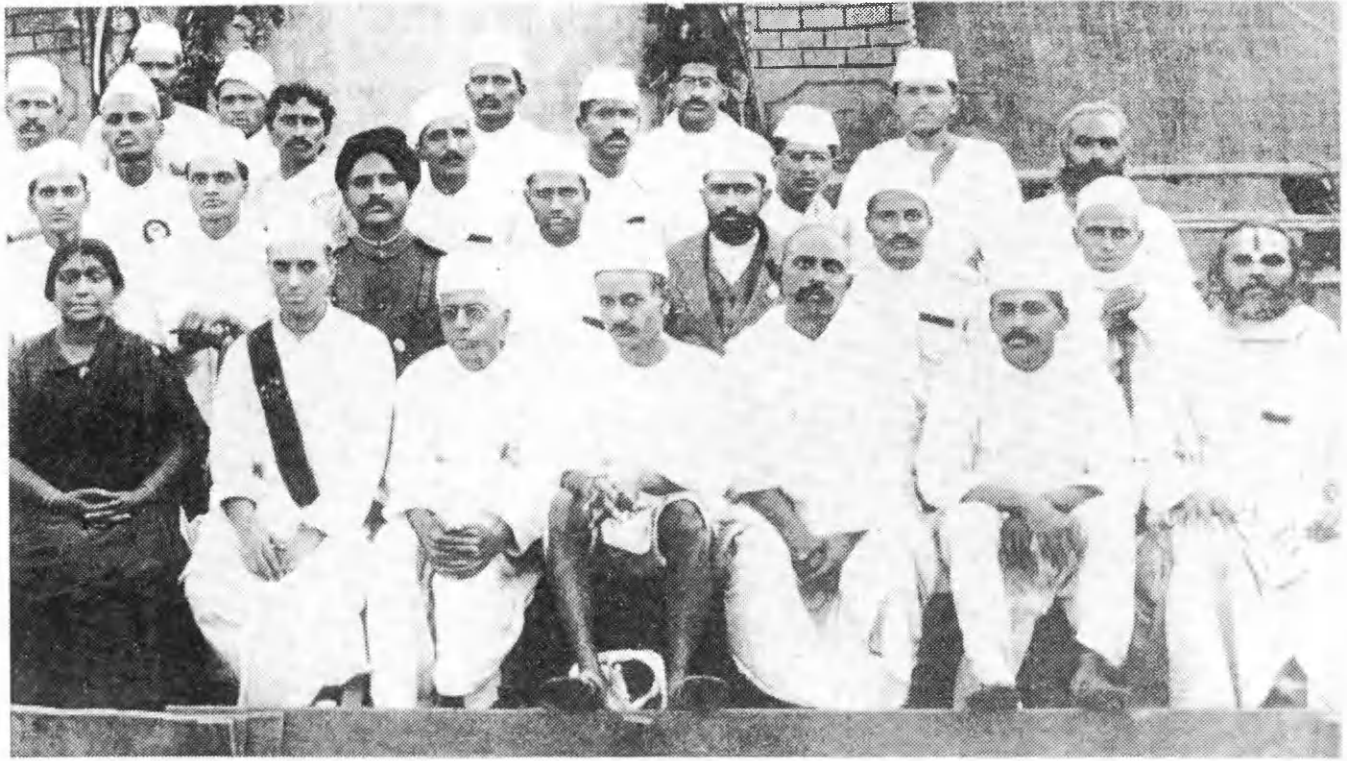
(c) Congress workers in South India, swathed in *khadi* (n.d.). Saurojini Naidu, the politician and poetess is conspicuous in her dark coloured sari.
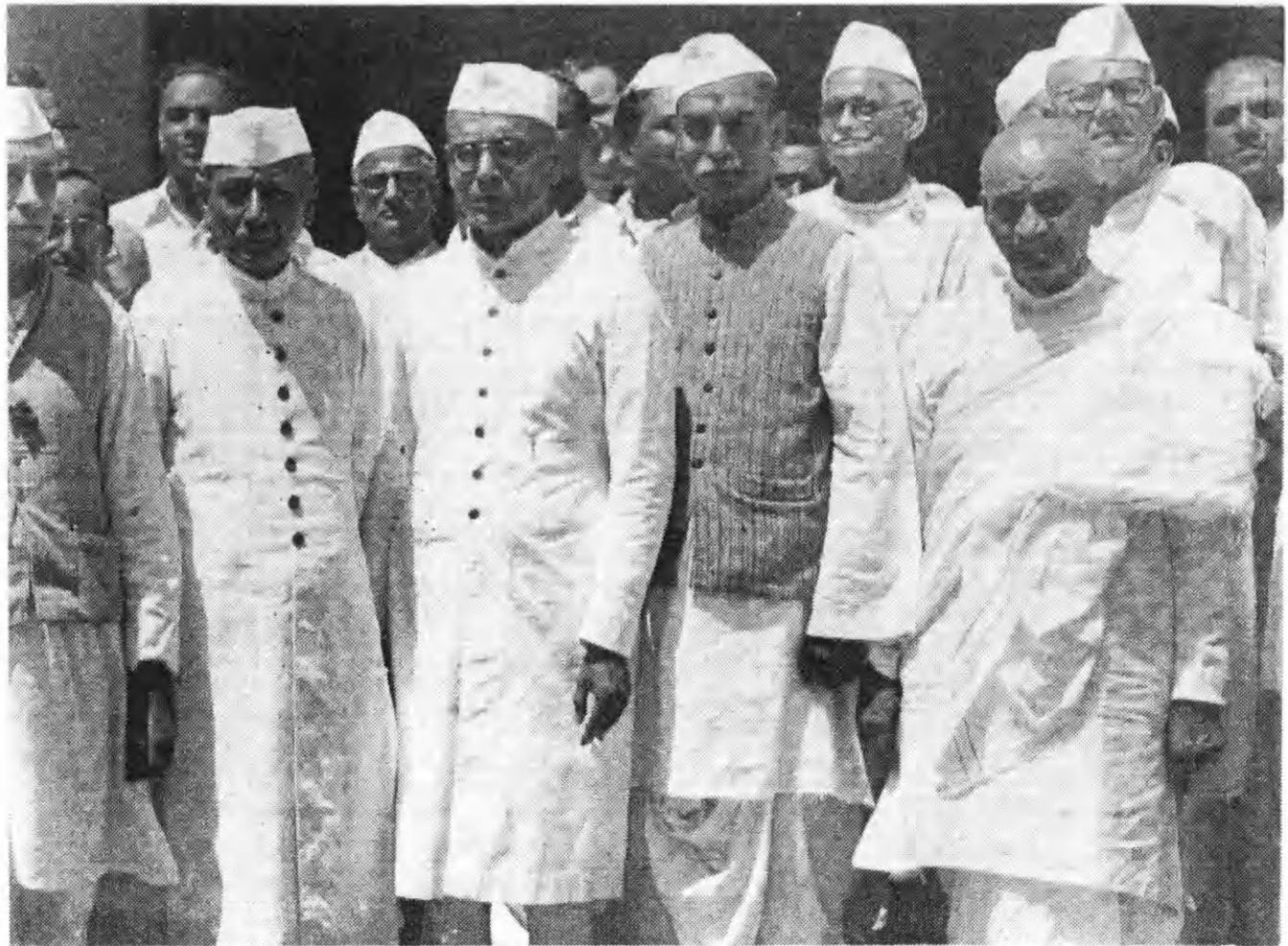
(d) Members of the Interim Government, 1946. Front left to right: Jawaharlal Nehru, Asaf Ali, Syed Ali Zaheer, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhai Patel.

Fig. 4:6 The Nehru family in 1929. Kamala Nehru wears a plain sari (not white) while her daughter Indira dresses in the men's outfit of *kurta pyjama* and Gandhi cap. In general the cap was confined to men's use. From **Jawaharlal Nehru: A Memorial Album** (1964).

entrenched divisions of caste, religion and wealth in Indian society? Was *khadi* really capable of covering difference at an internal level?

For some men and women of the elite classes, the adoption of *khadi* clearly *did* bring about new feelings of solidarity with the masses. One such man was Abbas Tyabji, who, inspired by the spirit of Non Co-operation, flung aside his previously tailored garments along with his job and became involved in village welfare. Writing to Gandhi from a village in 1920, he exclaimed:

> "God! What an experience! I have so much love and affection for the common folk to whom it is now an honour to belong. It is the fakir's dress that has broken down all the barriers" (Nanda 1989:126).

Similarly, Sarladevi Chaudhurani, whose sartorial dilemma introduced this chapter, found that her final choice of a coarse white *khadi* sari was a great success among the Punjabi women whom she addressed at political meetings. It seems, however, from Gandhi's report of the events, that her *khadi* dress singled her out rather than enabling her to blend with her Punjabi sisters for the latter were not wearing *khadi*. Gandhi recalls:

> "Sarladevi herself writes to say that her khaddar sari impressed her audiences more than her speeches.....The good ladies of Lahore flocked around her and felt her coarse but beautifully white sari and admired it. Some took pity on her that she, who only the other day was dressed in costly thin silk saris, now decked herself in hand woven swadeshi khaddar. Sarladevi wanted no pity and retorted that their thin scarves lay heavy on their shoulders with the weight of their helpless dependence on foreign manufacture whereas her coarse khaddar lay light as a feather on her body with the joy of the knowledge that she was free because she wore garments in the manufacture of which her sisters and brothers had laboured" (CWMG vol 18:20).

Tyabji and Chaudhurani provide two examples of members of the Indian elite who tried through their dress to identify with the Indian masses. Whilst for Tyabji his white *khadi* broke down social barriers, this was not the case for Chaudhurani whose simplicity of dress made her conspicuous. One of the problems with the idea that simple *khadi* could bind the elite to the rural masses was that the villagers themselves, particularly the women, were by no means all dressed in plain *khadi*.[7] But there were other problems with the idea that *khadi*

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7 Gandhi was aware of this difficulty to some extent for he wrote in Young India: "So much is town life now dominating the villages that, unless towns set the fashion in khadi, it becomes most difficult to persuade the villagers to spin even in their own interests and just enough for their own use" (Gandhi 1959:234).

covered social differences. Close inspection of the voluminous literature on the subject reveals that, despite an ideology of egalitarianism, many of the people who adopted *khadi* found, both intentionally and unintentionally, subtle means of expressing their social or religious identity. This apparent desire for differentiation was expressed in the fineness of the *khadi*, the types of fibres used, the colour, the decoration and of course the style in which the *khadi* was worn. These transformations of simple *khadi*, along with the numerous social, religious and political squabbles they engendered, reveal that this simple fabric of unity couched within its fibres most of the major divisions of Indian society.

Divided in *Khadi*

At a meeting in Devakkottah in 1927, Gandhi was presented with a piece of exceptionally fine *khadi*, woven by a local weaver from unusually fine hand spun yarn. Appreciative though he was, Gandhi found himself unable to accept the gift:

> "This khadi I cannot wear for the simple reason that it would be against my profession and that I want to have no more than any of the starving millions" (CWMG vol 35:28)

Gandhi's objection was that the *khadi*, being so fine, was a luxury item such as the poor could not afford. Therefore he, whose duty it was to represent the poor, had no business to wear it. He hoped, however, that some wealthy and patriotic man from Devakkottah would be able to adorn his body in this delicate piece of *khadi* by buying it for the extravagant sum of 1001 rupees. The following day he found his buyer (ibid:31, footnote).

The incident is interesting as it highlights the fact that *khadi*, intended to eliminate the distinctions between rich and poor, had become diversified according to the fineness of its weave. Those poor villagers who wore white *khadi* (mainly men) tended to wear the thick, coarsely woven variety since it was cheaper and more durable. When wealthy townsmen adopted *khadi*, they may have appeared to be choosing the clothes of the masses but very often they found a means of stressing their own superior refinement by sporting expensive fine *khadi* which was as costly and prestigious as the reputed muslins of Dacca. For fineness of cloth, as we have seen, denoted not only wealth but also social and ritual superiority. It was worn almost exclusively by those of high social status who could support themselves in prestigious occupations and did not require the hard wearing clothes necessary for manual labour. It therefore bore

with it the secondary associations of education as well as general refinement. Some high caste educated people even claimed that their bodies were too sensitive and delicate to support the terrible weight of thick *khadi* cloth.[8]

It is worth now taking a closer look at the *dhotis, kurtas* and *pyjamas* of the Nehru family (fig 4:4c-d). Even in photographs, it becomes apparent that their clothing lacks the crudity of texture, characteristic of peasant *khadi*. Evidence of this may be found in the letters between father and son relating to dress. Writing from jail in 1922, Jawaharlal complained about the quality of his clothing and requested three new *dhotis* and *kurtas* of a superior variety (SWJN vol 1:328-331). The concerned and loving Motilal responded by sending his son a large stock of high quality garments, for which Jawaharlal was grateful:

> "Thank you for the clothes you sent me. I have an abundance of them now. I was at first inclined to return the Andhra dhotis you sent me as they were too fine. On second thoughts, I kept them. They are not as fine as some Andhra stuff. Kripalani used to wear a much finer dhoti. The dhotis you have sent are just right as regards weight. The length too suits me....." (ibid:335).

Clearly Jawarhalal was aware that the fineness of these *dhotis* rested uneasily with the ideology of *khadi*, but even in jail he was, it seems, unable to resist the luxury of well made, finely woven garments which clearly set him aside from the average peasant. Later, of course, he further distinguished his own identity by adopting the short tailored *khadi* waistcoat, now known as the "Nehru jacket" (fig 4:5d).

Social and economic distinctions not only manifested themselves in the texture of the weave, but also in the nature of the fibres employed. Unlike Sarladevi Chaudhurani, many people were reluctant to take the full plunge into cotton *khadi*, and chose instead *swadeshi* silk. *Swadeshi* silk, otherwise known as *Khadi* silk, was silk which had been hand woven and handspun in India, using indigenous yarn. Since silk manufacture was restricted to only a few parts of India, and silk thread was finer than cotton yarn, requiring more time for

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8 This attitude was particularly prevalent amongst educated Bengalis. In letters from Bengalis to the Statesman we read: "Bengalees have not got the strength to carry the weight of coarse cloth, so they will never use it" (30.7.1921), and "Many will sympathise with Mr. Gandhi in his grief but at the same time the cultured Bengalee race should be proud of the fact that the Mahatma's teachings have not been able to take Bengalees back to pre-historic uncivilised days....to the period of Barbarism" (9.9.1921).

weaving, *swadeshi* silk was naturally a luxury product, restricted to elite buyers. This disturbed Shrikrishnadas Jaju, secretary of the All India Spinners Association, who wondered whether it was advisable for *khadi* organisations to sell *swadeshi* silk at all in view of the fact that it competed with cotton *khadi*, and encouraged a luxury-loving attitude in the wearer (CWMG vol 75:167). The question of the morality of *khadi* silk was a dominant factor in this debate. At their most lenient khaddarites felt that the diversity of choice that *swadeshi* silk provided should be encouraged as it was all part of the *khadi* cause. At their most puritan, however, people objected not only to the unnecessary luxury of silk, but also to the process by which it was made, which, involving the destruction of silk worms, could be defined as a violent act (CWMG vol 23:462-3). This finally lead to a new division of types, even within the comparatively small category of *khadi* silk. A moral distinction was made between "violent swadeshi silk" and "nonviolent swadeshi silk", defined according to the degrees of violence involved in the production process (CWMG vol 75: 166-7).[9]

These fine varieties of *khadi* cotton and silk were never in widespread usage, partly because of their cost and partly also because they rarely reached the open market. For it seems that Congress men and other important notables often found means of reserving such pieces for their own usage by making special arrangements with people who worked in the *khadi* shops.[10] Despite the apparent humility of Congress uniform, the sartorial link between politicians and the Indian poor was, it seems, less binding than it superficially appeared.

But there were other problems with *khadi* besides its coarseness. In particular, there was the question of its plainness. Male clothing in India had often bordered on the simple as far as colour and motif were concerned, but most women were accustomed to wearing more elaborate materials, decorated by printing, embroidery, dyeing and woven patterns. Gandhi, who called bright colours "ugly spots" (CWMG vol 20:451), was opposed to excessive decoration and accused women of being slaves both to their own whims and fancies and to their husbands. He told them: "If you want to play your part in

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9 Gandhi felt that "service to the millions is possible only through cotton *khadi*" but that non-violent *swadeshi* silk was preferable to foreign cloth (CWMG vol 75:166-7).

10 Information given in an interview with a man who was a strict *khadi* wearer during the Freedom Movement.

the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourselves for pleasing men" (Gandhi 1946:195-6).

White *khadi* was, he thought, a suitable means of enabling women to enter the public political sphere without appearing sexually provocative or immodest. But as far as most women were concerned, the *khadi*-clad image had little appeal and they immediately found means of beautifying and diversifying the fabric.

Women's objections to plain white khadi followed two main lines which raised questions regarding female aesthetics and identity. One version of the aesthetic argument was that *khadi* threatened to destroy the creative arts such as embroidery for which women usually employed Chinese silk (CWMG vol 31:321). More generally women feared the dull uniformity that *khadi* would invoke and the sombre unattractive image.[11] Yet more poignant than this were the negative associations that plain white *khadi* evoked. For white was essentially a colour worn by men and worse still, widows. Since widowhood was the most feared and least respected role a woman could have, most young women were reluctant to embrace so grim an image however much they sympathised with Gandhian sentiments. As a result, few but the most devout Ashram dwellers and some old women adopted plain white khadi saris in their simplest form. Even the most politically motivated women like, for example, Kamala Nehru[12] (Jawaharlal's wife) and Sarojini Naidu[13] retained at least some form of decoration in their saris.

11 Kamala Das describes her childhood memories of seeing her family in *khadi*: "I thought Gandhiji a brigand....I thought it his diabolic aim to strip ladies of their finery so that they became plain and dull" (Das 1976:12). Nehru's sister, Vijayalakshmi, also bemoaned the drabness of *khadi* and felt deprived when the men of the family persuaded her to wear it for her wedding (Bean 1989:372).

12 Kamala Nehru usually wore a simple *khadi* sari with a decorative border. Even so she was severely rebuked by her mother-in-law for her simplicity of dress and lack of jewellery, which was inappropriate to a married woman (Kalhan 1973:89). Kamala, an unusually independent woman sometimes even dressed herself and her daughter in the men's outfit of *kurta pyjama* and Gandhi cap (fig 4:6).

13 Sarojini Naidu, despite playing a major role in the Nationalist Movement, refused to sacrifice her feminine dress for plain coarse *khadi* (fig 4:5c). She wore rich Indian silks "except at times of grave political crises" and even during such critical times she beautified her *khadi* by dyeing it (Sengupta 1966:259). When she accompanied Gandhi to Buckingham Palace in 1931, she wore heavily embroidered white silk, rather than plain cotton. She believed in the economic benefits of *khadi* but not in its aesthetic merits nor in the benefits of austerity.

There soon grew up a wide variety of coloured, printed and decorated *khadi* saris, sometimes embroidered, sometimes bordered with silk, which saved *khadi* from monotony but which simultaneously increased the possibilities of betraying social and economic differences. The National Council of Women, founded in Bombay in 1921, began making embroidered ready-made garments and items of household use which they hawked from house to house and displayed in *khadi* exhibitions (Kalhan 1973:58-9). These of course sold for considerably higher prices than plain undecorated *khadi* which was already expensive in comparison to mill cloth. Rural women, like urban women, were reluctant to adopt white *khadi* and generally could not afford the elaborate decorated *khadi* worn by a small urban elite.

Despite the fact that Gandhi wanted to build *swaraj* on a "white background" (CWMG vol 20:451), dyeing *khadi* became a common means of differentiating not only individuals but also various groups within the Freedom Movement. A special female volunteer corps adopted black saris with orange, green and red borders. These were later replaced by plain orange[14] saris at the instigation of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya who found the previous colour combination distasteful (Brijbhushan 1976:29). The women became known as the "Orange Brigade". Meanwhile the male Congress volunteers in some cities distinguished themselves by wearing khaki coloured *khadi* uniforms. A volunteer corps of Muslims who joined non-cooperation sported either khaki uniforms with Turkish fezzes and crescent armbands or else the long green[15] Arab style robes that were popularised by the Ali brothers (Minault 1982:119-20). The Muslim Pathans, on the other hand, wore a distinctive red uniform, and were even named "Red Shirts" after their dress[16]

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14 Orange is the colour normally worn by Hindu ascetics. It is possible that it was chosen as an attempt to retain the theme of renunciation without the horrors of whiteness with its association with widowhood.

15 Green was the favourite colour of the prophet and is worn by those who mourn his death.

16 The adoption of red shirts by volunteers in the North West provinces provides an interesting example of how an accidental phenomenon attains symbolic importance. The volunteers, le jd by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, were originally dressed in white clothes until one day a man, wishing to cover the dirt, threw his white turban, trousers and shirt in a vat of pine bark solution at a local tannery. Others liked the colour and followed suit. When they moved on to other villages, they found that crowds came out to see them, attracted by the strange red colour of their clothes. It became a useful instrument for attracting attention so the red colour became institutionalised (Zutshi 1970:51-2) and the volunteers themselves became

Even when people adopted plain white *khadi*, they were still able to differentiate themselves if they wished through the style in which they made up their garments. Gandhi hoped that *khadi* would help to unite "Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Parsi-Christian-Jew" (CWMG vol 23:59), but he was not insistent that everyone adopt the same style of dress. As long as it was a simple Indian style, he was content. Yet the acceptance of different styles allowed the expression of different interests. Some felt that this prevented *khadi* from being a symbol of national unity:

> "The Musalman by putting on khaddar in Muslim fashion may feel that he is injuring British interests but he will never feel that he has become one with the Hindu. That is, he begins to feel politically but not a bit nationally. Pictures of political leaders bunched together appear in newspapers. They are so dressed that the Muslim eye selects the Muslim leader, the Sikh the Sikh. Under these circumstances it is impossible to educate the mass mind nationally" (Kumria 1941:19-20).

On the whole Hindus who adopted *khadi* wore *dhotis, kurtas* and Gandhi caps; Muslims wore *kurta pyjamas* with a cap or fez, and Sikhs retained their distinctive turbans. Some Hindus, far from uniting with Muslims in *khadi*, actually refused to wear the cloth because the *khadi* available in their region was made by Muslim weavers (CWMG vol 24:426). Parsis and Christians, on the other hand, rarely adopted *khadi* because they found it primitive and preferred to stick to Western styles. This led one Parsi man to suggest that *khadi* should be made up into European as well as Indian styles (CWMG vol 35:263). Even as early as 1921, when *khadi* was still a comparatively new cause, there were reports of people making it up into Western style suits, shirts and trousers, and even dyeing it black to make it visually indistinguishable from European dress (Statesman 18.8.1921).

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known as "Red Shirts". When the British tried to stamp out the movement in 1930 the red colour became a potent sign of patriotism (cf. Khan 1969). In one town British soldiers arrested all those wearing red shirts and when they demanded if there were any Red Shirts left, a local resident who wore white dress, rushed into his house, threw his clothes in a dye vat, and dripping with wet red dye, cried "Here are the Red Shirts". Tendulkar writes: "His chivalrous act infused such spirit in the people that no amount of repression could banish the red uniform" (Tendulkar 1967:71). The British frequently mistook this accidental redness as a sign that Pathans were Russian style Communists (Bernays 1931:326). The "Red Shirts" Movement, was founded in Peshwar in 1929 by Khan. By 1931 it was an integral part of the Congress struggle. Khan became known as the Frontier Gandhi and he encouraged his followers to ensure that their red shirts were made from *khadi*.

Where *khadi* threatened to cover difference, there were often traditionalists ready to object. An interesting example of this was the dilemma of a Maharashtran woman who wrote to Gandhi in 1928, explaining her difficulty in adopting *khadi*:

> "A year ago I heard you speaking on the extreme necessity of everyone of us wearing khadi and thereupon decided to adopt it. But we are poor people. My husband says that khadi is costly. Belonging as I do to Maharashtra, I wear a sari of nine yards long. Now if I reduced the length of my sari to six yards, there would be a great saving, but the elders will not hear of such a reduction. I reason with them that wearing khadi is the more important thing and that the style and length of the sari is absolutely immaterial, but in vain" (CWMG vol 35:504).

In this case the objection to *khadi* was that it threatened regional rather than religious identity. The desire of the Maharashtran elders to preserve local traditions stood directly in the way of national unity. When Gandhi harped back to India's mythical past when all had worn *khadi*, he failed to consider the extraordinarily diverse clothing traditions that had always co-existed amongst different social, religious and ethnic groups in India. For *khadi* was in danger of blanking out local Indian traditions just as much as it sought to stamp out British influences.[17]

The above examples reveal that despite the notions of voluntary poverty, equality and national unity which Gandhi attributed to *khadi*, there was a tendency among many *khadi* wearers to retain visible signs of their social, economic, regional and religious identity. This is not altogether surprising in view of the fact that many of the people who adopted *khadi* did not actually agree with much of what Gandhi attributed to it. Some for example believed only in its political value and its ability to hasten Swaraj, whilst others emphasised its power as the counterpart to the boycott on foreign cloth, and yet others believed chiefly in its ability to stimulate cottage industry or to promote a more humane economy. Furthermore mingled with these various personal beliefs and motivations was the feeling of an obligation to wear *khadi* which loomed large on the political horizon for believers and nonbelievers alike. For, as I have shown at the beginning of this chapter, the pressures placed on people to adopt *khadi* were enormous, ranging from subtle encouragements, blatant propaganda, regulations and family pressures to threats of physical violence.

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17 Gandhi's response to the woman's dilemma was that she should sacrifice her provincialism for, he argued "amenities and customs masquerading as variety are subversive to nationalism" (CWMG vol 35 504-5).
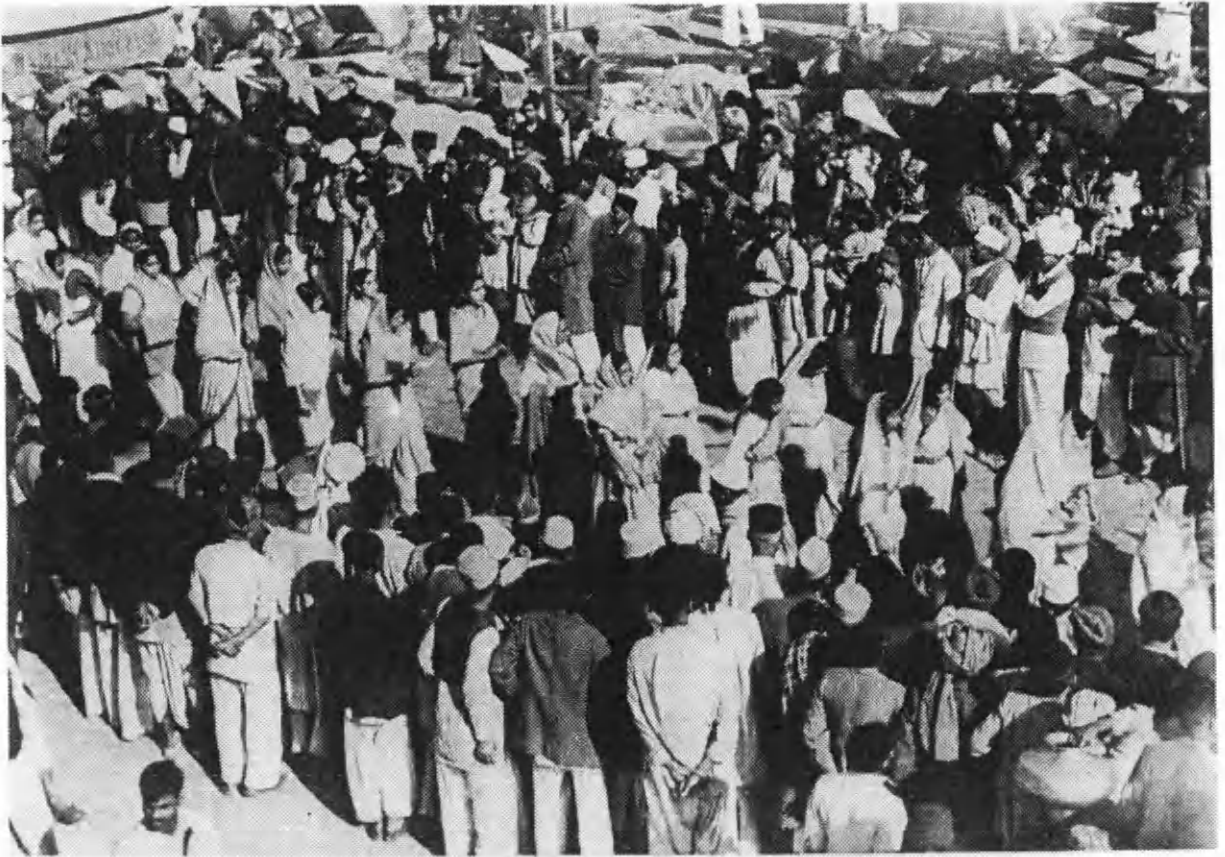
Fig. 4:7a The "Orange Brigade". Women protesters in orange saris with different coloured borders in Bombay 1937 (Photograph for French Press, 1937).

Fig. 4:7b Scene of violence (1942), illustrating that many *khadi* wearers have adopted black caps (French Press, 1937).
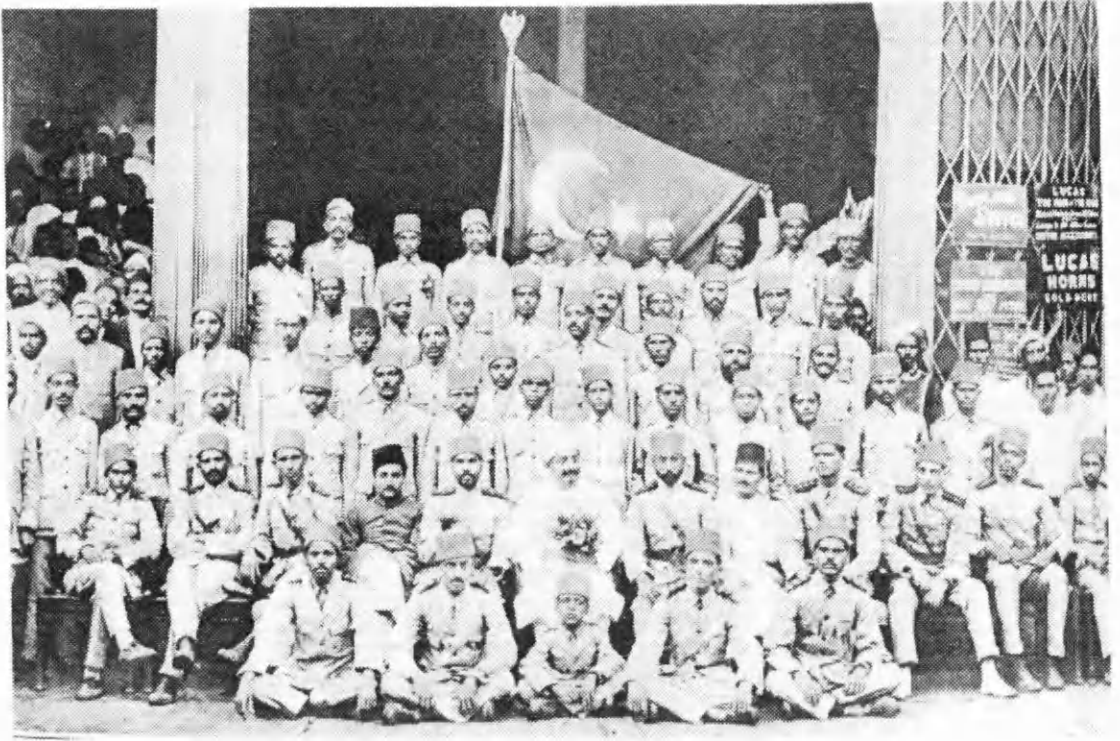
(a) Khilifat Volunteers in khaki coloured uniforms (1920).

(b) The inauguration of the Congress Hospital at Allahabad, showing motley interpretations of *khadi* dress. From **Jawaharlal Nehru: A Memorial Album** (1962).

Fig. 4:8 and 9 *KHADI*, FABRIC OF DIFFERENCE?

Fig. 4:9(a) The Ali brothers (Shaukat and Mohamed),
wearing long green *khadi* robes with woollen fezzes, one of
which bears the Islamic symbol of the crescent moon.
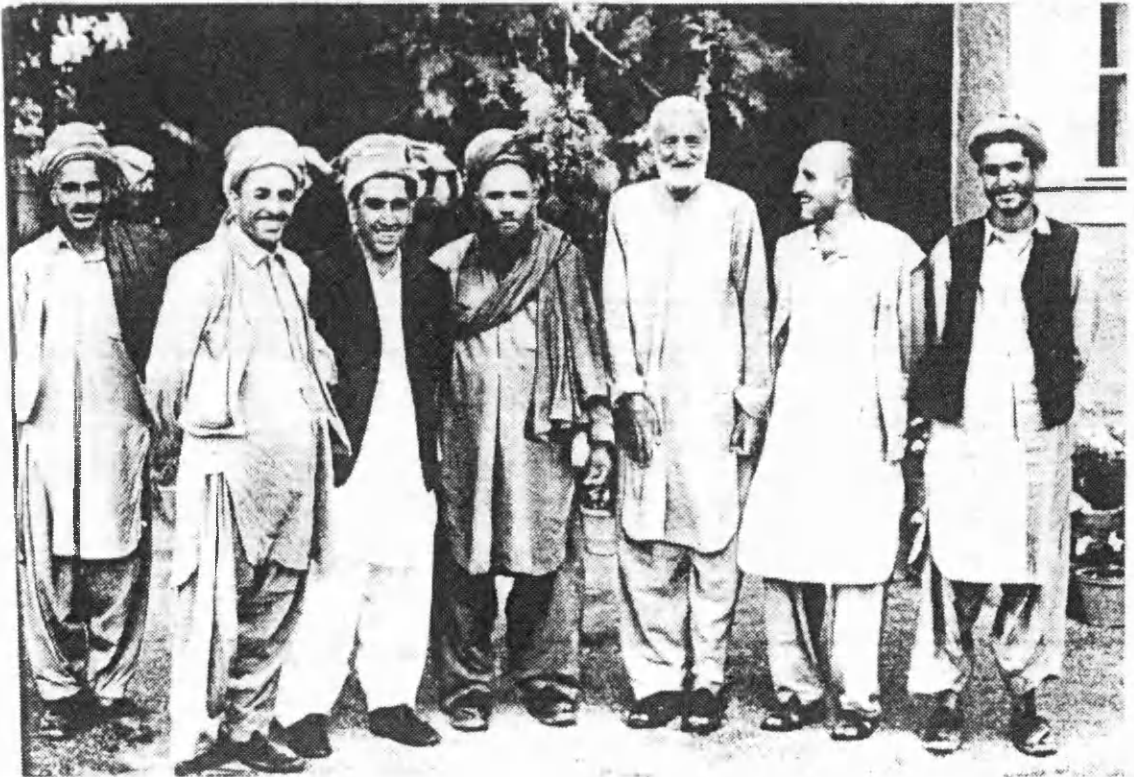
(b) Abdul Ghaffar Khan (third from left) with the "Red shirts"
who wear the distinctive pantaloons and turbans of the Pakhtuns.
From Tendulkhar D., **Abdul Ghaffar Khan: faith is a battle** (1967).

(a) The Fez and the Bowler Hat (Mohamed Ali and George Lansbury).

(b) The Bare Headed and the Top Hatted (Gandhi and M.A. Jinnah).

Fig. 4:10 Important leaders express their political differences in their headwear.

But perhaps the greatest pressure of all was the explicitly moral association that Gandhi himself had chosen to give to *khadi*. For it was his countless speeches about the virtues of *khadi* and the sinfulness of foreign cloth that made many people embarrassed to be seen in anything other than *khadi*.

This pressure led to a bizarre sartorial paradox: the greater the stress on the idea that clothing was an expression of integrity and moral worth, the greater the increase in the use of clothing as a form of disguise or masker of beliefs. For there were those who found that the combination of moral pressure to wear *khadi* and moral condemnation if they did not, was a more powerful inducement to *khadi*-wearing than their actual beliefs in the cloth itself. Furthermore there were not merely the negative consequences of being seen in foreign cloth to consider, but also the positive benefits of wearing *khadi*. For as Rev. C.F. Andrews pointed out to Gandhi, *khadi* was "a cheap method of gaining popularity" (CWMG vol 25:235). The fact that the mere act of wearing it could earn a person a reputation for honesty, self sacrifice and integrity undoubtedly made it a tempting clothing option for people who had little belief in the ideology of *khadi*.

It was the combination of Gandhi's moral emphasis and the apparent hypocrisy it engendered in others, that caused men like C. F. Andrews and Motilal Nehru to contemplate giving up wearing *khadi*. In 1924, Motilal even accused Gandhi of being "systematically duped by unscrupulous liars who have ingratiated themselves into your favour by the simple device of pretending an abiding faith in khaddar to the exclusion of all else" (SWMN vol 4:72).

An equally disillusioned *khadi* supporter wrote from Purulia informing Gandhi of the shallowness of people's *khadi* faith:

> "As you are expected to come to Purulia, all the people are buying khadi just to wear it during your stay. Your visit has reminded some of these men of their promise to use khaddar, and some are buying it just to escape public criticism. Now, if a man uses foreign cloth as a rule, but only wears khaddar on certain occasions, he is a hypocrite. And if your visit increases the number of hypocrites, what is its use?" (CWMG vol 28:143).

Even Gandhi was forced to acknowledge that "many self-seeking "workers" have exploited khadi dress. Wearing khadi and having made people believe that they were men of self sacrifice, such workers deceive society and refuse to make any amends. Such khadi wearers disgrace khadi" (CWMG vol 31:57).

In particular, it was Congressmen who came under frequent criticism for their "insincere" use of *khadi*. But if there were wolves in sheeps' clothing in the Congress Party, there were also sheep in wolves' clothing in the Indian Civil Service, for the same fear of recrimination that persuaded Congressmen to wear *khadi* in public, persuaded some *khadi* lovers to hide their *khadi* beneath a public facade of foreign cloth. In fact most of the sartorial antics popular in the 19th century, resurfaced in the Gandhian era with a somewhat changed emphasis and an explicit moral overtone.

Khadi Transformations of the Problem of What to Wear

In chapter 2, I discussed the sartorial dilemmas of the male Indian elite in terms of the problem of how much foreignness to allow into their dress. In the Gandhian era, this dilemma was replaced by what was for many the new problem of how much *swadeshi* to allow into their clothing and general lifestyle. Despite Gandhi's uncompromising demand for a total re-Indianisation, for many *swadeshi*, like Westernisation, was a question of degrees rather than absolutes (see fig 4:11). There was, as always, the question of where to draw the line in one's sartorial conversion.

In the pre-Gandhian era many men and women found a relatively uncontroversial solution to the problem of what to wear by wearing foreign cloth in Indian styles. But with the new Gandhian emphasis on *khadi*, this solution was now considered unpatriotic and immoral. Whereas in the past the style of a garment had been the most important criterion for judging patriotism, it was now the cloth itself, its production and origins that provided the new criteria. This resulted in some Congressmen, who were, as we have seen, officially obliged to wear *khadi*, concealing their lack of *khadi*-faith by wearing mill-made imitations of *khadi* which were mass produced in both India and Japan. By choosing simple white cloth, they could continue to enjoy the comforts of the cheaper softer mill cloth, while simultaneously reaping the benefits of a sanctimonious *khadi*--clad image. Some such imitations were pure fake, others were what Gandhi called "half khadi", that is fabrics that were hand woven but using machine spun yarn (CWMG vol 28:144). In Simla Congressmen not only bought and wore *khadi* imitations, but actually sold them in so-called *khadi* shops (Harijan 19.11.1938). The All India Spinners Association tried to control these developments by introducing its own stamp consisting of a spinning wheel motif, which guaranteed that their *khadi* was

THE NON-CO-OPERATIONISTS
AT THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S.

(During the Divali holidays.)

Alo, a non-co-operationist and a
Swadeshi to the core, boycotting
his cycle cap, russian leather boots
and German broad-cloth coat, stands
in his native garments by the side
of his Ali, dressed in a Sholapori
saree, ready to be taken. And a
good photo it is. Genuine Swadeshi!
Taken by a Swadeshi, non-co-opera-
tionist photographer too. But the
camera, the materials, the chemi-
cals &c. &c. ? ? ? ? ? ?

HINDI PUNCH.   (1920).

Fig. 4:11

"certified". But "uncertified" *khadi* remained a constant problem and there were even reports of dealers sending specimens of "certified" *khadi* to Manchester with the intent of obtaining cheap *khadi* imitations on which they could print the image of the Mahatma's head to attract custom (Statesman 30.7.1921). The inevitable consequence of these developments was that some people who actually intended to wear *khadi*, were in fact clothed in fake *khadi* without even realising it.

Another sartorial option, popular in the 19th century, was to wear a combination of Indian and European garments. Photographs of crowds in the 1920's and 1930's reveal that this remained a common choice. Gandhi was irritated by the sight of foreign jackets worn over *khadi* outfits by children in National Schools. "They should", he argued,"be saved from this miserable condition" (CWMG vol 26:551).

Just as in the 19th century Indian headwear was often worn with European dress, so the Gandhi cap was often adopted without the wearer Indianising the rest of his clothes. The cap was cheap and easily obtainable and, as we have seen, people were often coerced into wearing it. But a mere *khadi* cap was not enough to satisfy either Gandhi or his Muslim co-worker, Mohammad Ali. Confronted by a crowd of white caps and assorted clothes at a meeting in Sholapur, the latter proclaimed: "Personally I don't find anybody clad in khadi.... You must, you have to, bear the burden that full khadi dress entails" (Desai 1968:291).

For many who were not prepared to bear this "burden" but who none the less wished to appear patriotic, the solution was to maintain two alternative sartorial images through changing clothes to suit the situation. Always a popular solution, this enabled people to distinguish their public from their private selves. Gandhi's intention was, as we have seen, to abolish altogether the public/private dichotomy by suggesting a permanent sartorial solution which corresponded to a person's inner self. In theory this should have ended the necessity of changing clothes since *khadi* was the Indian expression of a constant unchanging truth. But far from discouraging constant changes of dress, Gandhi's preaching had the effect of reinforcing the necessity of changing clothes. For with the new Gandhian emphasis on the morality of dress, public appearances were interpreted as realities. This meant that the clothes of the public self were under more rigourous scrutiny than ever before.

Whereas in the past people judged one another's loyalties ultimately by the clothes of the private self, they were now encouraged to interpret the dress of the public self as an explicit expression of belief, national allegiance and moral worth. This inevitably tempted people to present acceptable external images regardless of whether or not they corresponded to their personal beliefs.

The threshold of the house remained an important border for conversion. Those who did not fully believe in *khadi* and who retained the idea that European dress was more civilized, cast off their *khadi* on entering the house and replaced it with mill cloth or European dress. Many, like Sarojini Naidu, wore *khadi* only during periods of intense non-cooperation or when attending political meetings (see fig. 4:12). In particular Congress politicians developed a reputation for wearing *khadi* only for ceremonial purposes in public events. According to Gandhi, such men had "become the laughing stock of all", creating an "atmosphere of cant hypocrisy and humbug" (CWMG vol 32:523). Some Congressmen restricted their *khadi*-wearing exclusively to the election period, buying *khadi* clothes at the last minute to bolster their political image. But worse still were those politicians who refused to invest their money in *khadi*, yet who, wanting the political benefits, borrowed clothes from the All India Spinners Association solely for election purposes, returning them to the Association once the elections were over, at which point they reverted back to foreign cloth (Harijan 16.7.1938).

To Gandhi it was vital for *khadi* to remain at the centre of all political activity. Advising someone on how to select a candidate for the Legislative Council, he wrote:

> "I shall tell you what I should do. I will first of all scan the candidates from top to bottom and if I find that among all the candidates there is not one man who is dressed from top to bottom in khaddar, I will retain my vote in my pocket absolutely sealed. And if I am satisfied there is at least one man who is dressed from top to toe in khaddar, I will go to him in all humility and ask him if he is dressed in this style for the occasion or if he habitually at home and out of home wears hand-spun and hand-woven khaddar. If he returns an answer in the negative, I should again retain my vote in my pocket. If positive, I would ask, "It is extremely good that you always wear khaddar, but do you also spin for the sake of the masses at least for half an hour (per day)?" (CWMG vol 26:375).

Yet even with such elaborate screening, it was not impossible for some stealthy politicians to satisfy their love of foreign cloth. Locating the boundary between inner and outer selves somewhere between their inner and outer clothing, these

IRATE FATHER—You num-
skull! What do you mean by
going in this european dress
in these Divali days? Be a
pucca Swadeshi like me and
wear khadi—

FASHIONABLE SON—That I
do, pa, when I've to attend
n. c. o. meet ngs But my
fiancee does not like to see
me in the dress of a Parsi
corpse-bearer! She considers it
so ill-omened!

HINDI PUNCH.

BOMBAY, OCTOBER 30, 1921.]

Fig. 4:12

men retained the comfort of their silky textured millmade underwear, safely submerged beneath a coarse external layer of *khadi*. Reversing the formula there were other men, who, working for the British administration, put on beneath their smooth textured Western suits, coarse khadi underclothes which remained close to their hearts and their inner beliefs both at home and in the workplace.

The only time when Gandhi considered it admissible for someone to change his sartorial image was when that person was going abroad. In such cases it was acceptable for a patriotic Indian to wear European styles as long as they were made from *khadi*. Advising Dr. Gurudas Roy about what to wear on his trip to England, Gandhi wrote:

> "I am perfectly confident you can do without any European clothing in England and Scotland provided that you take a sufficient stock of hand-spun woollen clothing....You may not know that Pandit Motilalji when he was preparing to go to England as a member of the Skeen Committee had an entirely hand-spun outfit including his cardigan jackets.... I suggest your consulting Satis Babu of Khadi Pratishthan, and if he cannot furnish you with an outfit, I know that the Khadi Bhandar of Bombay can, because that Bhandar has provided many England-going Indians with proper outfits....All your underclothings may well be cotton khadi" (CWMG vol 34:273-4).

Making *khadi* up into European styles was one of the most innovative methods of remaining patriotic and loyal to the ideology of *khadi* without sacrificing one's personal liking for European dress. But although such a solution was more acceptable to Gandhi than the reverse solution of making foreign cloth into Indian styles, it was not accepted by the Indian public, who retained the old idea that the style of dress was the most important criterion of patriotism. If clothes looked European they were likely to be criticised more than Indian-looking garments, even if the former were made from *khadi* and the latter were not. For once all the Indian features of *khadi* had been masked through cutting, tailoring and dyeing, there seemed little point in wearing khadi at all. Those men who wore black *khadi* suits of the European cut were suspected of British bias as they appeared embarrassed by their indigenous clothing traditions. This suggested that for at least some members of the Indian public a person's physical appearance was actually more important than his or her belief in *khadi* as an economic and moral solution to India's poverty.

A final example concerning the ever controversial question of headwear reveals this distinction between Gandhi's emphasis on the morality of the cloth and the public's emphasis on the morality of the clothing style. In 1929 a lawyer wrote

to Gandhi concerning the criticism he had received for wearing a *sola topi* which had been specially made out of certified *khadi* cloth:

> "I was a practising lawyer but non-co-operated in 1921. Circumstances have driven me back to law but I am a strict khaddarite. I have given up the use of trousers and ties and attend the court and local legislature in dhoti. As Chairman of my District Council I am running Famine Road Works, which require my being out in the sun. Recently I got a touch of the sun and went in for a hat, which has been specially made of pure khaddar. This has started a controversy. Will you take part in it?" (CWMG vol 41:25).

Gandhi replied in Young India:

> "This is an old controversy. My narrow nationalism rebels against the hat, my secret internationalism regards the sola topi as one of the few boons from Europe. But for the tremendous national prejudice against the hat, I would undertake to become president of a league for popularising sola hats.... But I know that national likes and dislikes are not governed by reason....I do not expect Indians to take kindly to the sola hat. Nevertheless workers like Pandit Durgashankar need not be ruffled by criticism and may certainly wear khadi imitations of the sola hat. It is in reality an easily portable umbrella that covers the head without the necessity of one hand being occupied by carrying it" (ibid:25).

Gandhi's liking for the *sola topi* which the Indian public rejected with such vigour, reveals the distinctiveness of his personal belief in the meaning of national dress. To him a moral and patriotic outfit consisted of simple, practical clothes made from *khadi*, preferably though not exclusively in Indian styles. But to the Indian public, style remained a central criterion of Indianness. To them the *sola topi* was as much a symbol of Britishness as their own Gandhi cap was a symbol of Indianness. The British themselves were well aware of the symbolism of their *topis*. Not long after poor Fred Burrows was forcibly *khadi-*capped by zealous Gandhians, the British voluntarily removed their own hats. The ritual was described by Rupert Mayne who was sailing with the last British regiment to leave the newly created Pakistan:

> "As we left Port Said and sailed into the open waters, everyone was paraded with their topees on deck and at the given signal we all flung our topees into the sea and that was the last of India" (in Allen 1975:229).

What better final victory for the Gandhi cap?

Post Independence Political Sartorial Inheritance

Needless to say the problem of what to wear did not end with the dawning of Indian Independence. And no one suffered more from this problem than Indian politicians. The intensification of nationalist feeling and moral righteousness that became attached to *khadi*, could not be easily shaken off. As Bayly has pointed out, Jawaharlal Nehru never shared Gandhi's vision of a non-industrial village-based society yet during his years as India's first Prime Minister, he continued to support *khadi* production whilst simultaneously promoting industrial progress. Successive governments have all followed this line even though specialist *khadi* shops and institutions often run at a financial loss (Bayly 1986:314-5). As with Government policy, so with clothes.

After fighting for freedom under a banner of *khadi*, politicians could not just turn round and forget it once the British had left India, even though the majority of the populace did exactly that. Furthermore the moral stigma which Gandhi had so cleverly woven into imported fabrics could not be unravelled any more than the moral integrity which he had so neatly woven into *khadi*.

Nehru's solution was to carve himself a highly tailored but noticeably non-Western image, whilst retaining *khadi* as the fabric of his dress. He therefore opted for the stitched tight *pyjama* which he wore with either the long *sherwani* or the short, now famous "Nehru jacket". It was a return to the pre-Gandhian version of respectable dress[18] with the difference that Nehru's version was made from *khadi*. He sometimes wore foreign dress on foreign visits but in India his clothes remained essentially Indian.

Concerned by the Post Independence sartorial confusion around him, Nehru wrote an official note on dress, advising those in high grades of Government office to steer clear of European clothes "which marked them out as a privileged, denationalised, and out-of-date class, and to adopt such clothes as would take them closer to the people" (Chaudhuri 1976:131-2). He passed on his own chic notion of *swadeshi* to his daughter Indira who usually dressed in handloom cotton saris and to his grandson, Rajiv, who threw aside his European

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18 Prior to Independence Nehru usually wore the more ancient Indian *dhoti*, replacing this with the *sherwani pyjama* in 1947. For details of the Nehru family's dress, see Chaudhuri 1976:93-6.

dress and aviator's uniform when he entered political office in 1985 (see fig. 4:13). In the run up to the recent 1991 elections, most political candidates were wearing white *khadi*, and one New Delhi candidate was even dressed as Mahatma Gandhi himself (see fig. 4:14). But, despite the efforts made to keep politicians in touch with the humble masses, the modern day politician remains a remote and conspicuous figure as far as most villagers are concerned (see fig. 4:15 and 16).

Fig. 4:16, published in the run up to the 1989 elections, shows the distance between the *khadi*--clad politician and the rural masses who wear a motley array of European clothes. The irony is heightened by his words: "Tighten your belts...roll up your sleeves...pull up your socks...." A sockless, beltless partially-sleeved village population stare incredulously at this strange, prosperous orator who proclaims his message from beneath the comfort of a black umbrella, held by an assistant in a European suit and shoes! For many politicians, *swadeshi* remained as always and perhaps more than ever, a matter of degrees (fig. 4:17) and, of course, a useful election stunt (fig. 4:18 and 19).

It is the long term association with morality and patriotism that has enabled and indeed forced *khadi* to remain in politics. No longer everyday dress, it is an obligatory appendage whenever the public political self is most on show. Modern day sceptics tend to view this phenomenon as a sign of degeneration, an indication of the shallow integrity of contemporary leaders who lack the sincerity of their freedom-fighting ancestors. But, as I have shown, strategic *khadi* dressing was born in the Gandhian era itself, even at a time when Gandhi was preaching a virtual religion of *khadi*. It merely intensified after Independence when the moral pressure to believe in *khadi* dissipated, leaving only the fabric itself to stand as an anachronistic but emotive symbol of the humble, caring politician. Of course most people know that the *khadi*-clad politician is no more humble than the rest of them, but then, as fig. 4:20 reveals, it is sometimes difficult to do things without *khadi*!

Post Independence Political Heads

A discussion of post Independence political dress would not be complete without reference to the age old saga of headwear. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, retained his Gandhi cap (fig. 4:21a), relic of the freedom struggle, and the same cap continues to sprout on Indian heads today, primarily at times of political intensity. But Nehru had always disliked Gandhi's peculiar
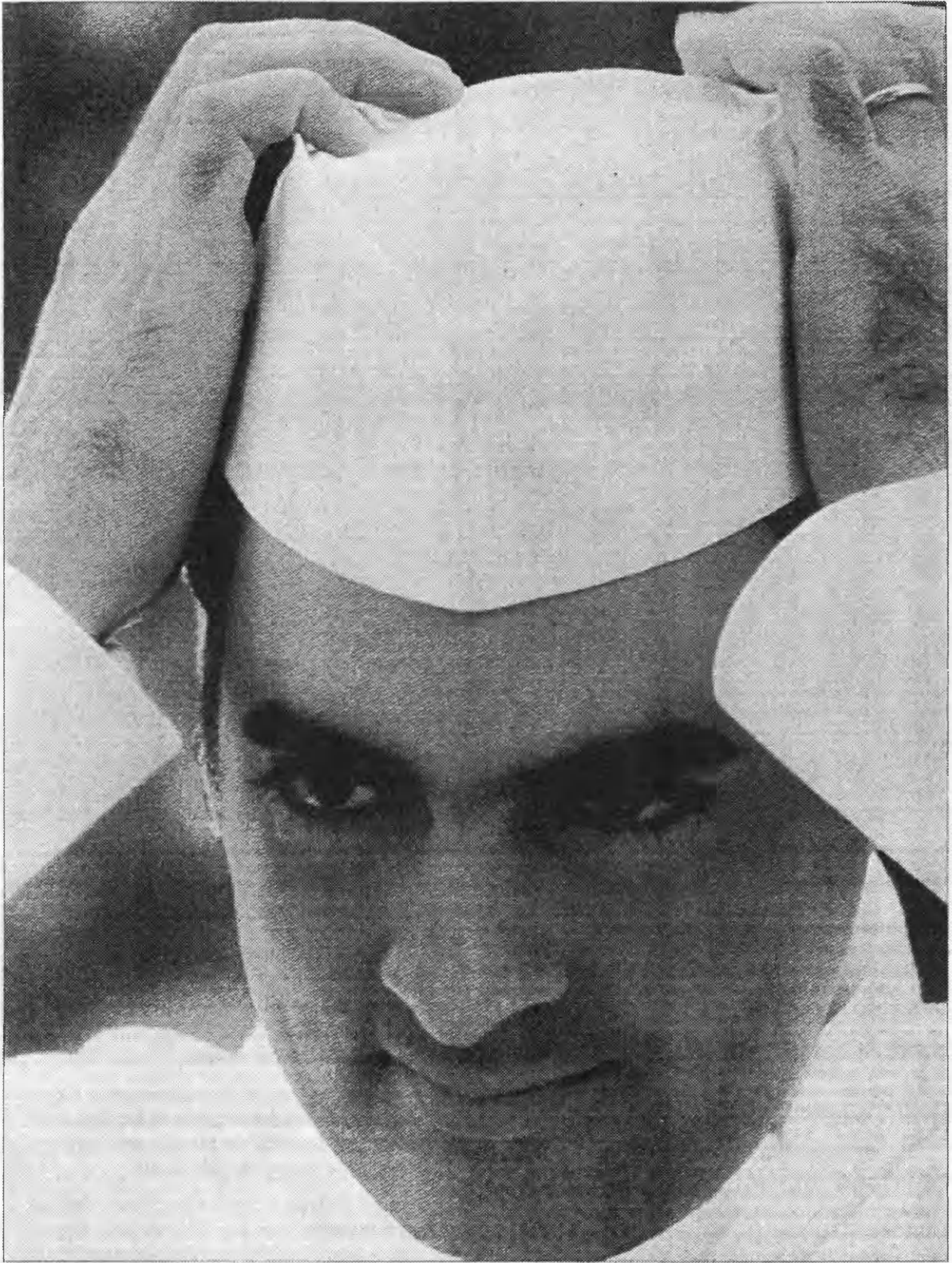
Appointed as general secretary of the Congress(I), Rajiv sheds his aviator outfit for a Gandhi cap.

The innocent in politics gradually becomes a willing captive of the traditional durbar system.

Fig. 4:13

SHARAD SAXENA

The new Gandhi wooing voters

Fig. 4:14 Madan Lal, a candidate
for the 1991 elections, dressed
as Mahatma Gandhi, flanked by
supporters, dressed as Ram and
Laxman. Madan Lal claims: "The
Mahatma is reborn in me to
liberate the country of brown
sahibs" (**India Today** 31.5.1991).

Ah, there he is again! How time flies! It's time for
the general election already!

Fig. 4:15 Cartoon by Ravi Laxman.
From the **You Said It** series.

MARIO MIRANDA FOR THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY

NOW IS THE TIME MY
BELOVED COUNTRYMEN TO
TIGHTEN YOUR BELTS... ROLL
UP YOUR SLEEVES... PULL
UP YOUR
SOCKS...
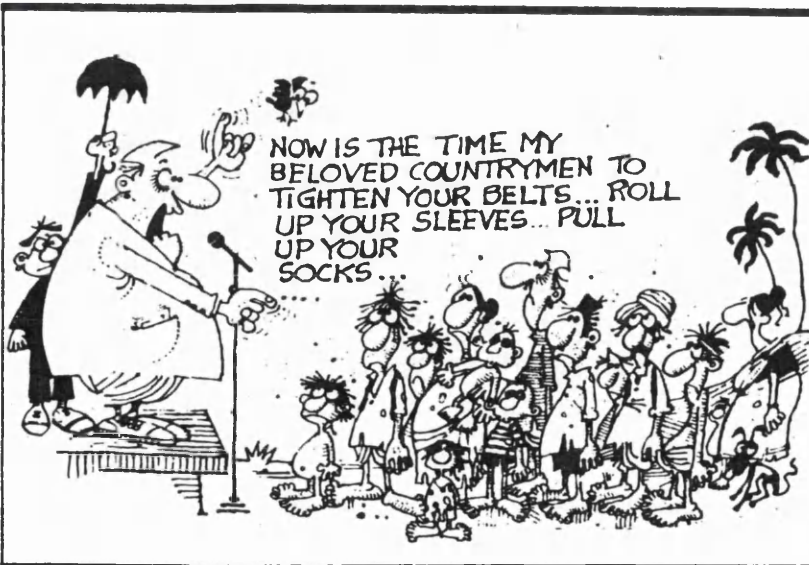
Fig.4:16 Cartoon by M. Mario.
From Abraham A., **The Penguin
Book of Indian Cartoons** (1988).
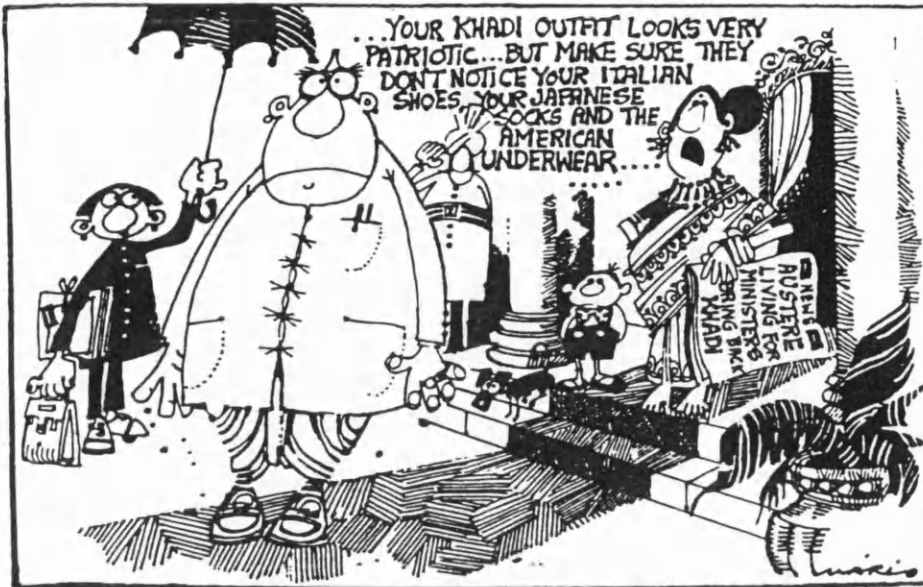
Fig. 4:17 by Mario/Sapre
From Abraham (1988).

I couldn't recognise you sir! I
thought it was some old Congressman!
What happened to your safari, pipe
and so on?

Fig. 4:18 by R. Laxman.
From **Times of India**, 1989.

The first one is before he joined the
Youth Congress, the second is after he
joined it and the third one is after
he became a minister!

Fig. 4:19 by R. Laxman
From **Times of India** 1989.
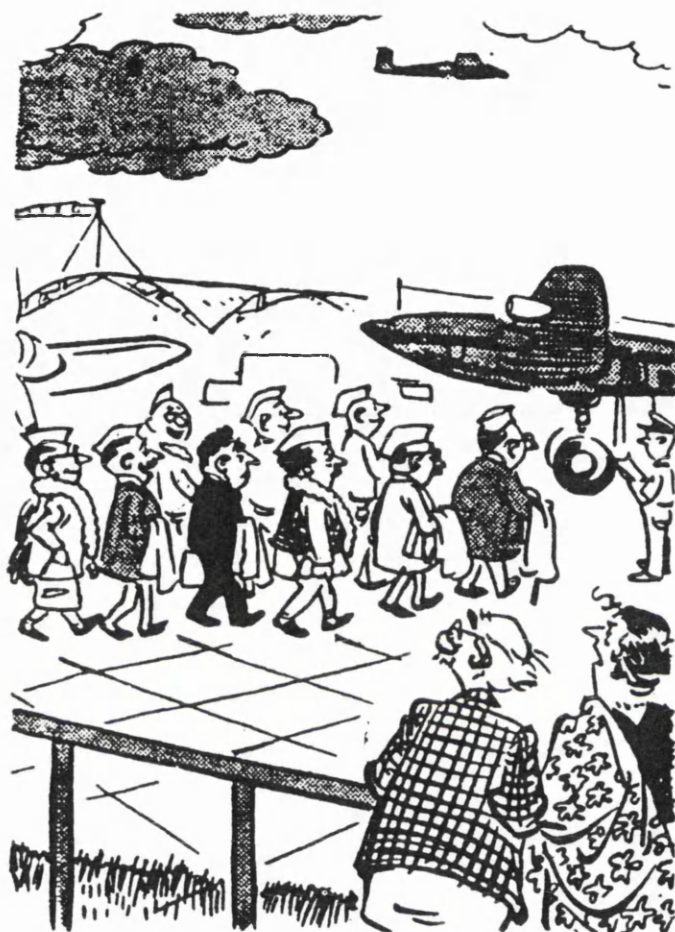
Now, that chap in the dark suit--how has he managed to go abroad with all these restrictions on travel!

Fig. 4:20 by R. Laxman
From **You Said It** series.

(b) Nehru by Shankar.

(c) Nehru by Shankar.

WHICH IS ME?

(a) J. Nehru by Shankar.
From **Shankar's Cartoons**.
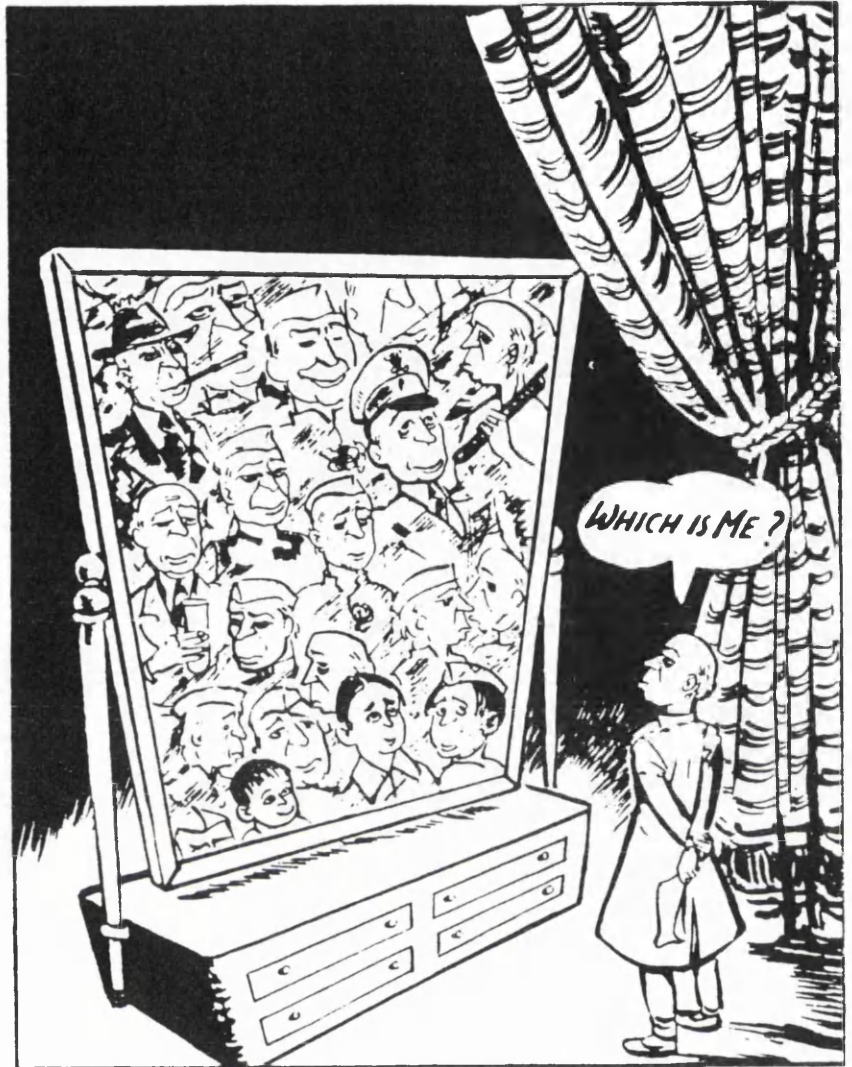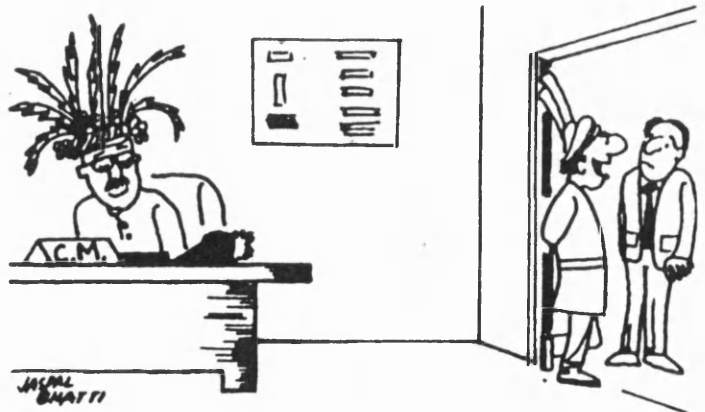
'*He has started wearing tribal headgear in the hope that when the Prime Minister visits his State he might be able to meet him!*'

(d) Cartoon by Jaspal Bhatti
From Abraham (1988).

Fig. 4:21

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Fig. 4:22 Nehru dons the dress of the Other.(a): with Indira in West African dress. (b): at Manali in Kulu dress. (c): in the U.S.S.R. in Uzbekistani dress. (d): with folk singers from Bundelkhand. (e): with the Prime Minister of Burma in Naga head-dress at Singkaling. From **Jawaharlal Nehru: A Memorial Volume** (1962).

(d)

(e)

(a) by R. Laxman. From Lakman, **The Eloquent Brush** (1988).

(b) Cartoon by Hemant Morparia. From **Illustrated Weekly** (4.9.1988).

(c) Cartoon by Raobail.
From Abraham (1988).

Fig. 4:23

manner of over simplifying things, sartorial or otherwise. While Gandhi tried to condense all Indian diversity into a single item of headwear, Nehru, on the contrary put into practice his favourite maxim: "unity in diversity", and wore a variety of different things on his head, sometimes leading to a certain amount of personal identity confusion (see fig. 4:21c). In his desire to communicate with other nations and ethnic groups, he developed a habit of dressing up in other people's clothes when on political tours. I call his behaviour "dressing up" because it was not so much an attempt to adopt the identity of the other as an attempt to greet the other on their own terms, so accepting their otherness. To do this he generally retained his sherwani pyjama, adding some foreign appendage to his dress. And very often it was the headwear of the other that he chose to wear on his visits (see figs. 4:21b and 22). It was a means of expressing his acceptance of ethnic diversity, even when the ethnic group he was visiting was not in reality so ethnically diverse (fig. 4:21d)! Nehru initiated his daughter Indira Gandhi in the same sartorial practice, and through her, it passed to Rajiv Gandhi who upheld the family tradition (see figs. 4:23a-b).

But despite their unusual practice of wearing different forms of headwear, the Nehru men continued to sport their Gandhi caps for certain official occasions in India. And the cap has remained an important part of the election campaign technique (fig. 23c). It is also worn by some Indians at funerals or for religious rituals when many who normally go about bare-headed, cover their heads. As we have seen the Gandhi cap was never quite the symbol of national unity that Gandhi hoped. But at least it retained a reasonable level of visual uniformity in the past. Today Gandhi caps are worn in different colours to portray different interests. Some have dyed it orange, giving it a Hindu flavour, while others, like the peasant leader Tikait, have dyed it green and made it a new symbol for the protesting peasantry. To those with the political background for reading the sign, these coloured caps say something of the political and ethnic conflicts in India today.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have emphasised the diversity of different ways in which people have used and interpreted *khadi* and the Gandhi cap. While Gandhi was successful in transforming the cloth of politics, he was not able to convert all Indians to wearing the same dress. His overriding desire for national uniformity was overridden by the people's desire for differentiation. Furthermore, despite his attempts to be a man of the people, his clothing policy had a greater impact

on the clothes of the Indian elite than those of the rural population. One important reason for Gandhi's inability to penetrate the villages of India was that each region had its own clothing system which was interwoven with the social structure of village life. *Khadi* not only threatened regional identity but also caste identity: two important criteria by which people define themselves.

In the following chapters of this thesis I shall examine the role of clothes within a village in Saurashtra where it is clear that notions of local hierarchy and identity are often in conflict with a more general idea of progress. Saurashtra, previously known as Kathiawad, was the birth place of Mahatma Gandhi, and was, as we have seen, largely removed from mainstream British influences. It has often been regarded as a bastion of tradition where people have resisted European styles of dress and even machine-made fabrics. In 1895 the journalist and writer, Mary Frances Billington, was impressed by the fact that the women of the area continued to wear country-woven and embroidered cloth when in other parts of India, they had adopted imported machine-manufactures (Billington 1973:186). This same conservatism irritated Gandhi who was disappointed by the absence of *khadi* in the area (CWMG vol 26:174) and who referred to local women's silver anklets as "*unbearable* heavy ankle hoops" (CWMG vol 28:328).

The image of the "traditional" Saurashtran woman, glowing with embroidery and jewellery, with her husband dressed in a white cotton smock and colourful turban, is today a favourite in both tourist brochures and books about Indian craft where conservatism is promoted as authenticity (cf. Dhamija 1985, Iwatate 1989). But descriptions, like photographs, are selective. The image is outliving the reality. The people of Saurashtra are, like people all over the world, developing new tastes and habits. For men this means wearing trousers, shirts and plastic sandals, a transition that is almost complete. For women it means rejecting previous regional styles in favour of the comparatively uniform sari. But the change in women's dress has been gradual and the transition often painful.

In the next chapter I focus particularly on the different social factors that serve to discourage change in women's dress in the village. These provide a background for understanding the clothing disputes discussed in subsequent chapters. An examination of clothing constraints does, in turn, provide a clearer understanding of the extraordinary obstacles that Gandhi was up against when

he tried to persuade all Indians to share the same dress. Following the tradition of ethno-archaeologists, I therefore suggest that an analysis of contemporary situations sheds light not only on the present, but also on the past.

Chapter 5

PROBLEMS OF DRESS IN A GUJARATI VILLAGE

Prologue: An Anthropologist's Clothing Dilemma

I first visited Jalia[1] village in April 1988. I was accompanied by a Gujarati professor and an English woman who was interested in textiles. The professor, a man in his late fifties, was greeted with all the respect and reverence that surrounds the educated city man, and we were greeted by all the staring, pointing and laughing that foreigners inevitably attract when they first appear in unexpected parts of rural India.[2] Being strangely conspicuous, we were immediately surrounded by a crowd of women and girls who seemed to alternate between staring in wide-eyed bemusement and giggling coyly into their veils. We were both wearing loose cotton dresses that fell well below the knee, but took care none the less to pull these down well over our ankles whilst sitting in people's courtyards. For my part, I felt somewhat uncomfortable amongst these women who were clad from head to toe, and many of whom swiftly disappeared behind their veils whenever the professor looked in their direction. Some went into total silence behind their colourful mobile screens. Others spoke from beneath their veils with a shy giggle when addressed. Their shyness and sense of modesty did not make me feel immodest exactly, but it made me feel over exposed and, above all, inappropriately dressed.

The members of one family were particularly friendly as it was through their youngest son who studied in the city that we had made our initial contact. When the professor had to leave after only an hour, this family invited the two white strangers to stay the night in their house. We soon found ourselves alone in the

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1 In response to a request made by certain villagers, I have given the village a fictional name in this study.

2 There is, of course, nothing new about Gujarati women laughing at peculiar looking foreigners. Marriane Postans records women's reactions when she visited the Roa's Palace in Kutch in the early 1830's: "I was greeted by whisperings, gigglings, and other demonstrations of amusement, at what they thought remarkable in my dress and manner" (Postans 1838:51).

kitchen with the women of the household, in this case, a mother and a daughter who bombarded us with questions:

> "Why are you wearing such funny clothes? Why this rough cotton cloth? Why aren't you wearing bangles? Why no nose rings? You don't even have holes in your noses? No anklets? No earrings? Nothing. Nothing at all? Are you married? Not married? Is that why you are not wearing bangles? So, what kind are you? What is your caste?"

I heard mother explain to daughter:

> "You see. They will put on nose rings and bangles after marriage. Then they will wear nose rings, bangles, earrings, anklets, sari, everything."

I tried to explain with my then extremely limited knowledge of Hindi and Gujarati, that we would not wear all of these things, not even in marriage and that in general women did not oil their hair or wear nose rings in our own country. It was not the custom. The only aspect of our appearance that was approved of was the whiteness of our skin and my cheap plastic watch which was immediately identified as good once it was known to be foreign.

The next day Ramanbhai, the youngest son, handed us towels and saris and ordered us in no uncertain terms to "fresh!" (wash ourselves). The women wanted our clothes for cleaning. Since they were filthy from long bus journeys we could not refuse. I returned from my wash, somewhat embarrassed, with a sari swathed precariously around my limbs. I thought it strange that they had not even given me a petticoat or blouse to put underneath. But it soon became apparent that this was only temporary apparel, for mother, daughter and son were in the throes of discussing what clothes they should give their new guests. It was not, it seems, a simple matter. The problem revolved around the fact that as unmarried girls we should not really be wearing saris but, on the other hand, we were much too old and much too big to be unmarried girls, which seemed to suggest that saris were most suitable. The other possibility was a *salwar kamiz* (trouser and knee length tunic), the dress worn by the daughter of the house when she went to school in the city. A fitted pale blue polyester version of this outfit was given to my companion whilst I was dressed in a long petticoat and tight synthetic *kamiz* (tunic), also belonging to their nineteen year old daughter. We found the clothes uncomfortable and physically restrictive but were willing, and even amused, to wear them for the day. But it soon became apparent that our hosts were taking the ritual of dressing us up more seriously than we

thought. They began to get out their bangles and tried to force them onto our over large wrists. They oiled our hair, screwing it back into tight smooth buns. They stuck red *bindi*s (spangles) on our foreheads. And finally the mother looked pleased, announcing in triumph:

> "Now you are *real* Gujaratis. Now you are *our* people. You are my very own daughters. Now I have three daughters, no longer one, but three!"

The reality of being "*real* Gujaratis" and "*our* people" soon became apparent when Ramanbhai, the youngest son, began to introduce us to people in the village, not only as *Brahman* girls, but actually as his mother's aunt's[3] daughters who lived in "Foren".[4] This explanation seemed to satisfy people's curiosity. Somehow, through our clothing, we had been transformed, temporarily at least, into people comprehensible in local terms. The whiteness of our skin, the peculiarly of our speech, our very origins were submerged by a heavy layer of cultural dressing. Brief though the victory was, it was the triumph of dress over descent; of culture over the body; of the collectivity of caste over our peculiarly Western sense of individuality.

Looking back on the incident, I realise that I was by no means fully aware of its significance at the time. Yet I remember feeling strangely relieved to get back into my own apparel at the end of the day, even though I knew it to be inappropriate. This was not simply because my own clothes were more comfortable, but also because I felt restricted in their clothes as though I was somehow expected to move and act differently. Dressed in their long and cumbersome garments, not only did I no longer look my normal self, but I no longer felt it either.[5]

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3 Ramanbhai's mother's maternal aunt (*marsi*) had emigrated to Kenya and later Leicester where she now lives with her daughter.

4 "Foren" was the term used for the place where foreigners live. It had wide and varied application according to where the flexible boundary was drawn between the indigenous (*deshi*) and the foreign (*videshi*). To some women with limited geographic knowledge, any place outside of Gujarat was in "Foren". To those with wider geographic knowledge, "Foren" referred to places outside India, but there was much geographic confusion. England was often thought to be in London, which in turn was sometimes assumed to be in America. And Ramanbhai's family, despite having relatives in Leicester, were convinced that Leicester was in London.

5 In a brief but pertinent article entitled, Lumbar Thought, Umberto Eco has explored this idea that clothes impose demeanours. Reflecting upon the effects of his tight denim jeans, he concluded that they reduced his sense of interiorness by forcing him to "live towards the exterior world" (Eco 1986:191-5).

When I returned to the village after some months, I was alone and equipped with a better knowledge of Gujarati and what I considered "appropriate clothing". This consisted of a *salwar kamiz*, the dress worn by most college girls in the nearby city of Bhavnagar and by a few village girls. The *Brahman* family were pleased that I was wearing Indian dress and approved of my choice of style which was, they said, suitable for an educated unmarried girl. But they were angry that I had purchased my own cloth and disappointed in my choice of fabric which, being cotton, was much too coarse and plain for their taste. They told me that they would have provided clothing for me, and they would have chosen much more suitable synthetic, shiny cloth and a better fitting style. I should not, they felt, have purchased anything myself. They were also annoyed that I had purchased a few vessels of my own. They wanted me to eat their food, wear their clothes, in short, to "be" one of them. I for my part was anxious to maintain some degree of independence for I realised that "being one of them" was going to place insurmountable restrictions on my movements. I had already seen that unmarried *Brahman* daughters scarcely stirred outside the house.

The problem of how I should be dressed was linked, of course, to the much more fundamental problem of my identity at large. It was a cause of great concern that an unmarried girl could stray so far afield without her parents. It was also inconceivable that any college could allow such irresponsible behaviour. Ideally, a respectable girl of marriageable age (though at twenty five I was pushing the limit) should stay inside the house as much as possible and if my studies took me outside, I should at least be accompanied by a male family member. For I must surely feel both scared and shy to venture out alone. I needed male protection. My situation was rendered all the more miserable in their eyes by the fact that my "sister" had gone back to "Foren" and found "service" (a job) whilst I was left in India all on my own.

The immediate, and indeed considerate, response of this *Brahman* family was to put right my shameful and apparently lonely position by incorporating me into their own family structure. Providing me with clothes was, of course, an obvious familial duty. It was, after all, the obligation of the head of the house to provide both clothes and food for his wife and daughters. What would neighbours say if I seemed deprived of my due? And just as this responsible father sought to provide for me, so he sought to "protect" me from the prying

eyes of the outside world of the village. This too was his paternal duty. For the first few days of my stay, I could not stir outside the house without the protective companionship of my "Gujarati brother" who tried to control both whom I spoke to and what we spoke about. He too was fulfilling his "duty". His presence made conversation difficult, for the farming women and girls with whom I was talking were not accustomed to visits from a twenty year old Brahman boy, and seemed to find his masculine and painfully serious presence constraining. This was not aided by the fact that he himself adopted an air of distinct superiority and disapproval. He was standing guard. When, after a week his father ordered him to purchase new cloth for me from the town and to get it stitched at the tailor's, I quickly refused the offer and assured them that really I had enough clothes of my own. I was never to accept clothes from them again except as a parting gift when I left the village, for wearing their clothes seemed to be tantamount to accepting the identity they wished to confer on me with all the benefits and constraints that it would entail.[6]

My refusal to accept their clothes was part of a more general attempt to shed my new Gujarati identity and to preserve my own. I soon informed the family that I did not wish to be presented either as their relative or as a *Brahman*. Finally we settled on a compromise identity. I was to be introduced to people as the friend and neighbour of their relative who lived in "Foren". This would provide a good explanation for why I had chosen their particular village and family with whom to stay and would satisfy the curiosity of other villagers who might be jealous or suspicious of my presence. For my part, it freed me to some extent of the obligation to act like a *Brahman*, although the role of daughter remained with me throughout my stay.

This initial experience gave me a taste of the problem of what to wear: the feeling of exclusion and peculiarity engendered by being inappropriately dressed, and the feeling of group inclusion with all the apparent limitations and restrictions that being appropriately dressed seemed to embody. Finally, I had searched for a garment that was sufficiently neutral to allow me to circulate with the maximum number of people; that was decent without being confining;

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6 Cohn has demonstrated how sets of clothes (*khilats*) were given by Moghul rulers to their inferiors as a gesture of authority. Receiving a set of clothes implied a person's inferiority and subordination. In their attempts to escape being placed in this position, the British tried to avoid receiving such "gifts" and placed them directly in the Company treasury when receipt could not be avoided (Cohn 1989:316-8).

female without being too "feminine" and Indian without being associated with any particular caste.[7] It also had the added benefit of being reasonably comfortable for a Westerner, accustomed to wearing trousers. I chose cotton because it seemed the coolest material and I restricted myself to comparatively simple designs.

Frequently women would remark on my lack of jewellery and suggest that without it I looked like a man. But this ambiguity of gender was something that worked in my favour. For the shapeless *salwar kamiz* which de-emphasised the female form, combined with the lack of jewellery, seemed to enable me to circulate in the village with the mobility more commonly experienced by men. This did not mean that I mixed freely with men, for my contact with them was always limited and secondary to my contact with women. But it did enable me to talk with a variety of people from all different castes, to visit other villages and ride a bicycle without being too much restricted by the normal constraints on female behaviour. It was both desexualising and freeing.[8] Interestingly, villagers were not unaware of this. Sometimes old women informed me that I was wise not to wear jewellery as it meant I had nothing to fear and was free to move around. Their young women, by contrast, were afraid to go outside alone for fear that thieves might snatch their large gold earrings. More often men would acknowledge my "freedom" and preach to their wives: "You see. She does not bother with all these things (jewellery). She can progress". As the providers of ornaments they saw in me the idea of escape from this financial burden. But, in reality, men dared not skimp on gifts of jewellery, for they feared the censure of other villagers and the crushing accusations that they were miserly men.

My search for appropriate clothing was, of course, very different from village women's clothing dilemmas. I could select my own option, a compromise

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7 The *salwar kamiz,* though introduced to India by Muslims has been worn for centuries by both Hindus and Muslims in parts of Northern India (see chapter 2). It has recently become the acceptable garb of female students of all religions throughout the subcontinent, although it is rarely worn after marriage, and still holds an Islamic connotation in some Hindu minds.

8 Young educated women in cities often cite this as the reason for the increasing popularity of the *salwar kamiz.* One woman in Ahmedabad told me: "It has offered a new ease of movement to women and a sense of liberty. Its popularity is part of the changing role of the upper middle class woman today."

between how other people wanted me to dress and how I wished to dress myself. Furthermore I was able to refuse their offer of clothes and in doing so could avoid, to some extent, the role that was being ascribed to me with those clothes.[9] But the experience of being temporarily dressed and presented as a *Brahman* relative gave me some insight into what it is both to wear and to receive apparel which simultaneously defines identity and places expectations on behaviour. Village women never had my kind of choice nor did they contemplate it, but neither did they accept blindly the expectations of caste and family tradition. My attempt as an outsider to prevent myself from being drawn into the minutia of their traditions could perhaps be seen as the reverse of their attempts as insiders to reach out from those traditions to a changing environment and to incorporate aspects of modernity into their clothing and behaviour. In this chapter I examine the relationship between clothing and identity in the village. Before introducing the clothes of the village, I shall first introduce the village, the environment and the people.

The Village and its Environment

The village of Jalia is situated in the Bhavnagar district in the eastern side of Saurashtra, the peninsula that juts out from mainland Gujarat into the Arabian sea. Prior to British intervention the territory of the district formed the petty kingdom of Gohilwad, named after the ruling clan of *Gohil Rajputs*. The central

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9 Since writing this prologue, I have come across Ann Grodzins Gold's account of her reception in a Rajasthani village. It provides interesting comparative material. Her position differed from mine in that she was considerably older and married. She had chosen to wear a *salwar kamiz* but since this was worn only by local Muslims and college girls in towns, it was considered inappropriate by all but the Muslim villagers. She therefore bought some material which was sewn up into ruffled skirts by her Rajput landlady's daughter. She wore these with a loose blouse and veil. She writes: "When I donned these clothes, it turned out that I looked like a Rajput, for the daughter had sewn them in her caste's distinctive style." The Brahman women thought she looked ridiculous and told her to wear a sari. Muslim women said she was better off in a *salwar kamiz* which afforded her good protection from men, and peasant women teased her by suggesting she adopt their briefer style of skirt and blouse. In defiance, she appeared one day in jeans which, being "men's dress", was met with unanimous disapproval. Finally, after struggling with the discomfort of a veil for a while, she settled for a long skirt and cotton blouse that did not identify her directly with any community, and kept her head uncovered. She too had found a neutral compromise between personal discomfort and social expectation. She avoided heavy silver anklets but wore the appropriate bangles, since without these she was considered inauspicious as a married woman (Gold 1988:13-14). Hobson (1978) and Jacobson (1970) opted for a more wholesale identification with the women they worked with, adopting saris,, the latter because village women were concerned that she looked immodest in her own knee length skirt and blouse (1970:128).

portion of the peninsula was called Kathiawad owing to the powerful *Kathi* clans that dominated it. Following the decline of the Moghul Empire the peninsula fell into a state of frequent warfare. Land rights were finally settled by the British officer, Colonel Walker, who, in 1807, drew up the boundaries of what became the 222 princely states of Kathiawar. These boundaries remained intact until Independence, after which the states were united and later integrated to form modern-day Saurashtra. Although Saurashtra is now part of Gujarat, it has maintained a distinctive sense of regional identity. Most Gujaratis think of it as a "backward", "traditional" and somewhat "romantic" place. Saurashtrans tend to refer to themselves and their language as Kathiawadi rather than Saurashtran or Gujarati.

Jalia is a large village with a Hindu population of over 7,000, and is well connected to urban centres by a road running from the city of Bhavnagar in the North to the town of Talaja in the South (see map, fig. 5:1). Being the largest village in the immediate neighbourhood, it attracts people from smaller surrounding villages, who come to make purchases or to catch a bus or truck to the city. With a small bank, a post office, a selection of temples, three medical dispensaries, a primary and secondary school, Jalia has many of the facilities of a minor town. Its main street (*bajar*) is lined with small, but well stocked shops, selling foodstuffs and household items such as steel utensils, soap, cloth, plastic buttons, bangles and beads, threads, pencils and school note books. Interspersed with these are the gold smiths' workshop and a number of tailors' units, as well as stalls selling cigarettes (*bidi*), betel nut (*pan*) and cold drinks. Spare parts for farming equipment and kerosene are also available in the village, though in limited quantity and supply. For most major purchases of clothes and other items villagers make the one hour bus trip to the city some 27km. away.

Jalia is linked to other villages and towns, not only through its strategic position on the roadside, but also through extensive kinship ties. The practices of village exogamy and virilocal residence ensure that women from other villages marry into Jalia, and Jalia women marry into other villages, thereby providing networks of familial links throughout the area. The practice of exchange marriage is common amongst many of the poorer caste communities (*jatis*) in which case women literally exchange villages and homes when they marry.

Despite its size and proximity to the city, Jalia remains a village rather than a town, both in local perception and by official definition[10]. It is surrounded by fields and hills and thrives primarily on agriculture. More than half of the working population earns its livelihood from farming activities, cultivating chiefly groundnut, millet, barley, sesame, onions and lemons. Most landowning families also own their own bullocks and cows, from which they obtain sufficient milk to fulfil their own needs. With the exception of eleven small diamond cutting units, most manufacturing in the village is for fairly local use and is performed by artisans, specialising in their particular hereditary caste occupations.

Perhaps more important than the official definition of Jalia as a "village" is the local perception of it as such. The explanations, "but this is a village (*gam*)" or "in the village only the village way goes" were frequently invoked by both men and women to describe patterns of expected behaviour. Women, in particular, were conscious of the need to act in accordance with "village custom" (*gam nu rivaj*). As in many parts of North and Central India, women were expected to veil their faces when they stepped outside their homes into the public space of their marital villages. And the ability to remain out of view within one's own home was considered a great privilege. Once outside, a woman was always conscious of what "the village" would see, or what "the village" would think. And although the village was large, heterogeneous and in the process of expansion and change, people invoked its name as if it had some sort of fixed autonomy and moral expectation. Stepping into "the village" was like stepping onto a stage where an audience (real or imagined) was ready to assess your performance.[11]

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10 According to the official definition used in census classifications, a town must have a minimum population of 5000 with at least 75% of the male working population engaged in agriculture. Jalia is therefore classified as a large village.

11 There are many parallels here with Sharma's discussion of Harbassi village in the Punjab. With a population of 6,000, Harbassi was neither so small that it had no public space nor so large that public space predominated. Inhabitants described it as "our own place" (*apni jegeh*) as opposed to the city where there was a certain amount of anonymity and reputations need not be so closely guarded. Sharma notes that married women were more restricted in their movements in the large village of Harbassi than in either smaller villages (with little public space) or cities (with predominantly public space) (Sharma 1980:230-239). This observation accords with my own observations in the district of Bhavnagar.

The Town 29 km.

Bhil Village 2 km

Hills

Farmland

Farmland

Village
Centre

G.P.O

Main Road

Farmland

River

The Plot

Farmland

The City 27 km.

S
E ⊥ W
N

|⫼| = *Kanbi* houses △ = temples

▨ = *Kharak* houses ◯ = wells

|ββ| = *Bharwad* houses

|HH| = *Harijan* houses

|xx| = *Brahman* houses
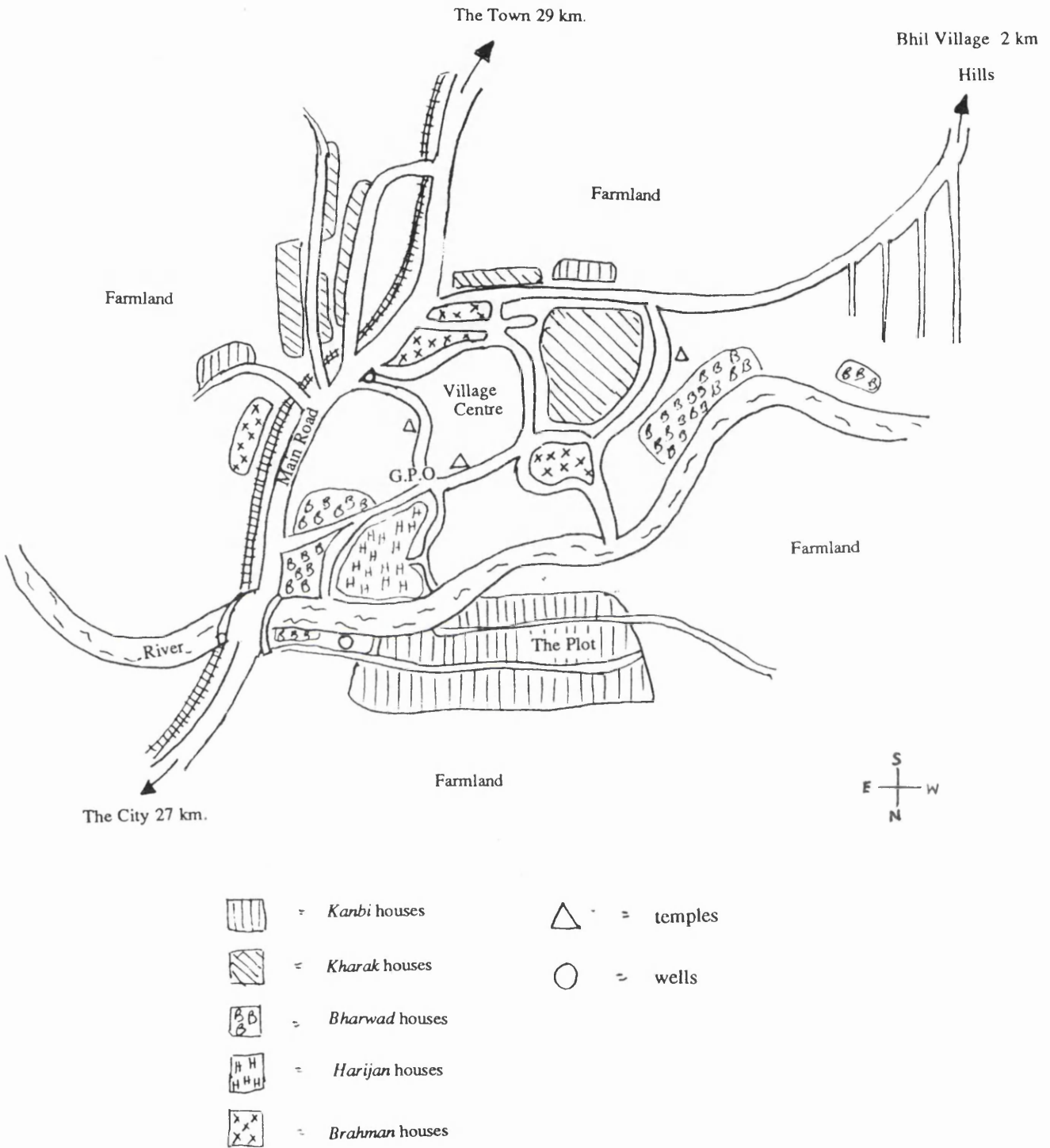
Map of Jalia (not to scale), showing the distribution of housing of the main caste groups with whom I worked (*Brahman, Kanbi, Kharak, Bharwad, Harijan).*

Fig 5:1
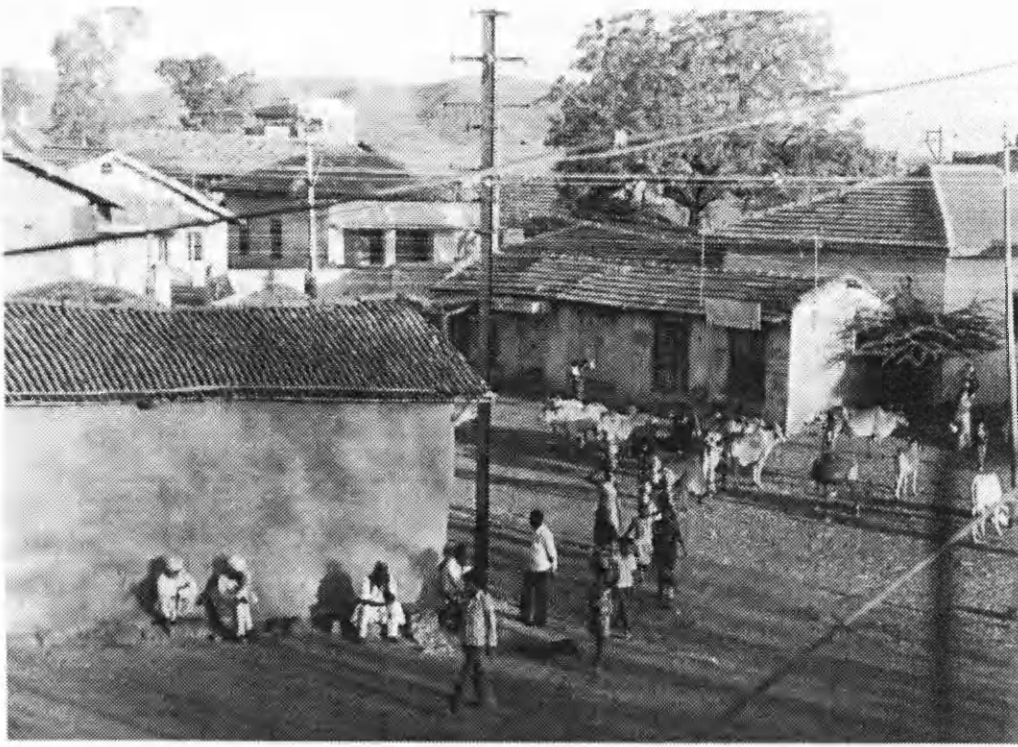
(a): View as one enters the *pakka* village centre.
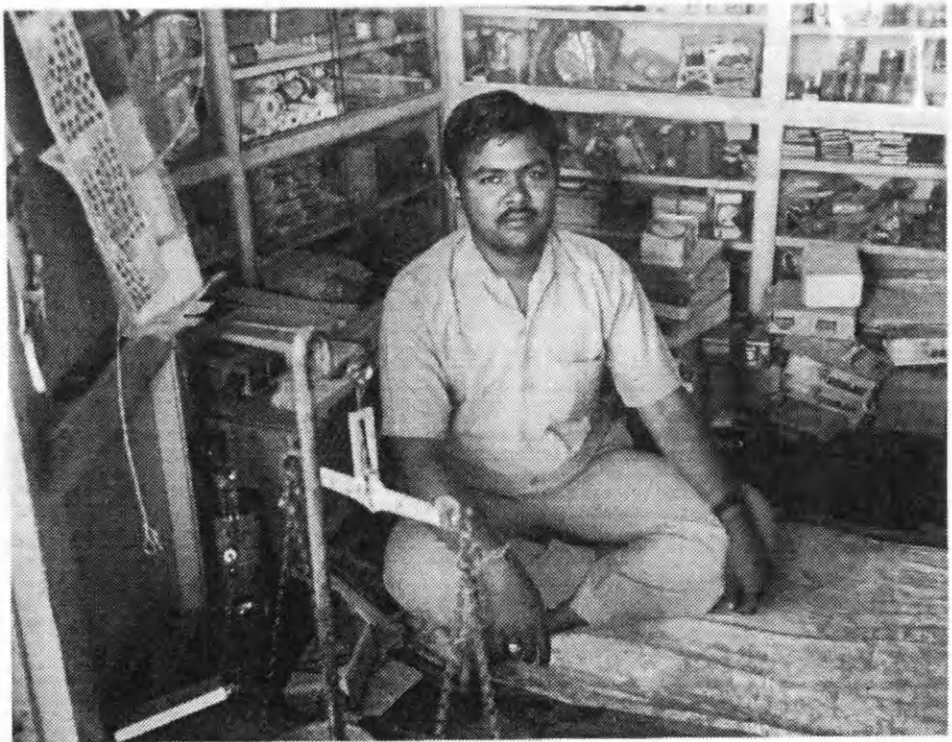
(b): Interior of a village shop, selling needles, thread, string, bangles, beads, buttons and a variety of miscellaneous small things.

Fig. 5:2 The Village of Jalia

The People of Jalia

The people of Jalia are (with the exception of a few Muslim families) entirely Hindu, coming from a variety of different caste communities (*jatis*). In Table 5:1 I list the the different castes of the village, classified according to traditional occupational type and local hierarchy.[12]

A high degree of occupational specialisation persists in the village today, with many men, particularly those of the older generations, following the traditional trade of their caste. The only occupation now extinct is weaving which has not been practised in Jalia since the early 1900's. Pottery is the other occupation that has almost died out with only two old brothers practising it today. Its rapid diminution can be attributed to the availability and popularity of stainless steel vessels. In general men of the younger generations are less confined to caste occupations than their fathers and often seek alternative employment either in the city or as agricultural labourers in the village.

Post Independence changes in the agrarian structure of Saurashtra have considerably altered the distribution of wealth in the area and have also affected the standing of certain castes within the village and the district. A brief description of these changes is necessary as they have played an important role in the development of sartorial change.

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12 A detailed discussion of the intricacies of caste hierarchy is beyond the scope of this study. Obviously, in a village the size of Jalia there are differences of wealth and land ownership between different members of the same caste. And such differences can affect a family's standing in the community. Furthermore, as Pocock (1972), Srinivas (1968), Jain (1980) and many others have pointed out, the hierarchy is not entirely rigid for there is a certain amount of mobility within it. But despite discrepancies and ambiguities, the notion of hierarchy remains strong. So too does the notion that a person can be polluted by eating with members of a caste whom they consider below them. The only instance where there was an obvious disjunction between social status and occupational type was in the case of goldsmiths (*soni*) who, despite being craftsmen, were accorded high social status in the village. This may be attributed to their wealth and also perhaps to the value of the substance with which they work. In general craftspeople occupy a lowly position in the hierarchy. The Muslim families mentioned above have been excluded from the list owing to their numerical insignificance and their different religion. They were in fact oil pressers and blacksmiths and occupied a fairly lowly position within the village.

Table 5:1: The Caste Groups of Jalia

NON MANUAL LABOUR

Brahman (priests and teachers)
Vaniya (traders)
Darbar[13] (landowners of the old ruling *Gohil Rajput* clan)

CULTIVATORS

Kanbi, known also as *Patel* (cultivators and cattle owners)
Kharak (cultivators and cattle owners)

LABOURERS,ARTISANS,SERVICE CASTES

Soni (goldsmiths)
Koli (farm labourers)
Darji (tailors)
Luhar (carpenters)
Sutar (blacksmiths)
Mochi (cobblers)
Kumvar (potters)
Dhobi (washermen)
Vanand (barbers)

SHEPHERDS

Bharwad (shepherds, keeping goats, sheep and cattle)

OUTCASTES

Vaghri (sell tooth sticks, musicians)
Jogi (mendicants)
Harijan, previously divided into *Dhed* or *Vankar* (weavers)
                    and *Bhangi* (sweepers)

Post Independence Reforms

Prior to Independence almost all the cultivated land around the village was owned by members of the ruling *Darbar* caste in an essentially feudal system. *Darbar* men rarely worked in the fields and their women were strictly secluded. Their land was farmed chiefly by *Kanbis* and *Kharaks* who paid a large percentage of their earnings in cash or crop to their landlords. They in turn hired landless labourers from different communities to assist in farming activities

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13 *Darbar* is the term locally used for the branch of the Rajput caste that ruled the district of Bhavnagar, previously known as Gohilwad. The rulers were known as *Gohil Darbars*.

during the busiest agricultural season. The inequalities of landownership in the area was one of the immediate concerns of the newly formed Government of India following Independence. An Agrarian Research Commission was established and between 1951 and 1954 reforms were introduced which transferred ownership rights from the traditional owners to the tillers of the land. The result was a considerable decline in the power of the *Darbar* and the rise of the *Kanbi* and the *Kharak* as the dominant landowning castes in the village. Both these castes are numerically strong in Jalia, and each *Kanbi* and *Kharak* household has at least a small farmstead and some land.

The *Kanbi*, who are spread throughout Gujarat[14], have invested much of their new wealth in the diamond cutting industry. Their kinship ties extend to Surat where the industry was beginning to expand in the 1960's. Many *Kanbi* families of Jalia began sending one son to stay with city relatives and take up an apprenticeship. By the end of the decade the trade was established in Bhavnagar itself and by the late 1970's many *Kanbi* households in Jalia had at least one family member involved in the craft. This provided a regular daily wage, considerably higher than that of an agricultural labourer. It also proved an important supplement to agricultural earnings, particularly in times of drought. During the recent drought of 1985-8, *Kanbi* entrepreneurs began setting up small diamond cutting units in Jalia itself which now contains eleven such workshops, ten of which are owned by *Kanbi* men. The craft is almost like a caste occupation since *Kanbis* employ mainly their own relatives.[15] But it differs from traditional caste occupations to the extent that it caters to the export market and is followed by the younger generation, rather than passing from

14 There are, according to Jain, five major divisions amongst the *Kanbis*: *Leva*, *Kadva*, *Anjana*, *Uda* and *Kadva* (Jain 1980:112). The *Kanbis* of Jalia belong to the *Leva* division, the largest group in Gujarat. The *Patidar* caste, described by Pocock, has derived from the *Leva Kanbi*, over whom they now claim superiority (Pocock 1972). Throughout Gujarat *Kanbis* in general have a reputation for being excellent farmers. In the 1884 Bombay Gazetteer, they were described as "the best cultivators in the province" (1884:176).

15 This is true even in Surat where, according to a survey carried out in 1987, 59% of diamond factories are managed by *Kanbi Patels* who also make up 70% of the labour force. The report also stresses that 80% of the workforce claims to have found employment through "personal ties". The rapid expansion of the industry in Surat which grew from employing 500 persons in 1962 to an estimated 40,000 in 1987, is attributed in part to the fact that India imports low quality rough diamonds that European countries reject, and with a cheap but highly skilled labour force, cuts and polishes them to "export- quality" standards. It is also aided by the rising demand for diamonds in Belgium, Japan, America, Hongkong and the Middle East (cf. Kashyap and Tiwari 1987).

seniors to juniors. Older generation men of the caste and women of all ages continue to labour in the fields so that families benefit from a dual source of income.

Money earned from diamond cutting has been invested in new concrete houses, built in an area of the village known as "the plot". The area is reserved almost exclusively for *Kanbis* and contains some of the most modern housing in the village. The caste has also begun adopting high status values in dress, food and other social customs. *Kharak* families, despite owning much of the land around the village, have not diversified their interests like the *Kanbi.* They lack the extensive kinship networks of the latter. In fact the *Kharak* caste, though well represented in the village, is geographically restricted to the Bhavnagar district and is not found in other parts of Saurashtra or Gujarat. As a result their kinship ties are local and their city contacts minimal compared to those of the *Kanbi.* Unlike the latter, the *Kharak* have remained almost entirely dependent on the land. The result is that the *Kanbi* are generally thought to have become *sudharo manus* (developed people) whereas the *Kharak* are regarded as comparatively *deshi* (backward, old fashioned, local). Changes in dress that have developed between the two castes in the past forty years have played an important role in this differentiation process and will be discussed in a later chapter.

The other caste that has experienced radical changes since Independence is the *Harijans.* The term *Harijan* (child of god) was introduced by Gandhi to apply to all castes who were previously considered "untouchable". In Jalia, the term is technically applicable to both the *Bhangi* (sweepers) and the *Vankar* (weavers). But in practice only the latter have been accepted under the new name. Despite the official abolition of untouchability in 1955, fear of being polluted by the touch of a *Bhangi* persists in the village. *Vankars*, on the other hand, occupy a much more ambiguous position. While they are still considered ritually low, they have in fact made good use of government support both in education and employment and therefore hold a number of white collar jobs reserved for *Harijans* in the city. These prestigious occupations, combined with the money they have generated have made them more respected but also envied in the village. Leaving aside the attitudes of other castes, the *Harijan Vankars* have considerably improved their standard of living and lead a fairly comfortable life style compared to the two *Bhangi* families whom they shun as ritually impure.[16]

In general, there is some discrepancy between the educational standards and occupations of different generations within the same caste. Amongst wealthy families education for boys is usually admired and the younger generations are more literate than their parents. Female education remains poor and is rarely pursued beyond the level of minimal literacy except by a few high caste families. Some castes like the *Bharwads* (shepherds) and *Kharak* have shown almost no interest in educating their women and very little interest in educating their menfolk. Education and wealth are two important factors that combine with ideas of ritual purity to effect notions of hierarchy in the village.

Clothing and Hierarchy

I have outlined the social structure of the village in order to provide a background to understanding the relationship between clothing and hierarchy. There can be no doubt that clothing has played an important part in establishing, maintaining and altering the image of different caste-communities in the area. But the relationship between clothing and caste is, and no doubt always was, complicated.[17] As Chishti and Sanyal have shown in Madhya Pradesh, particular patterns and styles of dress are often regional more than caste-specific (Chishti and Sanyal 1989:20). But even regional differences are not clear cut for there have always been a number of factors that challenge the boundaries between the clothing worn in one village or region and another. Firstly there is the fact that most villages were never self-sufficient, and relied on trading contacts with other villages or towns in order to fulfil basic needs like clothing (cf. Shah 1988). The houses and dowry chests of village elites were, for example, often stocked with luxury items from afar such as silks from China. Secondly, even in cases where villagers produced their own clothes, this did not prevent the influx of new designs since women marrying into the village would bring to their marital homes trousseaux containing clothes from their natal villages. This must have lead to networks of designs and ideas being

16 For a detailed account of attitudes to untouchability in rural Gujarat, see Desai 1976.

17 Note the difference between the highly ordered notion of caste dress projected in pictorial ethnographies in the 19th century (Johnson 1863 and 1866, Watson and Kaye 1865-75, Dalton 1872) and the considerably more chaotic image projected in volumes showing craftsmen at work, where the focus was on the occupation rather than the classification of human types (see "72 paintings of trades and castes in Cutch" and "Trades and Occupations" vol 52, both in the I. O. Prints and Drawings Collection). For a more recent example of casual photographs, see Hopkinson's Kathiawadi Album, compiled in the 1930's (I.O. Mss.Eur.D.998:26-36)).

exchanged between villages and regions. The extent to which these have affected the clothing traditions of the area must have depended to some extent on the geographical distance between inter-marrying villages. Until recently most families in Jalia, with the exception of the *Darbar, Vaniya* and *Brahman*, formed marriage alliances in a fairly restricted area so the pool of designs being exchanged would have been comparatively local.

While there was little to prevent designs spreading from village to village and eventually region to region, there was also little to prevent them spreading between different castes within a single village. Unless wealthy elites imposed sartorial restrictions on those socially beneath them, they could not prevent the latter from adopting new types of design or fabrics which often consisted of imitations of elite dress.[18] Although the image of caste-specific dress remains important in Jalia, it is questionable whether clothing ever formed the clear cut system of identification that museums often imply. Those women who embroidered their own clothes, for example, shared the same design sources and often ended up wearing the same motifs and colours as members of other castes. In Jalia, this was clear in the *Kanbi* and *Kharak* case where the women of both castes embroidered identical motifs, colours and stitches on their skirts. These were occasionally copied by those poor women who could afford the time and money to embroider. Where imitations were successful, low caste women ended up looking very similar to wealthy peasants. In brief, although dress is one of the means by which a caste defines itself, it is not necessarily an "indicator" of caste. And while dress does to some extent "indicate" regional identity, there is and always has been a certain blurring of local styles.[19]

Yet clothes *have* undoubtedly played an important part in the hierarchical structure of the village. In many cases they were linked more to occupation and wealth than specifically to caste as such. In women's dress, these differences were most clearly expressed in a hierarchy of fabric types which corresponded to the social hierarchy in the village (cf. Bayly 1986). In the early 1900's all

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18 In some parts of India high castes introduced sanctions to prevent members of low castes from wearing certain types of clothes (cf. Hutton 1961, Cohn 1989).

19 Shelagh Weir, when collecting material for a museum exhibition and book entitled Palestinian Costume (1989), found that she had to reject her initial hypothesis about well defined regional styles in favour of a more dynamic approach which corresponded to the constantly changing reality of Palestinian dress. She defined her change of emphasis as a shift away from the "museum anthropologists" approach (Weir 1989:17-20).

women in Jalia were wearing what might be described as the regional style of Kathiawad. This consisted of some form of skirt (stitched or wrapped) with a backless bodice (embroidered or plain) and half-sari. Table 5.2 illustrates the hierarchy of fabrics and castes.

Table 5:2 : The Hierarchy of Fabric Types

SOCIAL HIERARCHY (1900)	FABRIC HIERARCHY
NON MANUAL LABOUR *Brahman, Vaniya, Darbar*	Silk
CULTIVATORS: *Kanbi* and *Kharak*	Cotton *khadi* (heavily embroidered)
LABOURERS,ARTISANS,SERVICE CASTES *Soni, Koli, Darji Luhar, Sutar, Mochi, Kumvar, Dhobi, Vanand*	Cotton *khadi* (Plain or slightly embroidered)
SHEPHERDS *Bharwad*	Wool
OUTCASTES *Vaghri, Jogi, Harijan*	Cast offs and rags

At the top of the hierarchy was silk, the finest and the most expensive and exclusive fabric. This was not only considered a luxury material, but it was also the least permeable to pollution, giving it important ritual value (Bayly 1986).[20] A wealthy, high caste woman would wear a long gathered silk skirt (*chaniyo*) with an embroidered border. These skirts were sometimes made from enormous quantities of cloth, depending on the financial abilities of the family.[21] With her

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20 The ritual value and the social value of silk were of course complementary. The fabric was available to those who could afford it who were generally the wealthier members of a caste. Johnson records how in the 1860's, the *Vaniya* women who lived East of the Sabarmati River in Ahmedabad wore silk, whereas those West of the river wore cotton and were looked down upon by the others (Johnson 1863, vol 1:43). This is another example of how members of the same caste sometimes dressed differently.

21 Crooke describes a skirt made from 75 feet of cloth, worn by women in Kutch (Crooke 1916:159). In general it was chiefly the women and men of ruling *Rajput*

skirt, a woman would wear a backless silk and brocade bodice (*kapdu*), usually embroidered by herself or a servant, and a long half-sari (*sadlo*) of fine silk or muslin. Today, village women rarely wear silk, but high caste women have maintained their preference for fine textures and now wear full length synthetic saris in a variety of thin materials with blouses (*cholis*) and petticoats (*ghaghri*) underneath. They have entirely rejected their old bodices which they now regard as embarrassing and immodest owing to the complete exposure of the back. A few unmarried educated girls in this group now wear the *salwar kamiz*.

Next in the hierarchy was the embroidered cotton worn by the cultivators. This consisted of a brightly coloured and heavily embroidered wrap around skirt (*ghaghro*) in thick red *khadi*, worn with an embroidered bodice (often silk) and a dyed or printed cotton half-sari. The embroidery was done using silk threads and mirror inserts which made thick rough *khadi* look luxuriant and glowing.[22] Even so high caste women were disparaging about the clothes of the cultivators which they thought thick and heavy, thereby indicating and proving the coarseness and crudeness of their wearers. Even today, they call those who wear embroidered *khadi* the "thick-people castes" (*jada lok varan*). *Jada* (thickness) was a metaphor for lack of refinement. Even the bread eaten by farmers was criticised for being too *jada jada* (thick thick). But the peasants themselves (*Kanbi* and *Kharak*) were, until recently, proud of their skirts partly *because* of their *jada* quality. The denser and heavier the embroidery, the more they valued the cloth. Some old women still extol the strength of thick embroidered *khadi* which can be worn for farmwork everyday and does not disintegrate quickly or look faded and old like poor women's cloth. Still today, if embroidery is carelessly executed or sparse, it invites comparison to "lower" castes. Hence a *Kharak* woman rebukes her daughter: "Why is your embroidery so patchy and bare? Are you a *Vaghri* girl?" And another tells her child she will look like a *Koli* if she does not embroider neatly and closely. Good embroidery was then one of the means by which the *Kanbi* and *Kharak* differentiated their appearance from that other poorer castes. As Schneider has suggested in the

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clans who expressed their status through the quantity of cloth they used in their skirts and turbans. Postans refers to a turban worn by one of the Rao of Kutch's ministers that weighed fifteen pounds (Postans 1838:35).

22 It has been suggested that mirror work embroidery developed as an attempt to imitate the precious jewels and metallic threads used by the ruling elite in past centuries (Gross and Fontana 1981:1). Writing of the Middle Eastern context, Wace also suggests that peasant embroidery developed as a substitute for luxurious and precious silks (in Schneider 1980).

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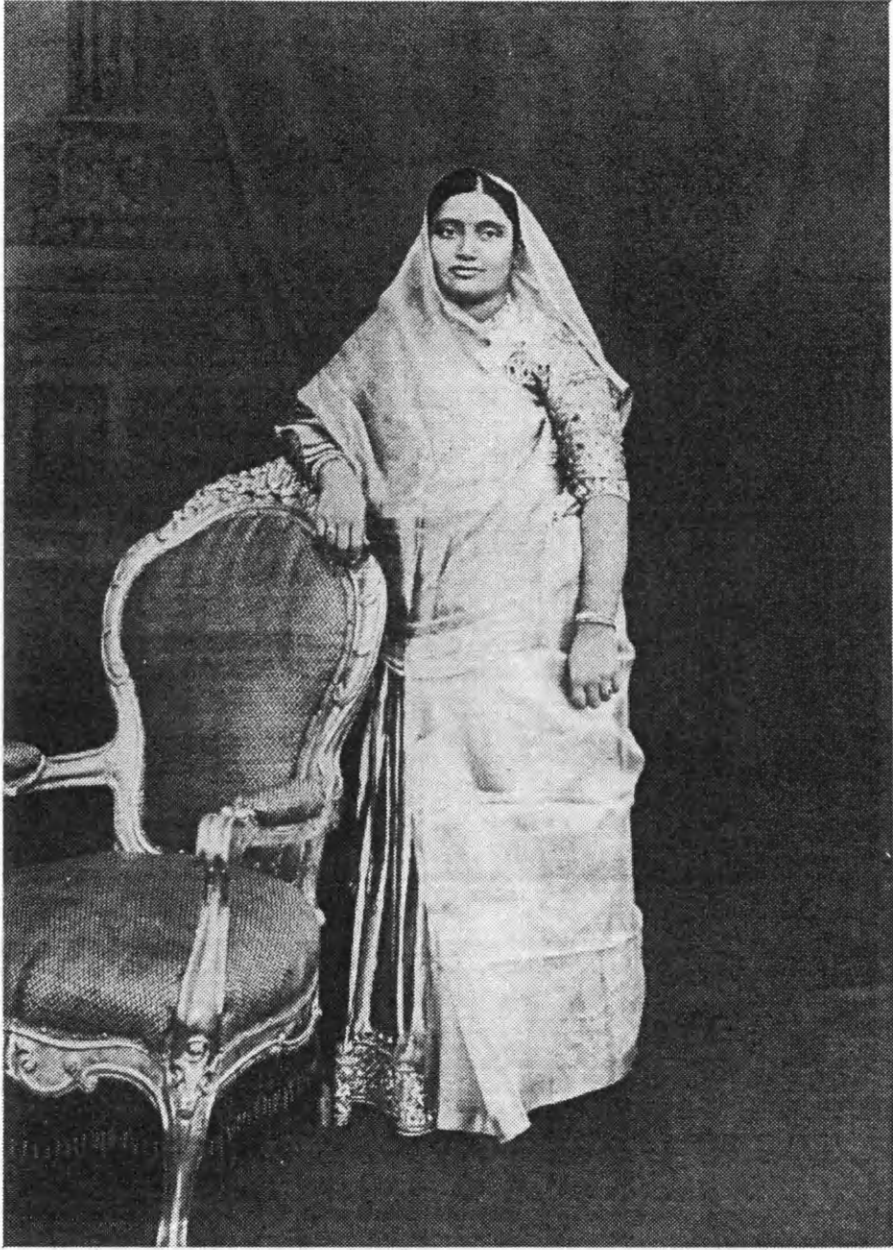
Fig. 5:3 The Princess of Bhavnagar (c. 1912). She wears a hand embroidered bodice (*kapdu*) and a full satin skirt (*chaniyo*) with an embroidered border. Her half-sari (*sadlo*) is worn in the Gujarati style with the end of the cloth being drawn over the head from behind and falling down the front. It is made of fine material, possibly foreign. This is the type of dress that was also worn by high caste village women in the early 1900's. Reproduced from **Celebration of the Marriage of Princess Manharkunvarba of Bhavnagar** (1912).

Fig. 5:4 A Gujarati couple from the *Vaghri* caste (1920). Like the princess (fig. 5:3), the Vaghri woman wears a bodice, skirt and half-sari, but her clothes are not silken and are considerably more skimpy, revealing large portions of flesh. The man is wearing a short *angarkha* and *dhoti* with a cummerbund and small turban. From Enthoven (1922), **The Tribes and Castes of Bombay**, vol 3.

Greek context, embroidery can be an efficient means of building up the layers which separate the wealthy peasantry from the proletariat (Schneider 1980:100). Today most *Kharak* women continue to wear embroidery while *Kanbi* women have converted to synthetic saris as part of their quest for upward mobility.

Most artisans and labourers were never able to compete with *Kanbi* and *Kharak* embroidery owing to lack of both time to embroider and money for threads, but they admired embroidery all the same. Some wore sparsely embroidered skirts and bodices in the same style as the cultivators while others made do with entirely plain red cloth. Today the young women from these castes have mostly converted to millmade saris or half-saris. These are not only cheap and easy to maintain, but they also allow a woman to wear highly decorative cloth without having to spend time embroidering. To them, cheap cotton and polyester saris provide a means of looking both colourful and modern, something which had always been a struggle in the past.

The *Bharwad* (shepherds), who are divided into the *Motàbhai* (Big brother) and *Nanabhai* (Little brother) divisions[23] are generally regarded as the most *deshi* people in the village. In the early 1900's their dress was comprised of predominantly woollen garments, woven by *Harijans* from wool taken from the *Bharwads'* own sheep. The women wore an unstitched black or red woollen wrap-around skirt (*jimi*) with a tie dyed black woollen veil (*dhabli*). *Motabhai* women wore veils with yellow dots whereas *Nanabhai* women wore veils with red dots. Like the women of other castes they embroidered their own bodices. Today they no longer wear predominantly woollen clothes, but they have retained the distinctive colours and styles of their caste. Specialist shops in the city stock machine made polyester and cotton versions of shepherd's dress. Even the embroidered bodice is now available in polyester, embroidered by machine using synthetic gold threads and brocades. The *Bharwad* are the only

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23 Members of *Motabhai* and *Nanabhai* divisions describe their relationship by the phrase, "bread we can exchange, but daughters we cannot". They also refer to themselves as "thick cloth" (*jada pachedi*) and "thin cloth" (*nana pachedi*). Some attribute these phrases to the fact that *Motabhai* women used to wear thicker woollen wraps than *Nanabhai* women. The most popular tale of the origin of the two divisions runs as follows: Lord Krishna told two shepherd brothers to take their flocks in different directions. The elder brother went one way and married a *Bharwad* while the younger brother went the other way and married a *Koli*. This was polluting so from that day the descendants of the elder brother (literally *mota bhai*) were ritually higher than the descendants of the lower brother (*nana bhai*).

caste in the village where young women continue to wear the open backed bodices without embarrassment. Their style of dress is highly distinctive in the village, though very similar to the dress of other shepherd groups in the district.

Finally, the outcast communities made do with whatever combinations of clothes that they could get. If they performed tasks or acted as servants for wealthy families in the village, they were sometimes given clothes by the latter and therefore wore a variety of styles. The *Bhangi* (sweeper) women, whose task it was to remove clothes from dead bodies before they were burnt on the funeral pyre, would sometimes wear the clothes of the deceased which other people considered polluting. The *Vankars* (weavers), on the other hand, would sometimes receive an item of clothing as payment for weaving cloth for other castes. Enthoven was surprised to find: "A well-to-do *Dhed*[24] woman wears a bodice equalling in the fineness and price of those worn by high caste Hindus" although he noticed that the bulk of the caste were "ill-clad" (Enthoven 1920, vol 1:323). Similar observations about the diversity of a poor person's clothes have also been made by Khodidas Parmar, a Saurashtran folklorist who was brought up in the area. He remembers seeing in his childhood an extravagant wedding procession where a richly clad *Darbar* man flung his clothes at a *Bhangi* drummer at the end of the celebration. The poor sweeper went about dressed like a wealthy *Darbar* until the clothes fell apart (personal communication). Such incidents suggest that the relationship between clothing and caste was never straightforward although, as Bayly suggests, there was in most cases a clear correlation between the fineness of the fabric and the status of the wearer (Bayly 1986).

Women's dress was not of course only a matter of expressing wealth and social status, as Veblen might have interpreted it (cf.Veblen 1925). It was also a means of beautification. The conjunction of these three aspects of adornment was most clearly expressed in the case of a woman's jewellery which was as lavish as her family could afford or would allow. The principal items worn by a married woman were heavy ivory bangles, a gold nose ring, a variety of gold or silver earrings, heavy silver anklets and silver toe rings. These have undergone considerable changes in recent years and are becoming lighter and finer. According to Parmar, caste identity used to be expressed more in jewellery than in dress (Parmar 1969:47). Nowadays differences in jewellery are more related

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24 The *Vankars* are members of the *Dhed* who have changed their name.

to differences in wealth than to caste status, but jewellery remains a vital aspect both of a woman's attire and her property.

Men's dress was and continues to be considerably less varied than women's dress. With the exception of *Brahman* and *Vaniya* men, who by the early 1900's were wearing long coats (*angarkha*) with trousers or *dhotis* and caps, most men in the village wore baggy pantaloon-type trousers which were tight from the knee down and a short smock top with multiple gathers from the chest to the waist (see fig. 5:6). These were known as *chorni* and *kediyun* respectively and were made from white *khadi*.. They were usually accompanied by a turban and waist-cloth. Writing in 1884, the author of the Bomay Gazetteer argued: "Higher in the scale coarse hand made cloth changes to calico......and the turban and waist-sash become more voluminous and of better material and richer colour" (vol 8:171).The *kediyun* and *chorni* are still today perceived as the local Kathiawadi style. Some men argue that the cut of the *chorni* used to reveal a man's caste, but the evidence is unclear since the older generation tailors in the village were unable to come up with more than six or seven variations at most. Furthermore people used different quantities of cloth in their clothes according to what they could afford and according to whether the clothes were for everyday or festival wear. These clothes were worn with silver bangles, gold or silver earrings and heavy farmer's shoes made from leather. The *Bharwad* (shepherds) were the only men who did not wear cotton or calico, but dressed instead in three woollen blankets, one wound around the waist, another round the head and a third round the shoulders (Enthoven 1920:119, Jain 1980:67). Today *Bharwad* men wear the cotton *kediyun* and *chorni* or *dhoti* that other castes used to wear and they continue to wear jewellery. Most young men and some older men of all other castes have abandoned their jewellery and now wear European style trousers with fitted shirts and shoes or sandals. Sometimes they change back into *dhotis* or *kurta pyjama* or loose cotton trousers on entering the house, but this they explain in terms of comfort. It is no longer obligatory for them to change out of their Western style clothes as it might have been in the past. With the exception of the *Bharwad* (shepherds), all communities in the village have by now accepted European dress for men and no longer see it as controversial.

It was a man's headwear which, in the past, was the most distinctive feature of caste, region and rank (Crill 1985, Cohn 1989, Bayly 1986). *Darbar* men wore a distinctive style of turban which was coloured usually purple or brown. Most

young farming men wore red turbans which they replaced with white ones in old age. But today it is impossible to establish a catalogue of earlier turban types since most men have abandoned the turban altogether. Even as early as 1909 the Imperial Gazetteer was forced to admit that it had not been possible to determine a person's identity from his "costume" for fifty years and that "even types of *pagris*" were "losing their significance" (1909:49). Whether it was ever possible, or whether the turban hierarchy was as ambiguous as the clothing hierarchy, remains unclear. Certainly the *Bharwad* men who still wear turbans today, sport a variety of styles despite belonging to the same village and caste. Whether such mixing was always possible, or whether it is part of the comparative freedom of expression that has developed since Independence, it is difficult to assess.

A brief examination of clothing change in Jalia reveals that the jewellery and dress of both men and women have undergone considerable changes since the beginning of the century. Some men explain this with reference to the political and economic changes that have been serving to disrupt the old caste-dominated hierarchy since Independence. Caste differences, they argue, were previously more apparent, whereas "nowadays anything goes". But although this helps to explain the apparent breakdown of the social hierarchy of clothing traditions, it does not explain the diverse directions that developments in men's and women's clothes have taken. For, whereas most men, with the exception of the *Bharwad*, have changed from local Indian styles to European styles, all women have either retained local styles or adopted alternative Indian styles. Not a single girl, past the age of puberty, wears European dress.

These differences cannot be attributed either to economic factors or to the differential availability of European styles for men and women. For, in the nearby city of Bhavnagar, both dresses and skirts are sold at a variety of prices from the cheap to the expensive. Jalia women buy these for their children, but never for themselves. Since all Jalia families prefer to make major purchases of clothing in the city rather than the village where prices are higher and the selection more limited, it cannot be argued that women do not have access to European styles. And if there are more shopkeepers stocking European men's styles than women's, that is because there is considerably more demand for the former than the latter. What is remarkable about women's dress is that, despite the easy availability of new alternatives, women have been relatively slow to change their dress, and show a complete unwillingness to reject Indian styles

Fig. 5:5 The Prince of Panna (who married the Princess of Bhavnagar), wearing a long *angarkha* with tight *pyjamas*, an outfit also worn by elite village men at the beginning of the century. The Prince's turban and ornaments would distinquish him from others who wear the same outfit. From **Celebration of....** (op. cit.).
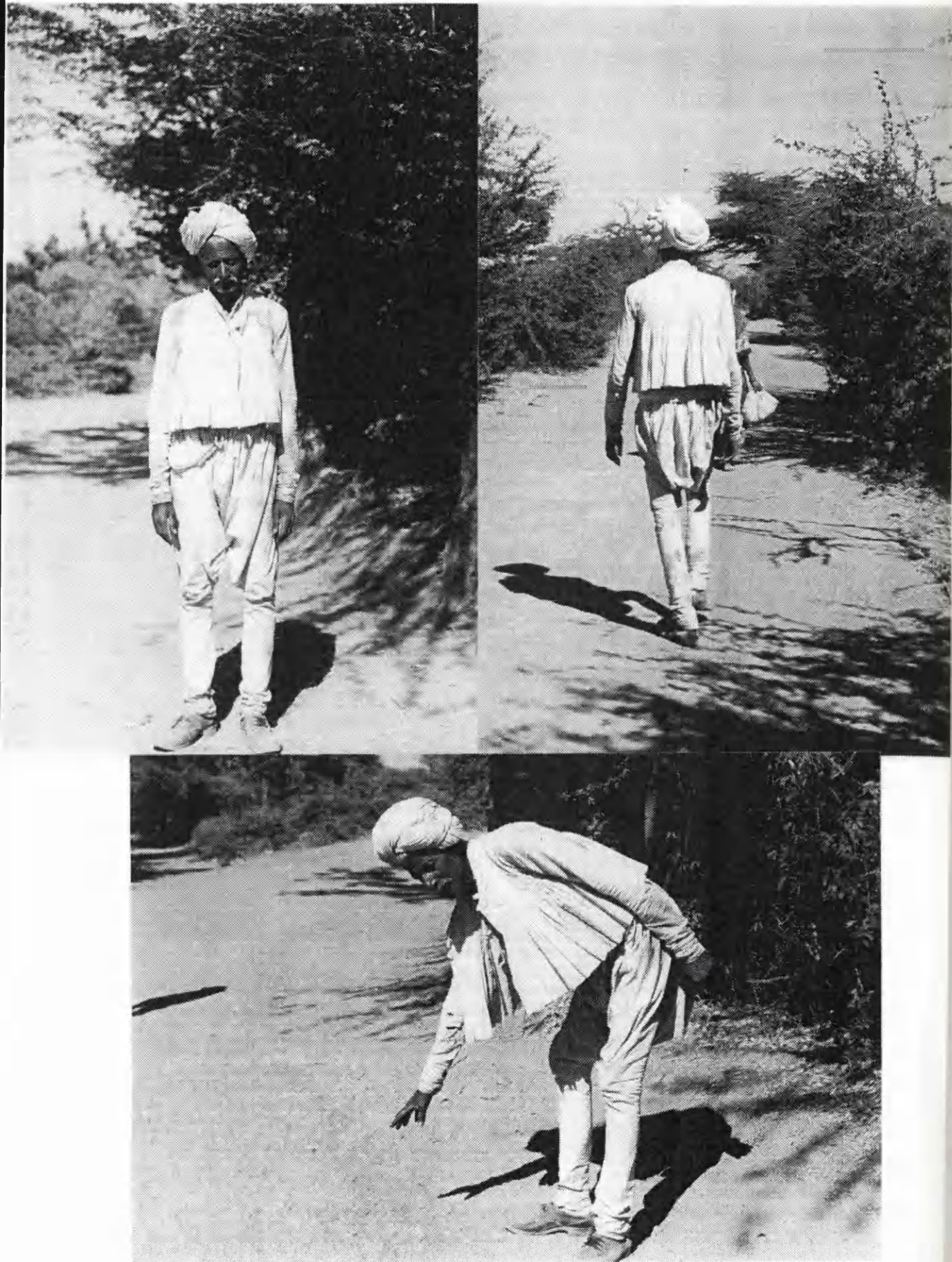
Fig. 5:6 A farmer of the *Koli* caste, wearing the white smock (*kediyun*), pantaloon
(*chorni*) and turban combination worn by most Kathiawadi men earlier this century
(1989).

for European ones.[25] In order to understand this female conservatism, it is necessary to examine some of the factors that have constrained women's sartorial choice without affecting men's choice in the equivalent way. In particular I wish to examine the role of clothes in defining positions within the female life cycle and in structuring the behaviour of women in relation to men. These constraining factors provide a framework within which female sartorial innovation can take place and against which women at times subtly rebel.

Clothing and the Female Life Cycle

Like most Indian women in rural areas, Jalia women are expected to abide by certain sartorial expectations which accord with their position in the life cycle and which help to define not only their role within the family, but also their sense of gender awareness. Whilst women of different caste backgrounds do not, as we have seen, share identical clothing, they none the less share certain ideas about how a woman should look in childhood, adolescence, married life, widowhood and old age. As Fruzzetti has shown in the Bengali context, a woman's entry into any of these states is marked by a change of clothing and adornment (Fruzzetti 1982). The idea that a woman's position in the family should be clearly delineated through dress remains important in Jalia today.

Early Childhood

Childhood is the time when gender roles are least clearly delineated and interestingly it is also the only time when girls wear ready-made European style clothes. In fact clothing is often minimal in early childhood and is not necessarily related to the sex of the child. Young girls are found wearing anything from skirts and dresses to shorts and vests like their brothers. Girls and boys play freely together and there is little to distinguish between them except for the ring in the left nostril of the girl's nose.[26] Noses and ears are

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25 This is true not only in villages but also in cities throughout India where most married women dress in Indian styles, a vast proportion of them wearing saris.

26 The importance of the nose ring (*nath*) was brought home to me by the fact that I was sometimes mistaken for a man without it, despite having long hair and women's clothes. More than once I was asked: "How can people tell if you are a man or a woman if you do not wear a *nath*?" That the nose ring should have become a repository of female identity is surprising in view of the fact that it does not appear to be an ancient Hindu ornament and features neither in Sanskrit literature nor ancient sculpture (Altekar 1962). Altekar thinks that Hindus adopted the

pierced by itinerant *Vaghris* who perform this task on children as young as one or two years old. Earlier this century young boys also had their ears pierced and some wore bangles but these customs have ceased amongst most castes. Today, it is mainly girls who wear jewellery.

Tattooing is also performed by *Vaghris* and until recently all girls had a small round tattoo mark on their chin, known as *ladva* (sweet) and a cross on their left cheek known as *makhi* (fly). Rows of tattoos were added later in childhood all the way up the lower arms, legs and neck though these are increasingly rare for children nowadays as most castes now see them as a sign of backwardness.

Late Childhood and Adolescence

The comparatively asexual clothing of childhood is replaced by more specifically feminine clothing usually around the age of ten or eleven. This involves increased covering of the body and a new sense of awareness about the necessity of covering. It is the time when girls are taught strict body awareness and responsibility in preparation for the more elaborate sense of covering which they must develop after marriage. Usually clothing consists of a light full length skirt (*ghaghri*)[27] and a blouse. Those who work outside in the fields usually adopt a half-sari (*sadlo*) at this time and learn to keep their heads covered by the cloth. Everyday clothes are supposed to be plain and should not attract unnecessary attention as this is thought to be dangerous and threatening to an unmarried girl. Girls of this age are expected to withdraw from the public eye as much as possible and to stick largely to female company. Covering the head marks, therefore, the beginning of awareness of the more general need to keep out of sight and out of sound. It affects not only the appearance of girls, but also their behaviour and deportment. Young girls, new to the veil find it difficult to keep it on their heads and have to learn to manipulate it. It becomes like an extension of their bodies and they have to restrain their movements in keeping with its requirements. Suddenly they find it difficult to run about the village and play and it is thought inappropriate for anyone wearing a veil to do such a thing. Girls from wealthy families who do not labour outside the home

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ornament from Muslims, while Crooke describes it as a high caste Hindu ornament (Crooke 1906). These may both be correct since it was mainly high caste Hindus who adopted features of Moghul dress.

27 The term *ghaghri* refers to a skirt of thin cloth as opposed to the term *ghaghro* which refers to a skirt of thick cloth.

are encouraged to stay inside as much as possible. For them, the *sadlo* is not thought necessary until marriage. Such girls usually wear a long "maxi" (nightdress) whilst at home during the day.[28]

Plastic bangles, cheap earrings, anklets and nose rings are worn prior to the engagement and wedding ceremonies when more valuable jewellery is presented to the bride by both parents and in-laws. The marriage age for girls varies from six amongst some low caste groups to twenty amongst high caste groups. In general most girls marry after puberty and do not live with their husbands before their mid to late teens.[29]

Wifedom and Motherhood

The movement of a young woman from her parental home (*pir*) to her conjugal home (*sasara*) after marriage marks the most major change in her life style and clothes. For the first time she becomes the owner of a large selection of clothing and valuable jewellery. Prior to this time, few girls have more than three or four outfits of clothing, whereas they may own as many as twenty-five to thirty-five outfits when they first move to their conjugal homes. This event is marked by the *anu* (sending away) ceremony when clothes and other trousseau items, given to the bride by her parents, are displayed in the courtyard of the house and viewed by friends and neighbours. The new wife herself remains inside the house and is dressed in green clothes by her brother's wife. Green is associated with fertility in ritual contexts and is a favourite colour with young girls. Her hair is parted and vermilion smeared in the parting. Vermilion is considered the most important symbol of *saubhagya* (the auspicious state of having a living husband) and the girl will regularly apply it to her own parting

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28 Where girls are educated, they usually adopt the school uniform which is loosely defined as a white blouse and green skirt. Most families are reluctant to educate their daughters beyond primary school, not only because they think further education unnecessary, but also they fear the public attention that their daughters might attract wearing such skimpy clothes.

29 In recent years many villagers show a preference for marrying their daughters late (late teens), and sending them to their in-law's house immediately after the wedding ceremony. In the past, however, there was a gap of some years between the marriage ceremony and the sending away (*anu*) ceremony. This gap was greatest among the *Bharwad* caste where child marriage was (and still is) the norm and where marriage was sometimes performed prior to the birth of the bride and groom. Some claim that this last custom continues even today, but I did not hear of any local cases of it in recent times.

in her new home. The young wife also wears whatever jewellery her in-laws offer her at this time, consisting usually of ivory bangles, a necklace, toe rings and new ear ornaments. After tearful farewells with the women of the family, the young wife's *sadlo* is pulled well over her face and upper body and she is led, fully veiled, out of the house and taken to her conjugal village by a party of in-laws.

When a girl remains at her parental home in the period between marriage and *anu*, she rarely wears the symbols of married life, except for festive occasions. Once in her conjugal home, however, she is expected to demonstrate her married status through her jewellery and clothes. She is meant to wear bright colours[30] that will differentiate her from the other women in the house and she puts on the ivory bangles, silver toe rings, *mangulsutra* (necklace) and vermilion in the parting that are only worn by women whose husbands are alive.[31] These visual marks of marital status are associated with beauty, joy, prosperity and societal approbation. Becoming a wife, therefore, entitles a woman to be richly and beautifully adorned, but it is an entitlement dependent on her husband's existence. All the symbols of *saubhagya* are detachable, and in the event of her husband's death, a woman loses her entitlement to wear them. The widow's bangles are smashed and she is expected to abandon her jewellery.

Although young married life is the period when a woman wears her brightest and most elaborate clothes, it is also the time when she must be most heavily concealed beneath her veil. The custom of veiling and the ideology of femininity associated with it, have had a profound influence on the development of women's dress and will be discussed shortly.

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30 Luschinsky describes a custom in Senapur in Uttar Pradesh where young wives dip their new saris in washable dye before wearing them for the first time. The colour runs out with a few washes, after which her saris look like those worn by other women in the village (Luschinsky 1962:348). Fruzzetti, on the other hand, describes how all married women wear saris with red borders as opposed to the plain saris of widowhood (Fruzzetti 1982:104). Clearly the distinct form which the new wife's clothes take is open to considerable variation according to region and wealth, but the idea that the new married woman should be distinctive and wear colourful clothes seems common throughout India.

31 The forehead spangle (*bindi*) was also a symbol of *saubhagya* but today it is worn throughout India by girls of any age and from any religious group.

Fig 5:7 A *Bharwad* woman in festive dress (1989). She wears the symbols of *saubhagya* , including the heavy ivory bangles (*boloya*) and lower and upper earrings (*porkhani* and *vedla*) that most farming women used to wear. A black beaded *mangulasutra* is just visible. The studded gold collar (*daniyu*) above it is a distinctive Bharwad ornament. The hand and foot ornaments are worn only for special occasions. As a young married woman, she wears a red waist-cloth (*jimi*) and bright red and green veil as opposed to the black clothes worn by older women of the caste.

Fig 5:8 An old woman of the *Kharak* caste. Being old, she no longer wears embroidery and, as a widow, she has abandoned her jewellery. Half obscured (far right), a younger *Kharak* woman wears an embroidered *ghaghro* and thick ivory bangles.

Old Age

There is no category equivalent to the Western idea of middle age. Jalia women call themselves old as soon as their first *vau* (son's wife) comes to live in their house. There are no fixed rules about how the *sasu* (mother-in-law) should dress but it is thought no longer appropriate for her to dress up in bright and alluring clothing. That is the privilege of her new *vau*. Most women therefore tone down their colours at this stage and some reduce their number of earrings, sometimes handing them on to their daughters or the new *vau* or selling them for family funds. If they reach extreme maturity, as for example when their grandson's wife arrives in the house, they will usually wear entirely plain clothes without any pattern. It is only widows who are actually prohibited from wearing their ivory bangles though some old women cease to wear them anyway.

Examination of a woman's dress in relation to her position in the life cycle reveals that her appearance is closely bound up, not so much to her biological development, as to her social role, and in particular, her relationship to men. Men's dress, on the other hand, is not dependent on their relationship with women. In the days when all farming men covered their heads, they usually replaced their red turbans of youth with white ones in old age. But this sartorial change was related to ideas of seniority and was entirely independent of marital status. Usually a man adopted a white turban when most of his hair had turned white. Thus while changes in female apparel are linked to gender relations, changes in male apparel are independent of them.

The differential importance of clothes in the life cycle of men and women reflects the different cultural constructions of male and female identity. Whereas a man's identity is established through birth into his father's lineage, and remains consistent throughout his life, a woman's identity is established first at birth, and then a second time at marriage when she becomes a member of her husband's lineage and moves to his village. She therefore has a dual identity as daughter of her father's lineage and wife of her husband's (cf. Fruzzetti 1982). Thus whilst for men the transition from son to husband is comparatively gentle, for women the transition from daughter to wife is a drastic one. Furthermore women can never play the two roles simultaneously. They are *either* daughters in their natal village *or* wives and later mothers in their marital village. This dual

aspect of female identity is marked by veiling restrictions which apply to women whenever they are in their conjugal village but not in their natal village.

Veiling (*ghunghut*)

A married girl still living in her natal village may, as I have shown, cover her head with her *sadlo* but it is only in her conjugal village that she will learn to pull the cloth foreword, thereby obscuring her entire face. This custom, known as *ghunghut*, is a form of deference and respect performed by women largely to men.

The *ghunghut* system in Gujarat is similar to that described by Jacobson (1970) and Thompson (1981) in Madya Pradesh. A woman is expected to cover her face, if not her entire upper body, in front of all men senior to her husband in her conjugal village. The obligation to veil is most rigourously felt in the presence of the father-in-law or husband's elder brothers. It is extended to other senior males in the village through the belief that all men of the village are relatives (Sharma 1978).

A number of anthropologists have put forward explanations of the custom of veiling. Jacobson, following Murphey, interprets it as a distancing mechanism through which tensions in the joint family are reduced (Jacobson 1970). Sharma extends this argument to show how veiling structures relations within the entire village, preventing married women from gaining access to all those with power. She points out that the veil does not so much render a woman unrecognisable as it renders her "socially invisible", the point being that once veiled a woman is unable to participate in public debate (Sharma 1978). These observations have provided valuable insights into the functions of veiling in relation to the social structure of Indian society. My interest here, however, is to examine how the veil is used in Jalia with a view to discussing the degree to which it discourages change in women's dress.

There is no simple dichotomy between being veiled and unveiled in Jalia. The cloth is in almost constant motion, being drawn, adjusted, withdrawn and redrawn in such a variety of ways that it seems almost like a part of the female body. And so long as a woman is in her marital village, she must move her veil with the same self-consciousness that she moves her body. It becomes in short an extension of the female space and a portable means of maintaining the possibility of shifting from the public to the private sphere at any given

moment. Only wealthy high caste married women are actually secluded within their homes in Jalia. Most women work out of doors where, as Sharma points out, the veil provides a means of limiting women's social effectiveness without limiting their economic productivity at the same time (Sharma 1978:229).

In Jalia women refer to veiling as *laj karvu* (doing shame). There are a number of different degrees to which this *laj* (shame) can be performed. Simple *laj* consists of taking the veil by the hand and pulling it rapidly sideways across the face. This is the type of *laj* typically performed when women are out of doors in an apparently secluded spot, and a man unexpectedly walks past. It sometimes acts as an intermediary stage before going into a more complete form of *laj* if the person approaching is someone who must be avoided. In situations where women have to walk through the village or fetch water from the village well, they generally leave their veils hanging forward, covering only their face and neck so that they can see where they are walking. If carrying heavy loads, they sometimes keep one hand on the veil so that they can lift it slightly without allowing people to see in.

The term *ardhi laj* (half shame) refers to the custom of drawing the veil over the face down to waist level. It is often performed in the presence of a senior relative within the home. Refined women will never speak when they do this type of *laj*. Ideally they are expected to absent themselves completely if a senior man is about to enter the room. They are given warning signals both by the man who will make some deliberate noise and by other women who will comment on his imminent approach. Once warned a woman pulls her veil into the "half shame" position and either turns her back on the approaching man or leaves the room, taking care not to face him, even when veiled. Ideally he should never see her or hear her voice. In practice, however, there are often occasions when she cannot leave the room or court yard because she is performing some task. In this case she simply turns her back and continues her task silently beneath the veil. In those families where women maintain strict seclusion (usually *Brahman, Vaniya, Darbar, Soni*), they also maintain strict rules of silence behind the veil. Those *Darbar* women who can afford it, keep the most rigo rous form of *ghunghut* in the village. A *Darbar* woman, making tea for her husband and his friends, will leave the tea just outside the male quarters of the house where it will be collected and served by her husband. She avoids being seen, even though totally veiled. In the past such tasks would have been done by servants, but the *Darbars'* declining wealth, combined with the unavailability

of cheap labour, has forced *Darbar* women to have more contact with their men than in the past. In families and castes where women work outside the home, they are less strict about rules of silence and deference. Wives who have lived in their conjugal village for some time will often speak from beneath their veils, though taking care not to address the men they are meant to avoid.

The strictest form of *laj* observed in Jalia is referred to as *akhi laj* (whole/complete shame). It involves pulling the veil forward at an angle so that it obscures even the arms. The aim of *akhi laj* is to leave no part of the woman's body visible. All brides of the village used to maintain *akhi laj* throughout the marriage ceremony, although this custom is declining and is regarded as a sign of backwardness by some educated families who feel the bride's face should be seen. After the marriage and the *anu* ceremony, most women do not have to perform *akhi laj* very often. But those young women who live in seclusion are expected to be fully veiled on the rare occasions they leave the house. At the Diwali festival, for example, I saw young *Brahman* wives, totally veiled by richly decorated saris, being lead by other members of the family to visit their relatives. They resembled large bundles of unwieldy but expensive cloth, with only their toes and the tips of their fingers visible from beneath their saris.

The degree to which different individuals and groups of women practise *laj* varies considerably, but there is not a single married woman living in the village who ignores the custom. Furthermore, women often blame the veil for their inability to wear other forms of dress. This first became apparent at Diwali time when I myself agreed to wear a sari for the day. High caste women seemed in agreement that I should tie it in the so called "Bengali style", with the sari end thrown back over the shoulder, rather than forwards in the Gujarati style. This was not because they wished to mark me out as a foreigner but rather because they considered the Bengali style more fashionable and more beautiful. Some women told me that they too wore the Bengali sari if they had to attend a wedding in some far off place or if they ever went to Ahmedabad. But when asked why they never wore it in the village, they replied: "How can we change our dress when we have to do *laj*?" and "this is a village so *laj* is necessary". The fact that the Bengali sari was thrown back rather than forward made it more difficult, they argued, to do the type of *laj* that was expected of them in the village. The same explanation was put forward as to why it would be impossible for a woman to wear a *salwar kamiz* after marriage, even if she wore one before. Without a veil that could be pulled well over the face and body, all

(a) Preparing for *laj*.

(b) Simple *laj*.

(c) *Ardhi* (half) *laj*.

Fig 5.9 A *Brahman* woman demonstrates different veiling (*laj*) positions.

5:10 Diagram showing the difference between wearing a sari in the Gujarati and Bengali styles. From Dongerkery, **The Indian Sari** (1960).

Egs. 1-7 demonstrate what Jalia women call the "Bengali style" although Dongerkery calls this the "Nivi"or "National style". Egs. 8-9 demonstrate the Gujarati Style, where instead of throwing the end of the cloth back over the left shoulder, the woman brings it forward over the right shoulder.

sartorial options were, it seems, impossible for the married woman. The veil, then, provided the outer limit within which change in a married woman's dress could take place.

It is not enough, however, to argue that the veil prevents change in women's dress in some deterministic way. Rather it is necessary to discuss some of the reasons why women veil and why they do not contemplate relinquishing the custom. This means examining not only the behavioural aspect of the veil, but also the feelings and emotions associated with it.

That veiling is associated with a sense of shame and modesty is evident from the fact that women use the word *laj* (shame) to refer to the act of veiling. This is appropriate for the act of veiling is but an expression of the female feeling of shame or embarrassment that encourages a woman to veil. More generally feelings of shyness, modesty and shame are referred to as *sharm*. *Sharm* differs from *laj* in that it applies to the emotions of shame and modesty rather than the behavioural response to them. *Sharm* therefore has a wider application and is used in all sorts of situations where people feel shy or embarrassed. As Thompson has pointed out, a woman is expected to show more *sharm* than a man and failure to do so risks damaging the honour of herself, her family and caste (Thompson 1981).

The difference between *laj* and *sharm* is expressed in the linguistic structure of the phrases associated with the terms. *Laj*, as I have said, is something that women "do". They are therefore considered the responsible agents of their own actions and if they fail to "do" *laj*, then they are blamed for disobedience. But *sharm* is never "done". It is a feeling that comes to you or overcomes you. This is expressed in the phrase so frequently reiterated by women, *sharm lage che* (shame manifests itself). Being overcome by *sharm* is something that is supposed to occur to women in a variety of situations (cf. Thompson 1981). Whilst response to *sharm* is learnt, there is the idea that the feeling of *sharm* itself should be natural. It should be intrinsic to all women, though some, it is recognised, have a more refined sense of *sharm* than others. While failure to perform *laj* is considered a disgrace, failure to feel *sharm* is actually thought to be unnatural or inhuman in the same way that failure to feel *bhuk* (hunger) or *thirus* (thirst) is thought abnormal. In situations where I had visited another village alone or spoken to men in the village, I was frequently asked by women: "Does not shame come to you, sister?", and "does not fear come?" The fact that

both my *sharm* and my fear were lacking was treated more as a thing of surprise and bewilderment than a thing of disgrace.

Although *sharm* overcomes women and is meant to be natural to them, this does not entirely exempt them from taking responsibility for their personal displays of *sharm*. If a young married woman had been caught taking the bus alone as I was, then this would indeed have been a matter of disgrace. Like other emotions, *sharm* was simultaneously spontaneous and learnt. It might be compared to the emotions of love and sorrow expressed at the *anu* ceremony. Here all women related to the girl who is about to leave the village are expected to cry violently for a short space of about 30 seconds each. When I failed to burst into tears, I was met with the response: "Don't you have any feelings in your country? Just look how much we cry. Look how much we love our sister." A group of women then explained that crying was an expression of love, so it was important that they should all cry well for if they failed to do so people would accuse them of not loving their sister. Their crying, which began and ended with what was to me disconcerting abruptness, was clearly quite natural to them but at the same time it was a definite social obligation.

The fact that *sharm* is thought natural and obligatory to women is important as it makes the practice of veiling, which is but one expression of *sharm*, natural also. This prevents women from questioning the custom and encourages them to uphold it. Furthermore *sharm*, and its associated behaviour, is in fact one of the feminine qualities most venerated and admired, particularly in young women. For a new wife, who has just arrived at her conjugal home, not only is her veil a useful refuge from the prying eyes of strangers (Jacobson 1970:485), but it is also a means of gaining approval from her new in-laws. It is on the basis of her *sharm*, obedience, and hard work that her character will be assessed. For women there are, then, certain positive benefits to be gained from veiling.

Finally there is another aspect to veiling which makes women in Jalia reluctant to drop the custom, even if it means they must remain in Gujarati saris when they would rather be wearing "Bengali" ones. Veiling not only structures relations between men and women, but also acts as a means of expressing different levels of social refinement (Jacobson 1970). Just as the fineness of a woman's fabric indicated her high social, ritual and economic status in the past, so her ability to be as invisible as possible, also indicated her family's position.

When a caste or family upgrades itself, withdrawing its women from the fields and/or introducing stricter veiling practices is one of the means by which it proves itself worthy of its new position (cf. Sharma 1978, Srinivas 1976, Cohn 1955, Pocock 1972). Veiling, then, is both a means of maintaining and creating the reputation of a woman, her family and her caste and this makes women willing to uphold the custom in a village context where the social hierarchy is still clearly pronounced even today.

Conclusion

A brief survey of the various ways in which clothes define and differentiate people within the village of Jalia reveals that the relationship between clothing and identity is highly complex, involving a number of factors. Firstly, there is the question of regional style: the clothes that people define as *deshi* or intrinsically Kathiawadi. For women this was the three part combination of skirt, bodice and veil. For men it was the pantaloon, smock and turban. Within these regional styles, however, were differences of material which further differentiated groups within the village and the area. A hierarchy of fabric types corresponded to a hierarchy of social groups, with fine fabrics suggesting social refinement and coarse fabrics suggesting crudeness. Finally, within the hierarchy of fabric types, differences in cut or the quantity of embroidery or small differences in jewellery suggested a person's particular caste identity, although, as we have seen, these differences were sometimes ambiguous.

While men's dress, with the exception of *Bharwad* (shepherds) dress, has become fairly standardised, women's dress continues to play an important role in the differentiation process. I have suggested that such female conservatism is related to the fact that for women clothes also play an important role in defining their position in the life cycle and in differentiating the roles of daughter, wife and widow. Furthermore the custom of veiling is so interlinked with the cultural construction of modesty which is seen as *natural* to women, that it acts as a sartorial constraint, preventing change beyond a certain level. When Gandhi tried to convince all Indians to dress in plain white *khadi* he was threatening not only regional identity and caste hierarchy, but also the separation of the roles of daughter, wife and widow which are central to perceptions of female identity.

In the following chapters I shall focus on how members of different caste groups tackle the problem of what to wear and will analyse the extent to which their clothing dilemmas are characteristic of the particular social groups to which

they belong. My choice of caste communities with which to work was influenced by a variety of sometimes random factors which need to be explained. Firstly, I was living in a *Brahman* family which automatically brought me into their social world and gave me immediate links with other *Brahmans* in the village. Their clothing disputes form the basis of the next chapter. Secondly, following my original intention to study embroidery, I worked closely with *Kanbi* and *Kharak* families who were the main embroidery producers of the village. Their clothing dilemmas feature in chapter 7. The *Bharwad*, on the other hand, proved interesting because they were the only group which seemed entirely reluctant to follow mainstream fashion, and where even the men continued to wear local styles. Finally, I worked with *Harijans* so that my discussion would span the major hierarchical divisions of the village. *Bharwad* and *Harijan* clothing dilemmas feature in chapter 8. Prejudice against *Harijans* from some individuals in the village forced me to work with them at the very end of my stay when my own reputation was no longer so important. The order in which clothing dilemmas are presented in this thesis corresponds, then, roughly to the order in which my fieldwork was organised. Each chapter begins with a specific clothing dilemma and then proceeds to a discussion of its ramifications in relation to wider issues.

Chapter 6

SOME *BRAHMAN* DILEMMAS

The Problem of Hansaben's Cardigan

It was midwinter, January 1989, and cold. Those who could afford it draped themselves in shawls and provided cardigans, jumpers and woolly hats for their children. The whole of Jalia took on a wrapped and huddled appearance. Hansaben, the only daughter-in-law in the house of the Brahman school teacher where I was staying, opened her cupboard of trousseau gifts, took out a thick warm cardigan, given to her by her mother, and put it on over her sari, continuing her kitchen chores. Her mother-in-law sat close by, huddled in a sari and a woollen shawl and drinking tea from a china saucer. Naniben, daughter of the house, helped Hansaben with the cooking.

At midday, there was a customary creaking sound from below and a loud and elongated cry of "Ram" projected up the stairway, reaching the women in the kitchen above. Naniben warned Hansaben in urgent haste that HE was coming and Hansaben swiftly turned her back, sweeping her sari over her head as she swivelled, and pulling it down till it hung well over her face and neck in *ardhi laj*. Crouched in the corner of the kitchen, her back turned, her face covered and head tilted downwards, she continued to roll out *roti* (bread) as before.

Chagancaca, her father-in-law, entered the room and sat cross legged on the floor whilst his daughter supplied him with water followed by a large selection of food. A constant supply of hot *rotis* was drafted from Hansa's hot plate to Chagancaca's *thali* (steel plate) by the intermediary and attentive daughter and wife. But Chagancaca soon noticed the figure of his veiled daughter-in-law stooping over the fire, dressed in an unfamiliar garment. He demanded with annoyance just what she was wearing and where it had come from. Hansa herself remained mute beneath her veil, but her mother-in-law explained that it was cold and Hansa was wearing a "jeket" that she had brought in her trousseau. Chagancaca, unimpressed, pointed out that the folds of Hansa's sari were interrupted by this unnecessary addition and that it looked untidy and improper. "No village girl would think it proper to wear such a thing", he remonstrated. "Has she no respect for our traditions? How can she do real *laj* when she looks such a sight with her sari half hidden under her "jeket" like

that?" He instructed his wife to order Hansaben to get changed. She must put the "jeket" underneath her blouse. He did not want to see such a disgraceful sight again. With that, he stomped out of the room and went for his rest. His wife and daughter immediately set about telling Hansaben to change her clothes. Hansaben defended herself by saying that her blouse was too tight and the "jeket" was too bulky. How could she wear the latter under her blouse? It was not possible. She could not even fit it on beneath her sari, never mind the blouse. Her two advisers reminded her that her father-in-law had ordered it and this alone should make her obey. Hansa stubbornly refused and went on with her tasks.

The next day Hansa continued to wear the offending cardigan as before and her father-in-law lost his temper. He delivered a furious tirade about disobedient daughters-in-law and their lack of respect for their elders. His anger scared all members of the household who knew his short temper, and his wife and daughter scolded Hansaben for her stupid disobedience and for deliberately causing trouble to everyone in the house. Intimidated by the situation, Hansaben removed her cardigan, still maintaining to the other women that she could not fit it beneath her sari or her blouse and that she would just have to suffer the cold instead. She would freeze. For the next few days she went about the house shivering and refusing to speak or eat. She did her tasks silently and obediently with the air of a much abused martyr.

Hansaben was three months pregnant at the time and still breastfeeding her first child, a girl of one and a half years. The family was anxious that she should eat well lest the new baby's health should be affected. When Chagancaca heard that she was eating virtually nothing, he lost his temper yet again, this time with all the women, leaving the three of them bickering amongst themselves in the kitchen late at night. Hansaben was crying out in her own defence, saying that her mother had given her the "jeket" and that she should be allowed to wear it since it was her own trousseau gift from her parents. Chagancaca heard this from the next room and flew into the kitchen in an uncontrollable rage. Never before, he claimed, had he heard his daughter-in-law speak. How dare she raise her voice. Had she no *sharm* at all? This was it. He ordered her to leave the house there and then. She caused only trouble to his family. He never wanted to see her again. She should go back to the city if she wanted to behave with so little respect for their revered customs. In Bhavnagar, at her parents' house, she could no doubt wear such a fancy "jeket", but not in Jalia.

By now the whole family was involved in trying to placate Chagancaca's rage. Hansaben's husband (Chagancaca's eldest son) tried to calm him down to no avail and was joined by Ramanbhai (the youngest son) who was a little more successful. He pointed out that Hansaben, who spent her days secluded in the house, could not be expected to leave the village alone at midnight. Chagancaca must rest and think with a cool head in the morning.

Hansaben spent the night in tears, refusing to speak to anyone, including her husband. The next day she continued her tasks of cleaning, washing and cooking in total silence with downcast, tearful eyes, and shivering without her cardigan. When no one was looking she slipped across the courtyard and told the neighbour that if it were not for her child, she would kill herself. There was kerosene in the kitchen. How quick and easy it would be to set herself alight? She had thought of it many times.

The neighbour, a renowned gossip, was quick to report this back to Chagancaca's wife and soon the whole family was anxious about the threat of a suicide in the household. Everyone knew that Chagancaca had gone too far in losing his temper this time. Even Chagancaca himself seemed to realise that. He agreed to send a message to Hansaben's family in Bhavnagar, saying that Hansa was unhappy just now and needed them to encourage her to eat. The next day her brother arrived from the city and she was able to confide her problems and explain how her father-in-law had ordered her out of the house in the middle of the night just because she had worn her "jeket" when she was cold. Her brother left after a polite and strained saucer of tea with his in-laws, but the next day a short note was delivered to the house by a stranger who used the local bus. It was from Hansaben's father, saying that he was currently ill and required his daughter to look after him for one month. His son would arrive to fetch her from the village the following morning and escort her back to her parental home in Bhavnagar.

There was no protest. Hansaben packed three saris and her controversial "jeket" and left the house with her young daughter in her arms and her brother by her side. The female in-laws and her husband waved her goodbye and told her to come back soon. They hoped her father was not too ill.

The incidents described here were spread over a period of seven days. But it was eight months before Hansaben was to return to the village, much to the consternation and humiliation of her in-laws. During these months another minor dispute arose, this time concerning Hansaben's saris.

Hansaben's Saris

Hansaben had been gone three months, already far longer than the initial request in her father's note, and long enough to set other villagers gossiping and speculating about this errant daughter-in-law, when a letter appeared, written by Hansaben herself and addressed to her husband. In it Hansa greeted other members of the family politely and gave news of her daughter's well-being. But she proceeded to say that her father was still very ill and required her assistance. She was therefore writing to request that they should send her saris to Bhavnagar as she had to attend a wedding and she had nothing suitable to wear. All her best saris were in Jalia and besides she needed her ordinary saris too since she had only taken three of them when she left the village.

This letter was met with grim resentment and much discussion amongst her in-laws. Three points emerged. Firstly, Hansaben's father was not really ill, for only three days earlier the goldsmith's son had met him in the city and he seemed fine. Secondly, Hansa's request showed her intention to remain at her *pir* (natal home) for longer still, humiliating her in-laws in the process and forcing her mother-in-law to do the cooking and household chores which were Hansa's duty. It was argued that if she asked for her saris one day, then she would be demanding her jewellery the next, then her cupboard, her vessels, the ceiling fan, the bed. In short she would try to win back the whole of her trousseau. Then she would never return to the village. It was therefore decided that not one sari would be sent to her, for with her saris still in the village, she would be forced to return to Jalia soon.

The third objection was that she should be allowed to dress up and attend a wedding at all in the circumstances. This was only proof of her lack of *sharm* and her desire to *gum gum* (wander aimlessly about) which was inappropriate to her married status. It also highlighted how irresponsible her parents were, allowing their married daughter to go out and enjoy herself. What business did she have to go to a celebration? How could she be a good mother to her child when all she wanted was to dress up and wander about? How could she pretend

that her father needed looking after when she was going off to weddings? That only showed the type of cunning and dishonest people her family were.

The Jalia family therefore decided to ignore Hansaben's request for her saris altogether. But their bitterness was expressed in the fact that Hansaben's mother-in-law began to wear Hansa's saris during the day. These saris were stored in Hansa's personal cupboard, also a trousseau gift from her parents. Her mother-in-law had ensured that Hansa had handed over the key to the cupboard before she left on the grounds that a few communal things were stored there. This gave her access to Hansa's saris, though not to her jewellery which was locked in a separate compartment from her clothes.

A second letter, requesting Hansa's saris arrived a fortnight after the first and seemed only to aggravate the mounting tensions between Hansaben and her in-laws, making reunion difficult. As the months passed the Jalia family became more and more desperate for her return, yet personal pride and cultural etiquette prevented them from lowering themselves to demand it.[1]

Family Delegations: How to get Hansaben back.

Late one evening in the fifth month of Hansaben's departure some surprise visitors arrived at Chagancaca's house. They were his two elder brothers (a priest and a trader), his eldest brother's son (a doctor) and a cousin (a teacher). Although they all lived in Jalia, they rarely visited Chagancaca's house owing to long-term family tensions. The priest's wife and Chagancaca's wife claimed not to have spoken to each other for twenty-six years and had lived separately for more than twenty. The trading brother and Chagancaca had remained together for a longer period but now blamed each other, and in particular each other's wives, for the split of the joint family some eight years before. A visit from these men could not be interpreted as a casual call, nor was it. They had come with a purpose. They wanted Hansaben back. A lengthy and heated discussion ensued between these five men (Chagancaca, his two elder brothers, his brother's son and his cousin). Hansaben's husband was excluded from this

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1 According to beliefs widespread amongst high caste Hindus in Northern and Western India, wife-takers are superior to wife-givers at least during the marriage ceremony, if not in everyday life (Van der Veen 1972, Parry 1986, Vatuk 1975, Werbner 1990). Apologising to Hansaben's family and asking for her return would therefore have seemed like an act of humiliation that Chagancaca's family, as superiors, were not prepared to take.

and fell asleep outside on the verandah. His mother, however, well wrapped beneath her veil, was straining to hear all and posted her daughter just outside the main room to convey the gist of the discussion.

Rumours, it seemed, were circulating via the goldsmith's son and his family that Hansaben would only return if she could live alone with her husband, separate from her mother-in-law, who caused her sorrow and treated her badly. The family delegation was concerned and horrified that such gossip should be conveyed by other people in the village and not even through personal relatives. Hansa, it seemed, was talking to her neighbours in Bhavnagar, some of whom had relatives in Jalia who were talking in the village. One rumour claimed that her in-laws had threatened to burn her. The delegation was concerned about the ramifications of all this for both the family and the caste reputation. It was disgrace enough that Hansaben had left, bringing shame on them all, and now these rumours made it worse. It was time, they felt, for direct action. Hansaben must be recalled and must be well treated.

This led to a second, highly sensitive issue which was raised by Chagancaca's eldest brother, the priest. If Chagancaca were not so lax in maintaining old traditions, he argued, then this type of behaviour in a daughter-in-law would never occur. But Changancaca had tried to improve himself too far and by "becoming a *Vaniya*"[2] he was losing sight of their own caste traditions. Most respected families in Jalia were content to educate their daughters up to seventh standard in the village school. This meant they could read and write. And why should they need more? But for Chagancaca this was not enough. He sent his daughter to high school on the bus where "anything might happen". Then there was the question of her being dressed in a *salwar kamiz*. It was not right for a Hindu girl to put on the trousers of a Muslim. Did he know how people talked when they saw her at the bus stop? Only the other day their cousin the *panwalla* (betal nut seller) had exclaimed at the sight: "See, the *Vaghran*[3] is coming.

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2 This was a reference to the fact that Chagancaca, though a school teacher and part time priest, had also entered the trading profession and owned one of the village shops which his eldest son now ran. The *Vaniya* (traders) were not only the principal traders of the village, but they were also considered the most fashionable and urban in their customs, partly owing to their extensive links with relatives in Bombay. By accusing Chagancaca of "becoming a *Vaniya*", his elder brother was referring both to the trade and to the reputation of the *Vaniya* caste.

Look, the prostitute!" Chagancaca owed it to his family and his caste to keep up his standards. His daughter should cease her education right away and this would save her from the disgrace of using the bus, roaming alone in town and dressing in clothes that were unsuitable for any Hindu village girl. But most importantly of all, Chagancaca must send his son to fetch Hansaben back at all costs, even if this meant a split in the household. For just now Chagancaca's family brought disgrace on all his brothers in the village.

The meeting ended with Chagancaca losing his temper and the delegation leaving in haste. He did not want a split in his own household, particularly since he had another son and a daughter whose marriages were yet to be arranged. These would be costly affairs for which he required the financial assistance of his eldest son (Hansaben's husband) who ran the shop. Hansaben's husband did in fact hope to escape this burden, particularly in the case of his brother's wedding. Not only did he want the financial independence of running his own house, but also he resented the fact that his younger brother was more respected by their father. This struck the elder brother as unjust, since it was he who contributed to the family income whilst his younger brother merely "played around at college", costing them money and contributing nothing.

Hansaben's Return

Hansaben's problem was not so much choosing *whether* to return as choosing *when* to return, for the return itself was, it seems, inevitable. When the Jalia family sent me as a neutral go-between to visit her parent's house and find out her intentions, she explained her position as follows:

> "I am married and must stay married. It is my misfortune to be married with those people, but what can I do? I know my life is there in the village and all my trousseau things are there. I asked them for my saris and they sent not one, not even one. My jewellery, my vessels, everything is there. I have nothing here in my parent's place. My life is not here. Soon things will get better in Jalia. Ramanbhai will marry and a new wife will come to the house. She will help me with the work and she will judge who is honest in the house. She will know that I am good."

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3 This was a reference to the *Vaghri* caste who have a bad reputation. The term *Vaghri* is often used in Gujarat as an insult, implying immoral, disreputable and ill bred.

Hansa never feared that her in-laws would not take her back for, as she explained, they needed her not just for the housework but for their reputation. Ramanbhai, their youngest son, would never be able to find a really good wife if there was already a divorce in his family. Even at this moment their reputation was being discussed because, according to Hansa's interpretation, everyone always wanted to know who was treating their daughter-in-law so badly as to make her leave. Hansa perceived her sojourn with her parents not merely as a refuge but also as a good revenge for her in-laws' unpleasantness. She demanded to know how difficult her absence had made things in the village and expressed particular pleasure at the fact that her mother-in-law, who disliked cooking, was now cooking every day. Hansa would play hard to get. She wanted her in-laws to apologise and ask her back but her own parents would not make the approaches. They were waiting for her in-laws to call her and in the meantime Hansa was enjoying the comfort and pleasure of being in her parental home.

When, one day, her husband finally visited her in Bhavnagar, requesting her return, she refused to speak with him and denied him access to their daughter, but her parents told him that Hansa would return to the village for a two week trial period. Her husband refused this humiliating offer and left. As far as he was concerned this was a sign that she was intending to return and he was not going to receive her on *their* terms. If she was coming back to Jalia, she must come and she must stay.

In the sixth month of her departure, she gave birth to their second child, another daughter. Two months later her father wrote to Chagancaca saying that Hansaben was ready to return, having recovered from the birth. Since it is customary for women to give birth to their first child and occasionally their second at their parent's house, the birth provided a suitable time for her reappearance in the village, giving it some facade of normality. She arrived with her daughter and new baby girl and was greeted with much affection and lavish displays of love from her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The family was back to its customary state of precarious stability and the "jeket" returned to the cupboard.

Implications of Hansaben's Clothing Controversy

At first sight it might appear that the seemingly exaggerated response of Chagancaca to a mere cardigan tells more about the ill tempered nature of one

particular man than it does about the significance of clothes. The cardigan might, for example, have been simply a random catalyst which happened to spark off flames in what was already a tense relationship. But closer insight into questions concerning the meaning and value of clothing to the people of Jalia suggests that the nature of the catalyst was by no means arbitrary. To gain some insight into the labyrinth of tensions which this clothing dispute seemed to evoke and embody, it is necessary to examine briefly certain aspects of the giving and receiving, wearing and possessing of clothes.

Giving and Receiving Clothing and Adornment

Giving and receiving gifts forms a vital element of every major life cycle rite in Jalia. The most important of these rites is the gift of a virgin daughter (*Kanyadan*) in marriage (cf. Fruzzetti 1982, Parry 1986, Van der Veen 1972). Around this central rite a whole series of other gift giving obligations is organised (Vatuk 1975, Werbner 1990, Tambiah 1973). Clothing and jewellery are, along with food, the most important components of these gift giving rituals, accompanying marriages, pregnancies, births, deaths, arrivals and departures. Werbner has shown how Pakistani migrants from Manchester, visiting their relatives in Pakistan, often pay excess luggage charges owing to the enormous quantities of clothing they carry back and forth as gifts for kinsmen and women (Werbner 1990:270). Such gifts tie immigrants to their natal homes and objectify social relations between families (ibid:283). In Jalia, gifts of clothing hold a similar importance, binding together individuals and groups, ratifying agreements, confirming commitments, ascribing social roles and protecting future interests. As Evans-Pritchard once commented in the African context, "material culture may be regarded as part of social relations, for material objects are the chains along which social relationships run" (Evans-Pritchard 1967:89). In India the major links of such chains are often forged in cloth.

Although both men and women give and receive clothes, gifts of clothing have a special and particular importance for women. Large stocks of clothing are accumulated in preparation for a daughter's wedding and after marriage a wife usually keeps her trousseau clothes in her personal dowry chest or cupboard to which she generally keeps the key. Men never acquire the large stocks of clothing that women receive from their parents. Neither do they discuss clothes with the same enthusiasm and eye for detail. Clothing is for women a frequent

topic of conversation as they compare and inspect each other's apparel and even display their entire clothing collection to visitors and friends (Gold 1988:13-5).

For women clothing is not merely a question of adornment but also a form of property, particularly in a village context where women's rights of inheritance to other forms of property such as land are rarely recognised (Goody 1973:17). If they get the opportunity, women hoard clothes, often in excess of their apparent requirements (Chaudhuri 1976:42). Clothing, carefully locked away and jewellery, worn or safely stored, are often the only parts of a new wife's trousseau over which she has primary access and control. It is not therefore surprising to find that women take more interest in accumulating and comparing clothes than men who inherit other, more permanent forms of wealth.

A brief examination of the gifts of clothing and adornment given to a woman in connection with her marriage reveals her gradual assimilation into her in-law's home:

Betrothal (*Sagai*)

Following the agreement between parents that their children should marry, the father of the prospective groom offers the future bride a veil cloth (*chundadi*), one outfit of clothes and a selection of jewellery, usually comprising a nose ring, anklets and earrings. He paints a vermilion mark (*chandlo*) on her forehead and places the veil over her head.[4] There is no written contract at the time of betrothal but the offering of the veil and the painting of vermilion are seen as a concrete agreement on the part of the groom's parents to take on responsibility for the girl's future. It is a contract written as it were on the girl herself.

This became clear in the case of a *Brahman* girl who suffered rejection by her future husband only one week after the engagement ceremony had taken place. This caused great outrage amongst her relatives who had witnessed the offering of the *chundadi* and *chandlo* and who remonstrated that the groom's father had already given the veil and therefore could not "cut it now".[5] Broken

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4 The precise details of the betrothal ceremony vary from caste to caste and according to whether or not a priest is involved. In all betrothal ceremonies, however, the offering of the *chundadi* and the painting of the *chandlo* form the central rite. These are usually accompanied by the gift of a coconut and one rupee.

engagements, though they did sometimes occur, were rare and were considered highly inauspicious. The offering of the *chundadi* usually acted as a formal acknowledgement of the intention of the groom's family to accept the gift of the bride.

Marriage (*Lugan*)

During the marriage ceremony the bride is dressed in a new set of clothes given by her parents, consisting usually of a petticoat, blouse and *paneter* (special red and white tie-dyed wedding sari). As she enters the marriage booth, however, one of her in-laws (sometimes the mother-in-law, sometimes the husband himself) covers her face and head with a *gharcholu*, a special marriage veil, usually green with yellow and red tie-dyed dots. She therefore wears simultaneously the veil given by her parents and the veil from her in-laws, symbolising her passing from the protection of one household to another.[6] The colours of red and green are associated with fertility and auspiciousness and are worn mainly by young women, married or unmarried.

Along with the *gharchulo* a bride also receives jewellery from her in-laws, including the ivory bangles which she will wear throughout her married life.[7]

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5 The incident was unusual since the parents of the groom had come to Jalia to ratify the betrothal without either the groom's knowledge or consent. He had in fact already stated his refusal to marry the girl after seeing her photograph. His parents had ignored his wishes and gone ahead with the engagement which the angry son later refused to acknowledge.

6 A folk song collected from the Jamnagar district, describes the bride's apparel from the point of view of her new sister-in-law. It is sung as the bride enters the marriage booth and awaits the presentation of the *gharcholu*:

"My chundadi has been (dyed) at Navanagar
O Bride! the colour of my chundadi is red
(please) drape a chundadi of durable chhayal*
Come gently, come gently, O Bridegroom,
My sister in law is dressing herself with care.
She looks beautiful in a white panetar
and waiting for the present of a gharchola (from you),
Come gently, come gently, O Bridegroom,
She looks magnificent with hansadi* around her neck
she is now waiting varmala*"
* *Chhayal*:draped cloth
* *Hansadi*:short necklace
* *Varmala*:garland given by the bride to the groom
(Census of India 1961,vol5,Part7 A, no. 21:39).

As the ceremony begins the bride's brother utters in Sanskrit: "This maiden, decorated with ornaments and robed in twin apparel, I give to you." The priest joins together the hands of the bridal pair and leads them to the central marriage square (*chori*). Here their garments are tied together and the couple take four turns around the sacred fire, physically united by the knot in their clothes and a long cotton thread (*mala*) which binds them together. The knotting of garments, a metaphoric enactment of physical union, has persisted even today when many grooms wear Western style clothes. Since these are fitted rather than flowing, the groom wears an additional shawl or drape over his shoulders to facilitate the knotting. Through the knotting of the cloth, the permanence of the union is stated.[8]

The Sending Away (*Anu*) ceremony.

The customs surrounding the sending away (*anu*) ceremony vary considerably according to the community and the age of the bride at the time of marriage. If the bride is young and there is a gap of some years between the marriage and the *anu* ceremony, then the groom's parents are expected to send one outfit of clothes to the bride every year to reaffirm the wedding contract. They are also expected to give money to the bride's parents to cover the stitching charges incurred at the tailors during the preparation of the bride's *anu* clothes.

The number of *anu* ceremonies may vary from one to three according to the particular preferences of different individuals or castes. The main *anu*, however, takes place when the mature girl first goes to live, rather than simply visit her husband's home. On this occasion she receives a large collection of clothes from her parents, consisting usually of at least twenty-one outfits and a

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7 In cases where the bride is young and will not accompany her husband at the end of the ceremony, she does not wear permanent marriage bangles. These are sent by her in-laws some years later just before she leaves her parental home to embark on married life.

8 In the same way that the act of knotting symbolises union, so the act of ripping symbolises the dissolution of social bonds. In some poor communities, such as the *Vaghri* and the *Bhungi*, the marriage tie itself can be broken through ripping cloth. Enthoven describes a *Bhungi* divorce: "The husband tears a piece of cloth from his headdress and gives it to his wife and the wife takes off her glass bangles and puts them into her husband's lap. This done, the divorce is complete." (Enthoven 1920, vol 1:104). *Vaghri* men and women similarly tear cloth from each other's clothes as an act of separation. Remarriage is achieved through tying the widow or divorced woman's sari to her new husband's garments by a new knot.

few items of jewellery.[9] After being carefully displayed to friends and neighbours, these are placed in a cupboard or dowry chest, along with a selection of steel kitchen vessels, contributed by all her near relatives, and small items of household furniture and ornaments which vary considerably according to family wealth and caste expectations.

The final *anu* is called *jianu*. It occurs when a woman returns to her marital home after giving birth to her first child at her parental home. When she returns to her in-laws house, she receives from her parents a few outfits of clothing and a number of outfits for the baby, along with a baby's cot and quilt. For the rest of her life she will usually receive a gift of clothing from her parents each time she visits her parental home. She will also be expected to provide gifts for her in-laws, but these are secondary to the gifts she receives herself.[10]

Her in-laws will in turn provide her with clothes and jewellery from time to time, particularly on festive occasions, so a woman can accumulate clothes even after marriage.

Social relations between two families are therefore expressed and reconfirmed through a series of gifts of clothing and adornment which bind the two groups together through the conversion of daughters to wives.[11] The knotting of garments acts as the central pivot around which such gift giving takes place. In the case of Hansaben and her in-laws, the contractual aspect of these gifts was particularly apparent. They belong to a *Brahman* subgroup[12] that is numerically

9 The number of outfits does of course vary according to the wealth of the families involved but there has been a marked increase in the amount of clothes that even poor parents are expected to provide for their daughters in recent years. Most families try to give at least fifteen outfits, each one consisting of a petticoat, blouse, and sari or half sari. Many mothers reported having received only three outfits at the time of their own *anu* ceremonies. The wealthiest families in Jalla today usually give thirty-five outfits. Until recently outfits were always given in odd numbers as these were thought more auspicious than even numbers. Nowadays, however, even numbers of outfits are sometimes given.

10 I do not propose to discuss the full complexity of gift giving in India, a subject that has already been covered extensively in anthropological literature (cf. Parry 1986, Van der Veen 1972, Vatuk 1975, Werbner 1990).

11 There is also a complex series of monetary payments which are an important part of the marital union but which are not discussed or emphasised during the actual marriage ceremony which should ideally appear like the gift of a daughter, freely offered without expectation of reward (Parry 1986, Van der Veen 1972).

12 They are *Saracharsau Brahmans* (literally "four hundred and fifty" Brahmans), who, along with the *Agyarasau Brahmans* (eleven hundred Brahmans) belong to the wider category of *Audichya Brahmans* who originated in Utar Pradesh. According

small, claiming a severe shortage of marriageable girls. When Chagancaca had first discovered Hansa, she was only fifteen and her parents had considered her too young to marry for at least another three years. She was pretty, fair skinned, intelligent and well bred which had made Chagancaca particularly anxious to procure her for his son. One of her greatest attributes was that she came from the city of Bhavnagar where he himself hoped eventually to settle. This, he felt, made her refined and greatly preferable to the less educated girls found in villages. All in all, Hansa had seemed too good to lose and the Jalia family had wanted to fix the betrothal straight away. Hansa's family had been apprehensive as this meant a three year gap between betrothal and marriage. Finally they were persuaded by Chagancaca's offer of twenty-one saris which would be given to Hansaben at the engagement ceremony. These revealed his family's commitment to the future marriage. They also acted as a deposit which guaranteed that Hansaben would be reserved exclusively for them, even if other more appetising offers presented themselves in the three year intermediary period.

When Hansaben married three years later, she received another twenty-one saris from her own parents in her trousseau, making her the owner of forty-two saris and a fine selection of gold jewellery, mostly given by her in-laws. These were her own property and were kept separately from the other women's clothes in her new home. She had, as we have seen, her own steel cupboard which was used almost exclusively by her.

In theory, the forty-two saris belonged to Hansaben, yet during her absence they were kept by her in-laws as hostages to ensure her return. When I asked Hansaben why she had taken so few saris with her to Bhavnagar in the first place, she replied that her mother-in-law had been watching over her whilst she was packing and had told her she did not need to take much. Her mother-in-law was suspicious, so Hansa had left with only three saris. In other words, if she had taken too many saris with her, she would have been seen to be breaking the contract under which those clothes had been given by expressing her intention to stay as long as possible away from the marital home. But her departure, though obviously based on just such a desire to get away, had to be made to

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to caste traditions these *Brahmans* were called to Sihor in Kathiawad by Siddharaji Jaysinghji to assist in a ritual which was to rid the king of his leprosy. After the worship was completed, eleven hundred *Brahmans* chose to settle in Sihor and four hundred and fifty settled in Jalawad where they served as *gor* (priests) for different castes and ceased to intermarry. Members of both groups lived in Jalia.

look like a departure of necessity, an obedience to her sick father's wishes rather than her own.[13]

During Hansa's absence, the topic of the twenty-one saris, given at betrothal, was frequently raised by the Jalia family. It was as if their deposit had proved worthless and they felt cheated. It was, it seems, in the spirit of bitterness and vindication that the mother-in-law began to wear the saris herself. When I first saw her dressed in one of these saris, it was not entirely obvious that they were not her own, for she had selected a fairly subdued colour. But she seemed self conscious and immediately confessed, with a laugh, that she was dressed in Hansa's clothes which were really more suitable for a younger woman. Wearing Hansa's saris seemed to be a way of reclaiming the remnants of a broken agreement.[14]

Although Hansa possessed a large selection of saris, it was clear that her rights of ownership were constrained by the context in which the clothes had been given. Owning clothes seemed to require the acceptance of certain conditions. The saris were hers so long as she was prepared to fulfil her wifely duties, but they ceased to be so the moment she appeared to step outside the role of wife, a role which, after all, justified her entitlement to the saris in the first place. Jacobson has suggested that a woman's control over her own jewellery varies according to her relationship to the donor. Just as a woman's kinship bonds

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13 One striking feature of this entire dispute was the indirectness in which it was couched. Hansa rarely expressed her opinions to her in-laws, but rather influenced events by talking to others such as her neighbour and her brother or myself. Such indirectness is common, especially amongst daughters-in-law, since they are the most constrained in their speech, visibility and mobility. But maintaining a facade of normal life, whatever the situation, seems to be an important feature of social life in general. Apart from Chagancaca, who expressed his opinions blatantly, other members of the family all took care to keep up appearances and to restrain their opinions.

14 It would be interesting to know the extent to which other mothers-in-law wear their daughters-in-law's (vau's) saris. In Jalia I came across one other case of an angry woman who was wearing her vau's saris in the latters' absence. Sharma has suggested that it is not uncommon for senior women to redistribute their daughters-in-law's saris amongst other family members (Sharma 1984:65). This practice was not, however, common in Jalia where most young wives kept their clothes in their own chests or cupboards and maintained a reasonable degree of control over them. It was other trousseau items such as furniture (beds, fans, display cabinets) and vessels which were used by other members of a woman's conjugal family. A sense of ownership was preserved however by the fact that all steel vessels given to the bride were engraved with the name and village of their donors prior to the anu ceremony.

with her parents are strong and permanent, so her ownership over jewellery from her natal kin is absolute. But in the same way that her relationship with her in-laws is vulnerable and precarious, so too is her control over jewellery given by them (Jacobson 1976). A dissatisfied in-law can reclaim jewellery in the same way that Hansa's mother-in-law reclaimed her saris. Such gifts from in-laws are conditional on the daughter-in-law's obedience and good behaviour. This raises interesting questions about what it means to own and receive clothes as a woman in Indian society.

Women as Owners and Recipients of Clothes

Women, as I have shown, receive and accumulate clothes more than men. It is one of the privileges of becoming a wife. While a woman's control over the gifts from her parents is more secure than her control over gifts from her in-laws, it must be remembered that both sets of gifts are conditional on her marrying. It is only through making the transition from daughter to wife that a woman becomes entitled to a large stock of clothes at all. Girls who never marry never receive the trousseau items that their parents accumulated for them in their youth. In fact, such unmarried women, who are in themselves a rarity, do not receive more than the basic requirements of clothing from their parents. Women who are separated or widowed, on the other hand, sometimes retrieve their trousseau clothing, but this is often at the discretion of their in-laws and cannot be easily enforced. If they return to their parental home with their trousseau clothes, these are usually given in remarriage or distributed amongst other family members if remarriage is unacceptable. One *Brahman* woman who returned to her parents after prolonged maltreatment by her husband, regained her saris but contributed all but three to her younger sister's trousseau as it was no longer thought necessary or appropriate for her to possess such clothes now that her marriage was over. She accepted this as her contribution to the parental home.

Young married life is, as I have shown, the only time when a woman is expected to adorn herself extravagantly and possess fine clothes. Great emphasis is placed on the beauty and adornment of the youthful bride and wife who symbolises prosperity and auspiciousness. The finer her clothes and the more lavish her jewellery, the greater her resemblance to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. She should dress brightly, have smooth oiled hair, lamp black round her eyes, polish on her nails, vermilion in her parting, and an abundance of gold jewellery on her wrists, round her neck, and in her ears. But

if an unmarried girl adorns herself too beautifully, she is immediately thought disreputable, attracting unsuitable attention. Prior to marriage she must, as I have shown, dress plainly except for special festivals when she can wear her finest apparel. Similarly, in old age a woman is supposed to tone down her appearance until finally, if widowed, she loses her entitlement to look beautiful altogether, casting aside the symbols of happy married life. High caste widows usually adopt white saris while widows from other castes wear dull red or black. Excessive adornment worn either before marriage or after married life is interpreted in both cases as an act of prostitution.

This suggests that the adornment of women is closely related to the celebration and control of their fertility. This fertility must not be emphasised prior to marriage. Neither should it be expressed in old age, even though some of the women who called themselves "old" were only in their thirties and were clearly still capable of conception. Such "old" women risked the accusation of trying to "be" their daughters-in-law if they dressed too lavishly. Once their daughters-in-law had come to the house, they were expected to cease producing children and to begin to divest themselves of excess ornament. It is therefore only the child producing years that entitle a woman to dress brightly, lavishly and decoratively. These are the years when her beauty can be safely expressed within the context of her relationship with her husband. Yet if a woman's freedom to dress lavishly is most expressed during this period, it is also, as I have shown, the time when her behaviour is most constrained and her physical presence most hidden. She must absent herself behind her veil, hiding her powers of allurement from other men of the household and the village. In the case of *Brahman* wives like Hansaben, they usually cannot leave the house or enter the village, even when screened by their veils. The privilege of receiving clothes and displaying one's beauty is therefore closely linked with the need to conceal it. Conversely for men, the act of providing clothes for their womenfolk entitles them to expect certain displays of *sharm* and obedience from their women. To husbands and fathers the obligation to give is as much a part of the masculine role as the privilege of receiving and obeying is part of the feminine wifely role.[15]

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15 Cohn discusses Moghul rituals of cloth giving as acts of subordination and incorporation through which something of the ruler's substance is transmitted in the act of giving clothes. These prestations were structured according to the idea that superiors give more than they receive. Receiving clothes was, therefore, an act which reinforced the recipients lowliness in relation to the giver (Cohn 1989:309). It is tempting to draw parallels between the gifts of a ruler to his

Men as Givers of Clothes

Giving clothes is for parents an obligation, a duty and necessity. Much time is spent on deciding precisely how much should be spent on the clothing and jewellery for a daughter's wedding. It is sometimes suggested that women control the distribution of goods while men control financial transactions (Sharma 1984:66). This is true to some extent but the distinction is not rigid (Vatuk 1975:191). Furthermore, while the mother of the bride does indeed play the major role in organising the trousseau and selecting appropriate items of dress, it is the father amongst most castes who takes the financial responsibility. And although it is women who inspect and assess a girl's trousseau display, it is the man's reputation that is at stake if her provisions are thought to be lacking. Chaudhuri sums up the situation when he writes that men give enthusiastically because their own position and prestige depend upon the clothes of their womenfolk. He quotes the lines from Manu Samhita which read:

> "Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers and husbands and brother in law for their own welfare....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 ornaments, clothes and food" (Chaudhuri 1976:42).

Often the obligation to give reaches unfortunate proportions particularly for men with a predominance of daughters. Their marriages and trousseaux cause many families financial difficulties. But the obligation to provide, and to be seen to provide, is stronger than any purely financial consideration. It is part of the duty of fatherhood and an indicator of a man's worthiness of respect. As Werbner has pointed out, gifts are often given in public situations where there is a large audience of kinsmen and women to impress (Werbner 1990:277). Displaying one's wealth and generosity, establishing and reconfirming social bonds, providing for daughters and fulfilling the duty of fatherhood, are all features that are intermeshed in the giving of the trousseau.

The intensity of the obligation to clothe a daughter is expressed in the annual ritual of *Tulsi Vivah* (Basil Wedding) when Tulsima, the holy basil plant which

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subjects and the gifts of men to women. But it must be remembered that not all prestations of clothing are given from superiors to inferiors. There are, for example, occasions when a daughter-in-law may be expected to present a sari to her mother-in-law, who is clearly defined as a superior.

grows in every courtyard is formally married to Takadada (Lord Krishna) in a ceremony which marks the end of the austere monsoon season and the beginning of the more festive winter period.[16] The ceremony takes place on the eleventh day of the bright half of *Kartik* (mid November) and it is only after this sacred marriage, that mortals in the village can celebrate their own weddings.

The marriage of Tulsima with Takadada resembles a human marriage in most respects, containing the essential elements of any Hindu wedding, including the setting up of a marriage booth (*mandap*), a central square (*chori*), a sacred fire (*agni*) and so on. Tulsima (the basil plant) receives all the privileges of the bride, including a full set of marriage clothing which is wrapped around her leaves and appropriate jewellery. When I witnessed the ceremony, a nose ring and earrings, provided by the substitute parents of the bride, were attached with some difficulty to a paper face which had been inserted at the top of the plant (see fig. 6:1). Takadada, in the form of a small statue of Krishna, was dressed in a *dhoti* and seated beneath a canopy. The couple are linked by a cotton thread (*mala*).

Responsibility for the cost and equipment necessary for the wedding is taken every year by a married couple who have no daughter. They become the parents of Tulsima for the night and give her away. It is significant that they not only provide her with bridal clothes but also with an entire trousseau of saris. The year I attended the wedding, Tulsima was promised twenty-one saris which were taken by the *Brahman* priest and kept for distribution to female ascetics.

Taking the financial responsibility for this event is considered a privilege and is meritorious to couples without daughters. It is said that a man cannot fulfil his full duty of fatherhood if he has only sons. Although sons are as a rule greatly preferred, people feel it necessary to have at least one daughter whom they can give away in marriage. The *Kanbi* man who acted the role of father explained this as follows:

> "It is only after obtaining wives for our sons and giving away our daughters with the provisions of a good trousseau that we can say we have completed our duty as fathers. Before today I had no daughter, but

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16 According to local tradition, the ceremony developed from the days when Krishna wished to kill the wicked demon, Jalandhar. But he failed to do so because the demon's wife, Vrinda, was so chaste and virtuous. Krishna therefore assumed the form of Jalandhar and violated his wife after which he was able to kill the demon. She transformed herself into a tulsi plant and Krishna, now in love with her, married the plant.

now I have given Tulsima, my daughter, to our god Takadada and I can become old quietly."

When I questioned him about the necessity of providing Tulsima with twenty one saris, he looked at me ascorn and answered: "Who would give away a daughter without a trousseau of fine clothes? What kind of father is that?"

The nature of the relationship between the sexes is restated in the female privilege of receiving clothes and the male privilege of giving them. This is particularly true amongst high caste groups. Where women are secluded, as in the case of Chagancaca's family, the man's obligation to provide is at its strongest but so too is his ability to control the clothing and behaviour of the women of the house. Chagancaca's wife claimed never to have been shopping since before her marriage some twenty-six years earlier. If she needed clothes then she asked her husband or her son to provide them. She said she would like to shop but her husband would get angry if she left the house.[17] She only went out for funerals, weddings and festivals. When Naniben, her daughter, would marry, then she would be able to shop with her husband for Naniben's trousseau, but this would be an exceptional occasion for which they would make a special trip to Ahmedabad.

Naniben herself (Chagancaca's daughter), being unmarried, was not so restricted in her movements as her mother. She was able to visit the cloth shops of Bhavnagar with her brother and choose the material for her own clothes. It was considered acceptable for her to have clothes made by a tailor so long as the latter did not take her body measurements. But this "freedom" did not exempt her from her father's criticism and overriding choice. He wanted her to look like an educated city girl which meant wearing a *salwar kamiz* of shiny synthetic fabric. In the sweltering heat of the summer she had tried to explain that cotton would be cooler and more comfortable, but her father had objected:

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17 *Laj* restrictions for Chagancaca's wife were so strict that she was prohibited from buying vegetables even though it required taking no more than two steps outside the front gate for the vegetable shop was actually located in the front of her own house. All food and clothing supplies were bought home by the men of the family and if for any reason they were delayed elsewhere, there would be a temporary panic about how to obtain chillies or eggplant for the next meal. If Naniben were absent, then a neighbour's child would have to be called or me if I were around. Naniben was allowed to fetch milk from a neighbouring *Kharak* woman who lived nearby but was prohibited from entering the main street of the village, unless for a special purpose.

Tulsima, the basil plant, dressed in a silk sari for her marriage to Takadada (Lord Krishna). Her nose ring (*nath*) and spangle (*bindi*) are clearly visible but her earrings have fallen off.

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Fig. 6:1

Desirable images. Shiny fake silk *salwar kamiz* of the type admired by Naniben.
From **Sweet 16 Fashion Catalogue** (1988).

Fig. 6.2

"What will people say if they see you dressed in *sada kapda* (plain cloth)? They will say that your father is so mean and poor that he dresses his daughter like a *Vaghri*. People talk."

And regarding Naniben's clothing people, usually relatives, did talk. Her uncle, the priest, felt it indecent for a decent Hindu girl to wear a *salwar kamiz* which was suitable only for Muslims or fancy city people. His own unmarried daughter, who was more or less confined to the house, wore simple long "maxis" (night dresses) and on the rare occasions of her entering the village, a sari. The *panwala* (betel nut seller), Chagancaca's cousin, called Naniben insulting names as she stood at the bus stop. But Naniben waited quietly for the bus and went to college despite the objections of her extended family, some of whom thought she was dressed above her station and others of whom thought she was dressed below it. As the heat of the summer increased, her father gave her permission to wear cotton "maxis" inside the house and even agreed to her having a cotton *salwar kamiz*. But these were strictly for indoor use, and she was severely chastised when an unexpected guest arrived at the house and saw her wearing cotton. Cotton was too *deshi* (local, unsophisticated). As far as Chagancaca was concerned, it was the cloth of rough, uneducated, backward farming folk.

Finally, Hansaben, as I have shown, had little control over her own apparel. She too relied on the choice of her husband if new clothes were required. But she resented the limitations of the village. She wanted to dress like a city woman in the "Bengali sari" that hung down the back instead of the front. But her in-laws argued that she would not be able to perform proper *laj* dressed in that style. Why, they asked, did she feel the need to look like a *sarawalla* (well-to-do person) when she was living in a village? She also wanted to wear a bra, but her mother-in-law had forbidden it on the grounds that she would not be able to feed her baby easily. Hansa resented this for there were, as she told me, front fastening bras available in Bhavnagar. She did not see why Naniben, who was younger and unmarried, should be allowed to wear a bra when she, who was older and married, was forbidden it.

The Cardigan Reconsidered

Examination of the importance of giving and receiving clothes helps to explain the apparently extreme reactions of Chagancaca and Hansaben to what at first seems like a trivial matter of a mere cardigan. As I have shown clothes are given

in the context of specific relationships and events and as such they embody the relationships between individuals, families and groups (cf. Cohn 1989, Werbner 1990). The result is that each item of clothing that a person possesses has a very specific history which becomes embedded within the garment itself. Hansa's cardigan had been made by her mother and given by her parents in her trousseau and therefore evoked a whole series of associations: parents, home, Bhavnagar where her life had seemed happier and more free. This in part accounts for her extremely emotional attachment to the garment and her reluctance to remove it. But it cannot fully account for her persistence in wearing it even after her father-in-law's initial objection. Before addressing this particular problem, it is worth considering exactly what Chagancaca's objections were really about. This is difficult to assess since he refused to discuss the incident in any detail. But his wife claimed that Chagancaca felt the cardigan was too modern, being a city style, and one which no married woman would wear in a village. Other women, if they needed warmth, wore shawls.

The city style of Hansa's cardigan was symptomatic of Hansaben in general. She came from a well-to-do police inspector's family in Bhavnagar city where her parents had a modern concrete house, well equipped with furniture and items of urban living. Members of Chagancaca's family seemed both to admire and resent this. It was in many ways what they themselves aspired to for they felt oppressed by the village and referred to "village people" as if they were something entirely different from themselves. But Chagancaca was unable to find work in the city and therefore remained frustrated in Jalia, hoping for a way out. That the daughter-in-law was so obviously city bred seemed to rile the household. Frequently the women of the house would inform me that Hansaben was a *shaher walla* (city-type), used to fine things, with a high level cooker in the kitchen, and a fridge and everything. This would be said with an air of sarcasm and jest and Hansa would deny it with a laugh and say that things in Jalia were good too. In private, however, she confessed that she hated the village with all its restrictions. She wanted to be a school teacher, not to cook and clean all day inside the house. She had studied to tenth grade. That was four years more than her husband. When Hansa's in-laws felt that she thought herself superior and above the village, they were, in a sense, right. How many of these more general household tensions were evoked by the sight of that modern city styled cardigan, it is difficult to tell. But it is likely that they lurked at least in the background, adding poignancy to the event.

The clothing style then, and what it represented, was in itself a means of provocation. But this provocation was enhanced by the fact that Hansa's sari had not hung straight on account of her cardigan. This meant that instead of being the absent, unnoticed figure draped in the corner of the room, she was noticeable and in Chagancaca's mind unsightly. The very act of being so visible was, he thought, a sign of immodesty for it attracted inappropriate attention. He had immediately accused her of lack of *sharm* even though her face was properly hidden and her back well turned. In other words Hansa in her "jeket" was too modern and too visible.[18]

This leads to the second question of why Hansaben persisted in wearing the cardigan even after Chagancaca had made his objections clear. Her refusal to remove it was more than a case of personal attachment. It was, as she well knew, a denial of Chagancaca's authority. By keeping her cardigan on, Hansa, despite being fully veiled, was showing her autonomy in a situation where she should have been meek and unnoticed. No one was more aware of this than Chagancaca himself who reacted with due fury, causing her finally to remove the "jeket", and lapse into a silent and resentful mood.

Hansa's actions are worth examining in more detail. Everything she did was indirect but highly effective, illustrating how even a daughter-in-law can carefully circumvent the apparently rigid system of senior male authority. If she had chosen a more confrontative approach, such as answering back to Chagancaca or lifting her veil, this would have been so badly considered that it is doubtful if she would ever have obtained her parents' sympathy or support. But in choosing the apparently innocent gesture of wearing a cardigan, she was in the happy position of appearing like the innocent victim, denied a basic right and forced to go cold. Her refusal to either eat or speak played upon the guilty conscience and ultimate helplessness of her in-laws, as did her threat of suicide which was delivered to the neighbour and to me, on the assumption that it would get back via one of us to the rest of the family. This it did, and she was soon able to speak to her brother and leave the house on the pretext of her father's supposed illness. Unhappy though she was with her in-laws, Hansa

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18 There has been much discussion of the importance of the veil as a means of rendering women socially invisible (cf. Sharma 1978b, Mehta 1976, Jacobson 1970, Papanek 1973). For a more general discussion of women as an invisible and "muted group", see Dube et al. 1986 and Ardener 1975).

was by no means the oppressed and helpless victim of the incident. She was carefully manipulating events in her own subtle way.

This raises interesting questions about the role of clothes in female disputes in general. Where women are confined to the house in an essentially male dominated culture, control of their own bodies, whether through starving, becoming mute, withdrawing sexual favours or dressing in a provocative way, becomes one of the means by which they can assert their own wishes, sorrows and desires. As actors, inventive women can even find means of reworking the very institutions that appear to work against them. Their own dependency on their men for jewellery and clothes can, for example, be exploited by women who try to bribe their husbands into providing such adornment. Similarly the restrictive custom of *laj*, in which a woman is expected to withdraw herself from view, can be used at times when a woman is expected to be on display, but does not wish to be seen. As Sharma has pointed out, the veil, though it conceals women, does not deprive them of a means of expression (Sharma 1978b:224). It can be drawn out of defiance and flirtation as much as modesty (Murphey 1964:266, Chishti and Sanyal 1989:18, Dar 1969:5-6). This was beautifully illustrated by a popular song performed in a local drama in a neighbouring village. It depicted a desperate man with two wives who were denying him access to their bodies unless he gave them each the most expensive gold necklace available in the city. He was trying to approach them with offers of mere bangles and earrings, but they swivelled away from him every time, both flirting and taking refuge under their veils, swearing that they would never come out of *ghunghut* until their wish for the necklaces was fulfilled. Finally the man, exasperated by these two shrouded women, was forced to agree to the purchases.

Despite the restrictions on how a woman dresses, it is clear that some women do not blindly follow the expectations of their seniors and, like Hansaben, assert a degree of autonomy. Similarly Jacobson has shown how some women in central India syphon off money in their conjugal homes and then purchase jewellery which they later pretend has been given to them by their parents (Jacobson 1976:165). Using such indirect methods, they can accumulate new apparel without their in-laws' approval or consent. In contemporary Hindi movies clothing often arises as a subversive issue for women, when, for example, urban girls appear in jeans instead of a sari when their undesirable prospective husband pays them a visit. In the same way that Gandhi used

clothes to shock and to challenge British expectations, so women like Hansa in subordinate positions, sometimes assert their independence by rebelling through the apparently innocent medium of dress.

Brahman Considerations

To what extent are the clothing disputes of Chagancaca's household unique? And to what extent are they symptomatic of more general caste and village dilemmas? Certainly every household in Jalia had its own concept of acceptable and unacceptable clothing, but it seemed that in wealthy families men played a much greater part in deciding what their womenfolk should wear. This sartorial power was reinforced by *laj* restrictions that ensured that married women did not leave the house except for festive occasions. Such *laj* restrictions were strictest amongst members of the *Darbar* and *Brahman* castes,.

Darbar women, if their families could afford it, were entirely secluded, living in separate quarters from their menfolk and dressing in comparatively plain saris. They were not as a whole either very wealthy, educated or fashionable. It was *Brahman* and *Vaniya* women, (often referred to by the composite term *Vaniya-Brahman*), who were considered the most modern and fashionable in the village. As a caste, the *Vaniya*, who were generally wealthier than the *Brahman*, took the fashion lead. The women favoured pale coloured, flimsy textured synthetic saris, preferably from "Foren", and the more foreign the better. A Jalia-bought sari was spurned; a Bhavnagar sari was more or less acceptable; an Ahmedabad or Bombay sari was desirable and a sari from America or Japan was highly coveted. It was usually impossible to determine the origin of a sari purely on the basis of its appearance, since patterns and prints from all over the world are successfully reproduced in India. But the point about a new sari is that people *discuss* it. They ask its price, they feel its texture, they demand where it was purchased and where it was made, and it is usually only after accumulating this knowledge that they assess its true desirability. *Vaniya* families, most of whom had relatives in Bombay, had highly prestigious saris. The current fashion was floral prints in pale greens and blues known as *angreji reng* (English colours). These saris were worn in the Gujarati style despite an overriding preference for the "Bengali style" which was thought more

sophisticated. *Vaniya* women only wore the latter style when outside the village where *laj* restrictions were less vital.[19]

Young *Vaniya* girls were considered the young *feshen walli* (trendies) of the village. Some went to college in Bhavnagar and bought city fashions of shiny *salwar kamizes* which they wore for going to town or for special events. They tended to wear make up and nail varnish and some even cut their hair in modern styles and spent time in Bhavnagar beauty parlours where they had their eyebrows plucked and the hair on their arms removed. These were expensive, luxury pursuits with which few other people bothered. The *mantri's* (Panchayat secretary's) two daughters who were *Brahman,* were the only other girls in the village who followed such fashions. They had been living in Rajkot (a city in Saurashtra) until four years earlier. Rajkot, they explained, was a much more "forward-looking place" than Jalia. The Government doctor's daughters (also *Brahman*) also wore *salwar kamizes* although they did not attend the beauty parlour. But they too had come to Jalia only recently and had been brought up in a town. None of these girls wore their *salwar kamizes* when at home during the day since such fancy clothes were thought inappropriate to the village. At home such girls wore "maxis" or full length skirts with simple blouses.

On the whole *Brahman* men were stricter than *Vaniya* fathers about what their children wore. Few allowed their daughters to wear the *salwar kamiz* and, as we have seen with Naniben, this garment was considered improper by some men in the village. The question of whether or not a girl should be allowed to wear such a garment was really the question of whether or not she should be educated beyond seventh standard at the village school. Any further education meant travelling by bus to college in Bhavnagar and this in turn entailed a change of clothes. As Naniben explained:

> "We cannot wear our maxis or skirts to the town. All the college would laugh at us and call us village people. At college almost every girl wears a *salwar kamiz*. And those who do not wear it, dress in "midis" or frocks. If I went in a maxi, I would be the laughing stock and people would insult my father's name."

Sending a daughter to college entailed breaking two major village taboos, quite apart from embracing the radical assertion that female education was desirable

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19 As Sharma has shown with reference to a village in Himachal Pradesh, women veil more rigourously in their own conjugal villages than when they visit another village, city or town (Sharma 1978a:230).

or necessary. The first taboo was allowing a daughter to travel by bus, a risk which few fathers were prepared to take for fear that it would spoil their daughter's and hence the family's reputation. The second was allowing one's daughter to wear a *salwar kamiz*, contradicting the local assumption that only Muslims wore trousers whilst Hindus always dressed in skirts or wraps.

In theory, the breaking of these taboos should have been no more difficult for *Brahman* girls than for *Vaniyas*, but two factors combined to ensure that they were. Firstly, as I have said, all *Vaniya* families had relatives in Bombay whom they visited and who, in turn, visited Jalia. This kept them in touch with wider fashion and they often received gifts of clothes from the city which they were happy to wear. Secondly, the *Vaniya* did not hold the traditional religious functions of the *Brahmans* which gave them a greater freedom of expression. The specific dilemma of *Brahman* households revolved around the fact that in almost all cases they were connected to the priesthood at some level, however distant.[20] And although most men held clerical or trading positions and no longer officiated as priests, there was a general feeling that the ritual superiority of *Brahmans* must be maintained through their maintenance of high moral standards and their adherence to a strict code of Hindu practice. One means of asserting this superiority was to maintain strict rules of seclusion for women and to ensure that even unmarried girls in their teens did not venture into the streets and risk the danger of tarnishing their reputations by being seen too much or by talking to the "wrong" sorts of people. Instead, they should be modestly dressed and little visible. But this presented a fundamental dilemma, for although *Brahmans* saw themselves as upholders of tradition, they also perceived themselves as modern, forward-thinking as opposed to the more "backward" farming and labouring castes. Being *sudharo* (developed) however, meant educating one's women, recognising the value of literacy and rejecting certain age old village customs such as the total covering of the bride during the wedding ceremony or excessive ritualised crying at the bride's departure to her in-laws' house. Yet such enlightened attitudes entailed accepting new forms of clothing (including the *salwar kamiz* and cardigan) and, above all, new canons of modesty.

20 It is interesting that the two *Brahman* men who allowed their daughters to dress in modern styles with impunity were the doctor and the *mantri* who, apart from their more urban upbringings, also had the added benefit of being new to Jalia. They therefore lacked the restrictive censure of senior generation relatives and religious functionaries who could take objection to their daughters' dress.

A fundamental problem for many villagers, but one which seemed most sorely felt by *Brahmans*, was the clash between the conflicting values of the village and the city regarding the sensitive issue of female modesty in dress. This concept of modesty was in a state of flux and those who lived in villages but harboured urban aspirations were to some extent caught between two contradictory models. Speaking of the Punjab in the 1930's, Darling pointed out that the fashionable clothes worn by elite Punjabi girls were the equivalent of a prostitute's garb to most other villagers (Darling 1934:84). Similarly in Jalia the *salwar kamiz*, which some high caste people consider the most fashionable dress, is also considered the least reputable by other villagers' standards. For few people have adopted the criteria of modesty that the *salwar kamiz* demands.

At the beginning of this century all women in Jalia wore, as I have shown, a backless bodice *(kapdu)* which left the entire back exposed to view. This was considered desirable as it allowed air to circulate. It was only during the early years of this century that high caste women began to feel embarrassed at such exposure and took to wearing full blouses, often with long sleeves. Parsi women in Bombay were considered the trend setters in Indian women's fashion. Billington describes them as wearing petticoats "of white lawn or batiste, or even silk all frilled and laced, and a bodice of silk or material cut after the English or French patterns, though without the extravagances of exaggerated sleeves or high stiff collars" (Billington 1973 (1895):180-1). Lace and silk blouses, adopted by the Indian elite, gradually took the form of the more familiar short *choli* (blouse) which is, in a sense, a compromise between the Indian bodice and the European blouse.

The backless bodice (*kapdu*) was, in the past, worn by high caste women with a long petticoat and half sari (*sadlo*) which was wrapped once around the body and over the head. The idea of the modest well-bred woman in the 1900's was, then, she whose back was uncovered but whose face and head were concealed beneath a veil and whose legs were well hidden beneath large quantities of cloth in the form of a silk skirt (*chaniya*). Some groups in Jalia, such as the *Bharwads* (shepherds), continue to expose their backs and cover their faces in this way but they are considered the most *deshi* and least educated people in the village. The new model of female behaviour and appearance that is promoted amongst the educated urban elite, requires precisely the opposite canons of
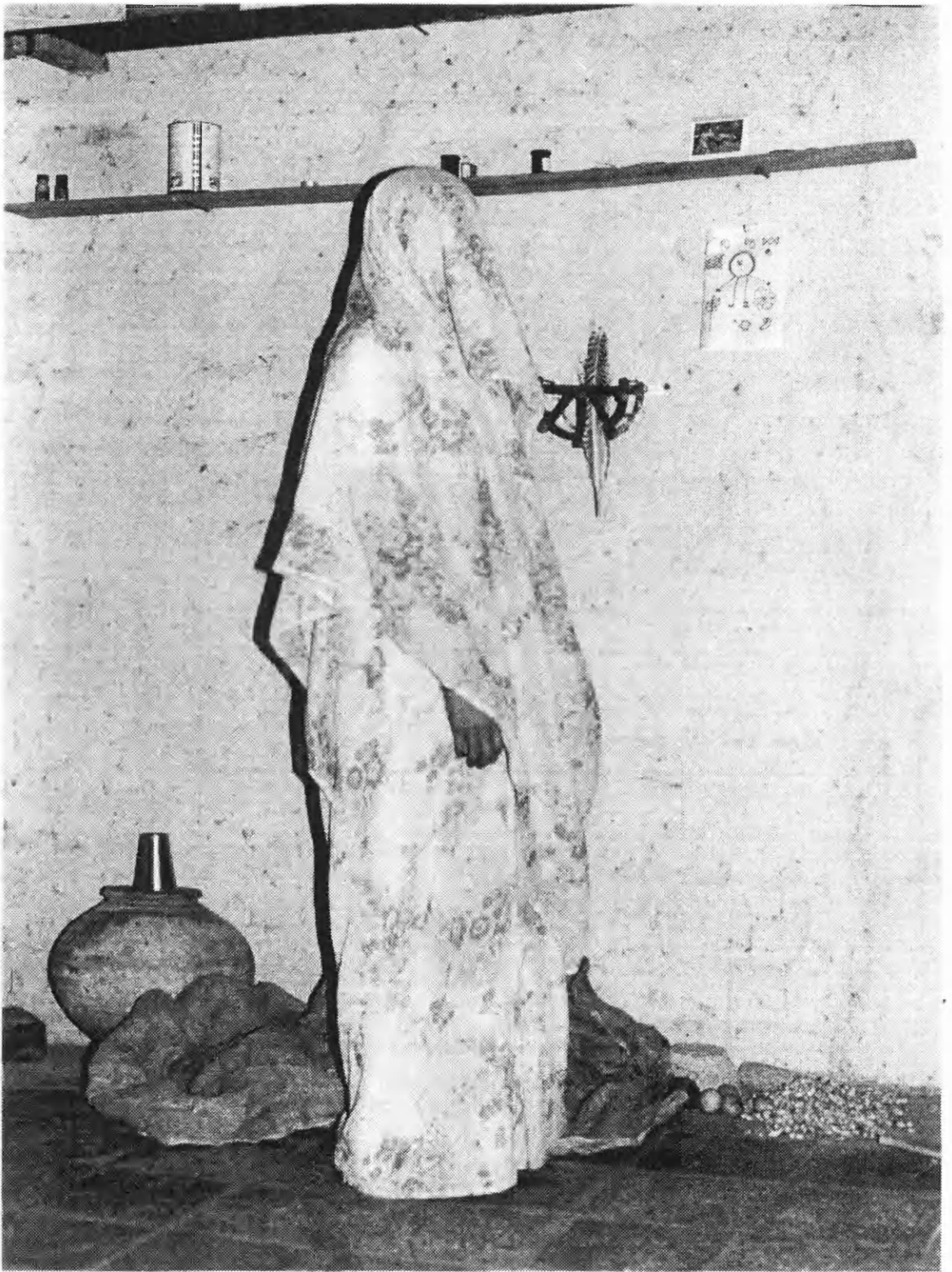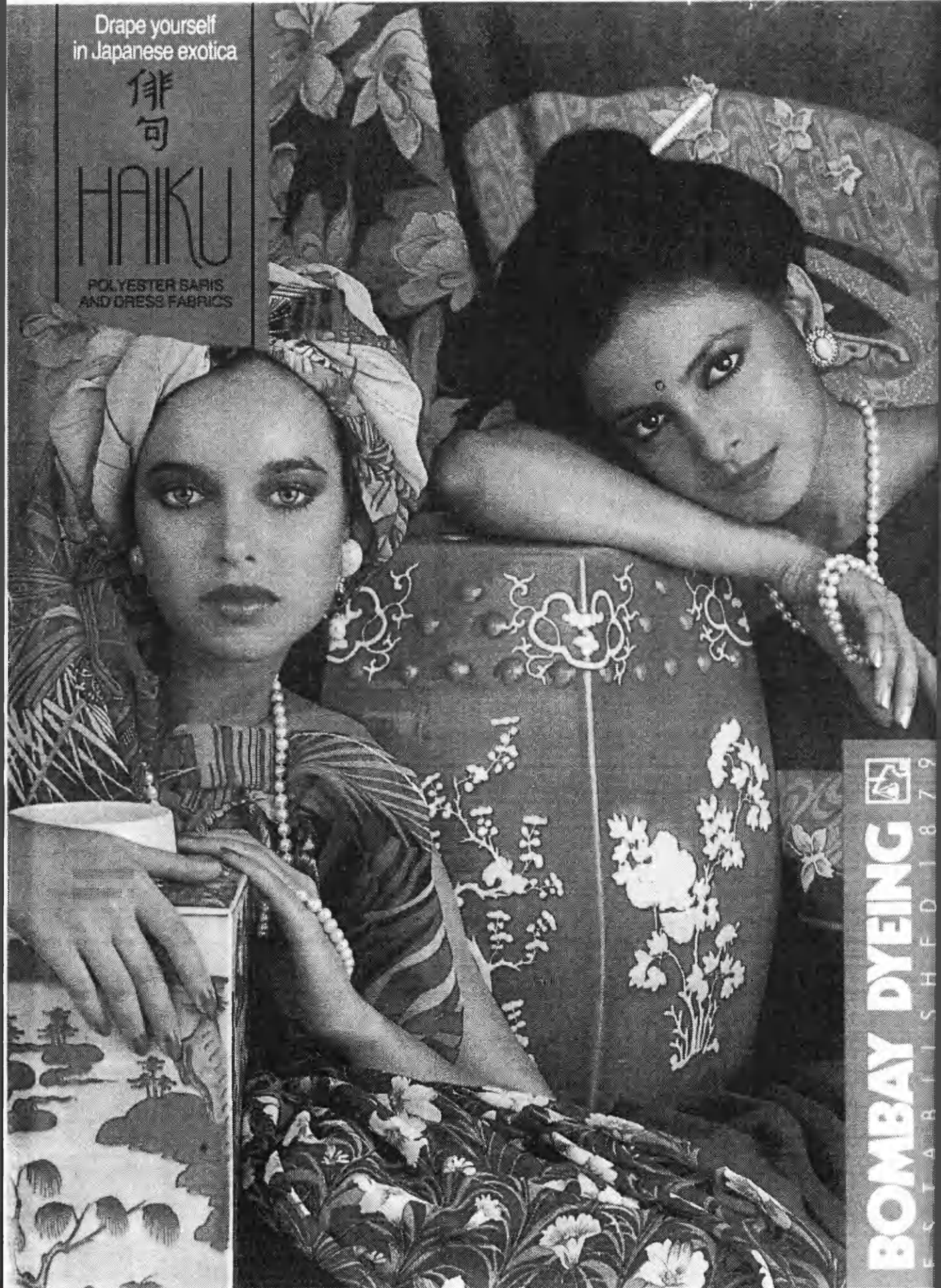
Hansaben in *laj*, wearing a finely textured synthetic sari from Ahmedabad with a repeated floral motif. It is pale blue and green, locally known as "English Colours".

Fig. 6.3

Drape yourself
in Japanese exotica

俳句

HAIKU

POLYESTER SARIS
AND DRESS FABRICS

BOMBAY DYEING
ESTABLISHED 1879

Fig. 6:4   Advertisement, showing "exotic" saris from Japan.

modesty and exposure. Based on an essentially Western influenced tradition, it requires that the back should be covered but the head and face should be exposed. It asserts that the uncovered back is naked and indecent (cf. Billington 1977:178) but the covered face is backward and oppressive. Progressive urban men are therefore expected to allow their womenfolk to walk in the streets bare headed and to forswear the custom of *laj* not merely during the marriage ceremony, but also in everyday life. They are also expected to condone female education and the new styles of clothes thought appropriate to the college-going girl. This is, of course, the *salwar kamiz* which covers the entire body and cannot therefore be considered too revealing, although, as we have seen, it can be thought too masculine, or too Muslim, or too much like something that the undiscriminating *Vaghris* might wear. Still more progressive urban fathers allow their daughters to wear Western style skirts ("midis") and dresses ("frocks") but these play more serious havoc with convention, since they expose the lower leg which in high caste village terms is a sign of immodesty and lack of refinement, found only amongst the lower castes.

Chagancaca's frustration about how the women of his household should dress revolved around the fact that he sought appraisal from both the village and the city simultaneously. Yet what was socially upgrading in wider national terms was morally downgrading in local terms. This was not such a problem for *Vaniya* families who were more concerned to boost their urban reputations and cared less about attitudes in the village. Nor was it so much a consideration with the Darbar or the farming castes because the identity of these women was still essentially village-based and there was no question of educating daughters in the city. But well-to-do Brahman parents wanted their daughters to be educated and modern but at the same time to preserve their reputations for modesty in the village. Furthermore, the more religious minded amongst them regarded the salwar kamiz as a minor sacrilege to the Hindu faith, not because it broke some Hindu rule about the sanctity of unstitched cloth, but rather for the simple reason that it was commonly worn by Muslims.

Brahman women were therefore in the difficult position of having to conform to contradictory role models in two quite different spheres. Hansaben and Naniben occupied the opposite sides of the same dilemma. Hansaben had been reared and educated in the city and was now having to adapt herself to village life whereas Naniben, brought up in the village, was expected to adapt to becoming a college girl in the city. The only solution to this problem was either to risk

offending one group or another by one's choice of clothes or, like Naniben, to change one's clothes to suit the occasion.

Changing one's clothes to suit the situation was, as we have seen, an extremely popular solution for men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is not to say that women at that time were *entirely* unfamiliar with the option. Billington mentions her frustration at finding that her visits to Indian households were often "expected" which meant people had dressed up for the occasion. She found Indian girls in frocks and bonnets, stripey stockings and German shoes, although she does not mention whether adult women ever deserted Indian styles on such occasions (Billington 1973 (1885):177). One woman who *did* temporarily cast aside her Indian dress was Swarup Rani, wife of Motilal Nehru, who adopted European dress when she accompanied her husband to Europe in 1905 (SWMN vol 1:61). She later changed back into a sari for her return to India. But maintaining more than one style of clothing was, until recently, unusual even amongst such sophisticated urban women. It is only now beginning to emerge amongst women of the village elite. Its emergence coincides with and is an integral part of the changing expectations of women in contemporary Indian society.

Until recently the lives of most rural women were confined to the house, the village or the farm. Though involving much hard labour, work in these spheres did not require women to step outside their caste and domestic role in the same way that male jobs often did. And since women were usually denied education, they were not introduced to many alternative role models in the way that young boys were when they attended school. But recent attempts to encourage female education even amongst villagers is leading to a multiplication of roles for women and a new multiplication of clothing styles. As Naniben pointed out, she could not risk her reputation in the city by appearing at college in "village dress". She therefore had to have an alternative set of clothes for going to Bhavnagar. Her most traumatic time was waiting at the village bus stop, dressed in a *salwar kamiz*, and listening to the insults of other villagers. It was the age-old problem of what to wear on the border territories between one sphere and another, a problem familiar to many Indian men earlier this century.

The question of when to change one's clothes is often, as we have seen, linked to the wider question of where to draw the boundary between public and private presentations of self. North Indian women, until recently, experienced this

dilemma differently from men, not only because they circulated less in social and geographic terms, but also because they always wore some form of veil. The veil enabled women to draw the public/private dichotomy around their own bodies. Being portable and obligatory, it provided the constant possibility of slipping into the private sphere at any given moment. The comparatively new fashion of wearing a *salwar kamiz* has, however, put an end to this. A woman dressed in a *salwar kamiz*, worn with only a small decorative *dupatta* (scarf), lacks the means of withdrawal and is forced to remain permanently visible and exposed.

This did in fact have grave consequences for Naniben. Having completed her schooling, she was all set to attend sewing classes in Bhavnagar, when one day a youth followed her in the city and tried to talk to her at the Bhavnagar bus station. She threatened him with her sandal and he soon left her in peace. But there were young men from Jalia who had witnessed the event which, though totally unprovoked by Naniben, blemished her reputation. Had she been wearing a sari or half-sari, she might have been able to retreat into *laj*, but as it was, she stood blatantly exposed to view and publicly humiliated. When she told her parents of the event, her father and brother decided that she must never take the bus or go to Bhavnagar again, unless accompanied by her brother. Her sewing classes were cancelled and from this time onwards she was confined largely to the house, only occasionally entering the village. This event shows how young women who abandon the veil are in fact taking a considerable risk in a culture where female modesty is still so highly prized and female honour so intensely vulnerable. For the veil not only conceals women but it also acts as a shelter (Papanek 1973) in a world where even comparatively modern women are taught that they should not be seen too much.

Conclusion

To what extent can one compare the sartorial dilemmas of the women in Chagancaca's family to the sartorial dilemmas of the male Indian elite earlier this century? And to what extent are women's contemporary dilemmas related to the colonial heritage? At first sight there are certain parallels. Though on a different scale, the silent but persistent struggles of the women of the household may be compared to the struggles of Indian nationalists, who, subordinated by British presence, chose dress as a means of non-violent but provocative rebellion. Furthermore in Hansaben's case the central focus of the dispute was a cardigan,

a Western style of garment, suggesting that European dress is still a provocative issue in India today. But the parallels are not as self evident as they might at first appear. It was not, for example, the Western aspect of Hansa's dress that was at issue. Her cardigan was perceived as being a *city* style, rather than a *European* one, and much of the dispute revolved more around questions of modesty and visibility than style as such. Like the Gandhi cap, the symbolic value of the cardigan was in fact accumulative, being constructed more through the actions and behaviour of those around it than through any stylistic features or properties of the garment itself.

The case of Naniben's dress presents a different problem. At first sight the question of whether she should wear a *salwar kamiz* or some form of sari appears unrelated to colonial issues. Both garments are clearly Indian, suggesting that her problem of choice was purely an internal Indian affair. This it was, but the conflicting ideas of modesty and modernity that these different sartorial options embodied, have their echoes in the colonial encounter. Cohn has discussed disputes in Travancore in South West India in the mid 19th century, when Protestant missionaries encouraged low caste *Nadar* women, who had converted to Christianity, to cover their previously naked breasts. By covering their breasts, these women, though conforming to European standards of decency, were at the same time breaking local hierarchical codes whereby they were expected to keep their breasts naked in front of *Brahmans* as a sign of respect (Cohn 1983:78-87). With the exception of the missionaries, the British made few direct attempts to interfere with Hindu women's dress, but British sartorial values were none the less invasive.

Although Naniben's problem of how to dress was entirely removed from direct contact with Europeans or Christians, it was, all the same, intimately bound up with the indirect historical consequences of both Muslim and British rule. The *salwar kamiz* was perceived as controversial in Jalia, partly because it was considered "Muslim dress", and partly because it was thought immodest for a mature girl to keep her head uncovered. The idea that it is liberal and advanced for women to expose their heads and faces, is, of course, a hand down from the British who were shocked by veiling restrictions and the high caste practice of female seclusion. Though not perceived in these terms, the dispute over how Naniben should dress was part of a long historical confrontation between opposing cultural values. To Naniben, the dispute was framed in terms of the conflict between "traditional" village values as opposed to educated urban ones.

But these educated urban values were, in turn, informed by the values of the cosmopolitan Indian elite who were the closest followers, though also the sharpest critics, of British attitudes and behaviour during the colonial period (cf. Srinivas 1968:51). As Ashish Nandy has shown, colonial values were not only *in*vasive but also *per*vasive. Part of the very forcefulness of the colonial encounter was the infusion of alien cultural ideas in such a way that they can no longer be disentangled from Indian thought. They have become part of Indian society itself (Nandy 1983). Naniben's clothing dilemma could be couched in terms of a number of different dichotomies: rural/urban; uneducated/educated; local fashion/national fashion; Hindu/Muslim; Indian/British. None of these dichotomies taken individually quite covers the issues involved, yet each pair has contributed something to the web of cultural meanings which the disputes about Naniben's dress seem to embody.

As women become increasingly educated and take a more active role in the public sphere, it is likely that the problem of what to wear will become increasingly difficult for them, at least during the period of transition. For, as we have seen, circulating in different spheres often requires a change of clothes and a permanent change of clothes is frequently perceived as a threat to cultural values. It is likely that women will resort increasingly to the popular solution of changing their dress to suit the situation.[21] At present, however, this remains a problem confined largely to educated girls who, in Jalia, represent a tiny minority. Peasant women, whose lives revolve more around the village and the farm, do not confront such issues. But they do have their own clothing dilemmas. In the next chapter I shall examine how women of the *Kanbi* and *Kharak* castes are struggling, with varying success, to replace their embroidered clothes with synthetic saris.

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21 In London, for example, many Indian women change out of their saris and into Western styles just for work, returning to their saris before entering their homes at the end of the day. Their menfolk are aware of the practice but do not prevent it. They recognise it as a valuable compromise which allows their women both to earn a living in the outside world and to retain their cultural allegiance within the home where an Indian identity can be more easily sustained.
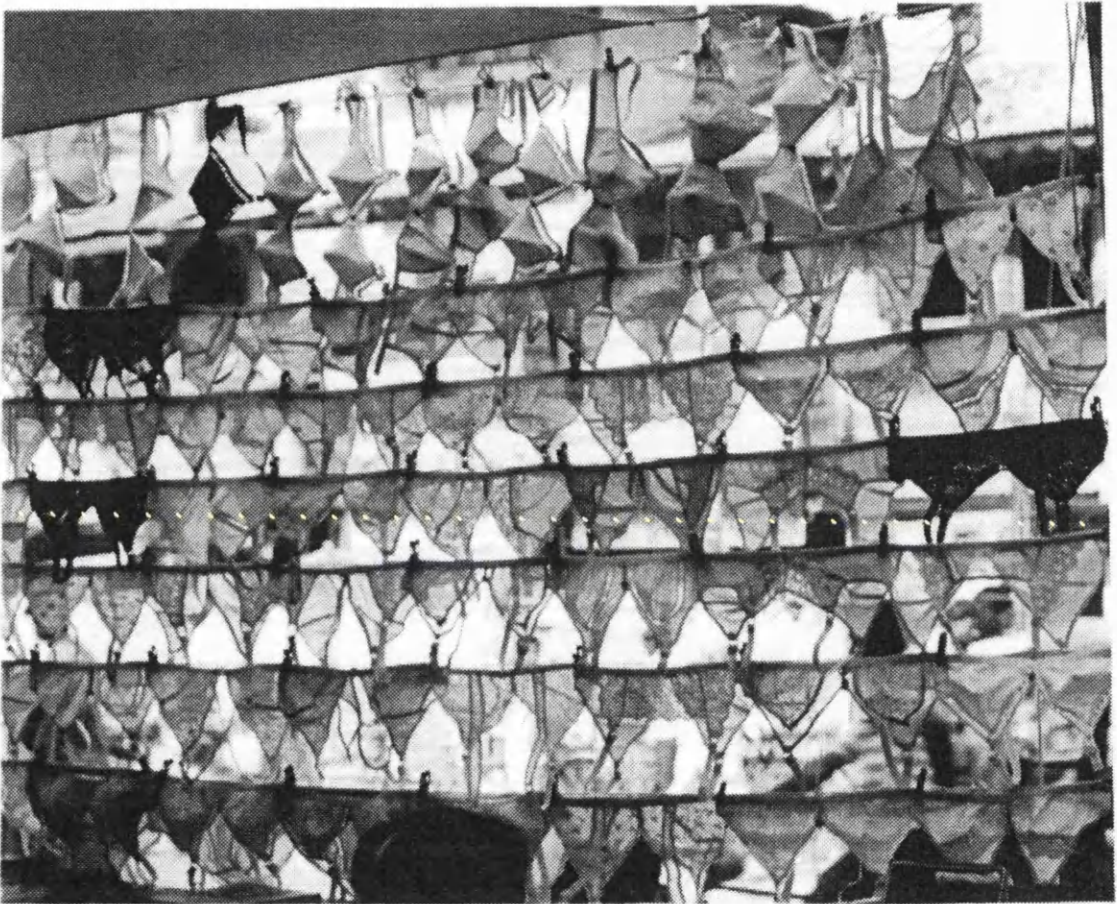
Much admired city goods. Bras literally line the streets in one of Ahmedabad's popular street markets.

Fig 6:5

Chapter 7

SOME PEASANT DILEMMAS (*KANBI* AND *KHARAK*)

The Problem of Liliben's *Ghaghra* (skirts)

Liliben is a *Kharak* girl of approximately fourteen years old. When I first met her she and her mother were busy sorting the winter crop of groundnut that had just been harvested from their fields. Liliben's mother, a woman in her late thirties, was dressed in a brightly coloured skirt (*ghaghro*) and bodice (*kapdu*), both of which she had embroidered herself with colourful stitching and inserts of mirror. Over these she wore a printed half-sari (*sadlo*). Liliben, by contrast, was dressed in a thin polyester petticoat, a plain blouse with buttons down the front and a synthetic floral *sadlo* in bright blues and greens. Despite her youth she had been married for four years, but was not due to join her husband's family for another three. Even so, she claimed to have stocked up clothes and ornaments for her future trousseau. When I asked if she would make embroidered *ghaghra* like her mother, she looked at me with serious disapproval and told me that she would *never* wear a *ghaghro*, and did not even know how to make them. The *ghaghro* was, she claimed, "the stuff of the past" (*pelu nu vastu*), and no one like her would be seen in such an old fashioned thing. When her mother left the courtyard, Liliben added proudly that *she* was the sort of person who could mix with foreigners like me. Others in her caste would not even be able to talk with me but *she* was modern. Her trousseau would contain not "village clothes" (*gam nu vastu*) but saris from Bhavnagar city. That embroidery was something of the past.

As winter gave way to summer and the arrival of hot windy days when agricultural activity more or less ground to its annual halt, I returned more frequently to Liliben's house and was surprised to find her sitting with her cousins on a string bed in the open court yard, embroidering a *ghaghro* of the same colour and style as all the *ghaghra* worn by the elder generation women of her caste.

"Whom is that *ghaghro* for?" I asked.
"It's for me", she replied, a little sheepishly. "It's for my trousseau." She looked down at the bright heavy red cloth and added, "But I won't wear it. I have to make it and I have to take it with me to my in-laws' house, but I'll never put it on."

Despite her negative attitude to the garment, Liliben was a serious and experienced embroiderer and it turned out that she had already stitched five *ghaghra* and that this was the sixth.

"Why do you embroider them if you think you will never wear them?" I asked simplistically.

"Because I have to show them at my *anu* time. It is our custom. We have to give some *ghaghra* in our caste", she replied.

Liliben lived in a large extended family. Two of her cousins (her father's brothers' daughters) were due to make their ceremonial departure to their in-laws' homes later that summer and were therefore in the midst of preparing gifts and clothes for their trousseaux with particular diligence. Like Liliben, they were embroidering *ghaghra*, and like Liliben, they too insisted that they would not wear the things unless absolutely forced. Vasantben, one of the cousins, asserted:

> "You see, it depends on the mother-in-law. If my mother-in-law is kind and lenient, then I won't have to wear my *ghaghra* until I am an old woman of thirty or so. If she is strict and narrow minded, then she could make me wear them at twenty or twenty five."

Asked if she would ever resist her mother-in-law's decision, she replied:

> "How could I do that? If the mother-in-law insists, then I have to obey. But most mothers-in-law are good. They won't make us wear these *ghaghra* because they are no longer in fashion. They are for old women now. We don't even know how to put them on. Look at the *Kanbi* girls. They have advanced. They wear saris now."

As the summer progressed and *anu* preparations reached a frenzied height, Vasantben's *ghaghra* were hanging in a line on the verandah, awaiting their borders which were being machine-stitched by a tailor who had set up his equipment at Vasantben's house (fig. 7:1). She had made eleven *ghaghra* which she seemed to regard with a strange combination of pride and embarrassment - pride at having made them, and at the final product, but embarrassment at the idea of wearing them.

This embarrassment did not prevent her from leaning over the tailor and supervising his border sewing which seemed to excite her more than her own handiwork. And indeed the borders were more complex and intricate than those worn by older women. They consisted of extravagant quantities of different coloured cloth, piled up in layers and decorated with machine embroidered motifs. Far from ousting hand embroidery, machine embroidery co-existed with it within the same garment, but whereas in older *ghaghra* the machine sewn border was narrow and fairly plain, in the new *ghaghra*, it was two or three times its previous width and complex in design.

Once Vasantben's eleven different borders were completed, she became quite proud of them and showed me each one with enthusiasm, pointing out her favourites. But the idea of wearing the *ghaghra* remained a sore point. Once I asked her to put one on and she had difficulty adjusting the garment and had to call for her mother's assistance. She and her companions giggled profusely at the result, rather as European children might laugh when trying on their mothers' shoes. Vasantben complained that the skirt was too heavy and she could not walk with it on. Within a minute, it was consigned to the bed. Vasantben's curious attitude seemed less an individual whim than part of a consensus shared amongst the new generation of *Kharak* women and girls, for whenever I visited *Kharak* families, I invariably found girls preparing *ghaghra* but reluctant to wear them. A common complaint was that the they were too *jada* (thick, heavy) or simply that the "feshen" had gone. There was a strange disjunction between the extraordinary amount of time spent embroidering *ghaghra* and the adamant insistence that they would never be worn. This painstaking and elaborate embroidery was, it seems, a matter of both pride and embarrassment to its makers. It was simultaneously valued and denigrated.

Pride in the *ghaghro* revealed itself not only when women and girls discussed motifs and stitches together while they sat embroidering, but also at the *anu* ceremony when the entire trousseau[1] was displayed to relatives and friends. The *ghaghra* were usually either laid out on string beds or hung on a rope, but whatever the particular form of display, they always occupied a prominent

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1 Listed below are the contents of Vasantben's trousseau which was fairly representative of the trousseaux given to *Kharak* girls in Jalia in 1989: Clothes and household goods: 11 embroidered *ghaghra* (made by Vasantben), 21 saris with 21 matching blouses and petticoats, plastic bangles and bangle box, silver anklets, 70 steel vessels, 1 brass water pot (*hel*), quilt (*rajai*), 2 bed covers (*chadar*), mattress (*matla*), wedding stool (*asan*), metal plaited dowry chest (*pathara*), electric wall clock, wooden display cabinet.

place, despite the fact that an additional twenty odd saris were provided for the immediate wear of the new wife who nowadays was considered too young to wear a *ghaghro* immediately on reaching her conjugal home.[2]

Embarrassment about the *ghaghro*, on the other hand, revealed itself not only in women's reluctance to wear these skirts but also in their attitude towards my embroidering a *ghaghro* myself. They laughed in disbelief when I expressed a willingness to learn, and Liliben's mother commented:

> "You don't want to bother with such things. You know how to read and write. Why should you make *deshi* (local) embroidery? That is only for we people who know nothing. Liliben has not even studied one book."[3]

Despite a certain reluctance, she began to teach me the process and soon became enthusiastic about my efforts. Other *Kharak* women would sometimes visit the house and I would visit their houses and reactions to my embroidering seemed at once to fluctuate between pleasure, enthusiasm and thorough disapproval. Some women would tell me I was wasting my time and that embroidery would ruin my eyesight. Commonly I was told: "yoghurt will form in the brain" (*magaj ma dahi thai*). Meanwhile men informed me that *deshi* embroidery was only for illiterates and that it would turn me mad (*pagal*) or that my mind would "become water". But some women, both young and old, would be pleased that I was learning and would supervise my progress and criticise my stitches with

Vasantben's Trousseau continued:Ornaments and decorations (made by her):
plastic beaded ornaments, crochet cloth, embroidered door hanging (*pardo*),
hangings for above the door (*toran*) (1 embroidered, 1 sequined, 1 glass straw),
embroidered wedding canopy (*mandap*), plastic straw mobiles, sequin photograph
frames, plastic woven bags, glass straw bags.

2 In the 1960's peasant girls would wear their embroidered *ghaghra* and *kapdu* as
soon as they reached their conjugal home. Parmar, who has collected a number of
folk songs in the area, records a song, sung by local women:

> "*Ghaghra*, embroidered with flowers and fruits and lace on the head we
> have never worn, but will wear when we go to our in-law's home.
>
> *kapdu*, embroidered with mirrors and beads, we have never worn, but will
> wear when we go to our in-law's home.
>
> *Chundadi* from Navanagar, decorated with parrots and peacocks, we have
> never worn, but will wear when we go to our in-law's home" (Parmar
> 1969:13).

3 The common local manner of ascertaining someone's standard of education was to
ask them how many books they had studied. "No books" meant total illiteracy
whereas "ten books" meant highly educated.

A *Kharak* tailor stitches borders onto a girl's *ghaghra* in preparation for her trousseau.

Fig. 7:1

Fig. 7:2 A *Kharak* woman, wearing a hand embroidered *ghaghro* with a machine embroidered *kapdu* and a synthetic sari. Her young son wears a Western style shirt and shorts.

interest. They seemed convinced that I was making the *ghaghro* for my own trousseau although they found it difficult to believe that anyone in their mid twenties would ever find a husband. One rather more sceptical woman informed her friends that I would cut it up and make it into handbags or *salwar kamiz* decorations which I would sell in "Foren" for a profit. She, like other women, was aware that embroidery had become high fashion in the cities and the cinema in recent years. Whereas only five years earlier their embroidered skirts were almost worthless in commercial terms, they could now be sold for between 100-150 rupees each. But *Kharak* women rarely sold their *ghaghra* although some women in the village, mainly *Kanbis*, had sold large quantities of embroidery to passing traders (*pheria*) for a good sum.[4]

Although it is mostly *Kharak* women in their twenties, thirties and forties who wear embroidery today, the embroidered *ghaghro* was never the exclusive preserve of the *Kharak* caste. It had, until recently, been worn by a number of farming castes in the area: *Kanbi, Karadiya Rajput, Pariwal Brahman, Sathwara, Talabda Koli*. They all shared the same design sources and motifs and embroidered in a similar style using silk threads and mirror, usually on a red background (Parmar 1969:47). It was, they claimed, a practical garment for farming as it was *jada* (thick) and did not easily tear when they worked in the fields. In Jalia itself the embroidered *ghaghro* had been worn primarily by *Kanbis* and *Kharaks*, the two dominant agricultural groups in the village.

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4 Schneider has suggested that for Greek peasant women the lace they made for their trousseaux performed the dual function of indicating status and acting as a form of currency that could be stored and used in times of economic distress (Schneider 1980). Similarly it has been suggested that Gujarati women sell their embroidery in times of economic scarcity or drought (Hitkari 1981:foreword, Nanavati 1966). Certainly the recent drought (1985-8) boosted embroidery sales in the driest regions of Gujarat, particularly in Kutch. But Jalia women disputed the idea that embroidery was ever a useful form of currency. As one woman put it: "We could not have sold our embroidery in the past. Who would have bought it? No one was interested in *deshi* clothes at that time. They would not have given anything for it. If we needed money we had to sell or pawn our gold earrings. *They* were worth something. Embroidery was worth nothing and anybody who sold it was really giving it away." Nowadays, with the emergence of new ethnic fashions amongst the Indian elite, embroidered clothes are recognised as valuable commodities. But despite this, women in Jalia, unlike women in some parts of Gujarat, were not willing to embroider expressly for sale as they felt that the payment would never be sufficient to compensate for the necessary hours of labour.

It is likely that historically *Kanbi* women were making and wearing embroidery prior to *Kharak* women[5], yet nowadays young *Kanbi* women are no longer wearing embroidered *ghaghra*. When a *Kanbi* girl said that she would never wear the old fashioned garment, it was true. There was not, to my knowledge, a single *Kanbi* girl in the village who was making *ghaghra*.. Neither were they displaying them at the time of their *anu* ceremonies. They were all wearing synthetic saris with plain blouses and petticoats underneath and these were the only types of clothes they accumulated for their trousseaux. Even some of the elder generation *Kanbi* women who had in the past both made and worn embroidered *ghaghra*, were now dressed in saris, having sold their *ghaghra* to itinerant traders.[6] Most *Kanbi* women were now disparaging about embroidered clothes which they saw as a sign of backwardness. Whilst there were a few older women who took pride in their past embroidery heritage, there were others who dismissed the *ghaghro* as *Kharak* dress as if it had nothing to do with the *Kanbi* caste.

Why is it that in recent years the appearances of the two castes have diverged so markedly, with *Kanbi* wives now wearing synthetic saris and *Kharak* wives wearing, though often reluctantly, modernised versions of the embroidered *ghaghro*? What were the factors that encouraged the *Kharak* to modernise the *ghaghro* rather than reject it altogether like their *Kanbi* counterparts? And why did *Kharak* women continue to embroider *ghaghra* at all in view of the reluctance of the younger generations to wear them?

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5 Sureshbhai Seth suggests that the type of *ghaghro* worn in the Bhavnagar district today is of *Kanbi* origin, being adopted by the *Kharak* at a later date (interview). This assertion is supported by stories concerning the origin of the *Kharak* caste. According to local tradition they were originally *Vaniya* (traders) in Rajasthan but were excommunicated for eating with a *Kanbi*. Thereafter they migrated to the East coast of Saurashtra where they settled amongst the *Kanbi* and learnt the latter's farming techniques. It is likely if they modelled themselves on the *Kanbi* at this time that they would also have started embroidering their clothes and wearing the local farming women's *ghaghra*. Parmar recalls how in his childhood *Kanbi* women wore and owned more embroidery than *Kharak* women (interview with Khodidasbhai Parmar).

6 Until recently women who wished to sell their embroidery bartered it in exchange for stainless steel vessels which were hawked to villages by itinerant traders (*pherias*) mainly from the *Vaghri* caste. Large quantities of embroidery were often exchanged for one small bowl or pot. Today women expect cash. For a summary of the development of the embroidery trade in the region, see Tarlo 1991.

In order to explore these questions, it is necessary first to describe in detail the clothing and adornment that *Kanbi* and *Kharak* women used to share, and to discuss its evolution over time. In particular I will focus on the *ghaghro* itself, its composition and essential features, tracing its evolution according to changes in technology and design over the past fifty years. These changes will be analysed in relation to parallel changes found in other handmade items that women prepare for their trousseaux and in the motifs of their tattoos. Through discussing the attitudes of village women both to their clothing and to their environment, it is possible to gain some insight into the reasons why *Kanbi* women have rejected embroidered clothes more rapidly than *Kharak* women who continue to make and wear them, albeit with reluctance.

Kanbi and *Kharak* Clothing and Adornment (1940)

The clothing and adornment of a young *Kanbi* or *Kharak* wife fifty years ago consisted of the following elements: *ghaghro, kapdu, sadlo*, jewellery and tattoos.

Embroidered *Ghaghro* (Skirt)

The embroidered *ghaghro* worn in Jalia and the surrounding area was a wrapped garment which when opened out formed a long rectangle slightly gathered at one end.[7] This rectangle was composed of two separate pieces of red *khadi* cloth, stitched together. The lower cloth (*choliyu*) was embroidered by hand while the upper cloth (*chadavo*), was left plain and was stitched to the *choliyu* after the latter had been embroidered. At the top of the *ghaghro* the material was slightly gathered and given a string band at the waist (fig. 7:3 a-c).

The lower piece (*choliyu*) was the largest and most visible part of the *ghaghro*. The embroidery always ran parallel to the width of the cloth, turning at a right angle at one end where it climbed vertically to form a triangular peak (*vadkyu*). A machine made border ran parallel to the hand made border at the outer edge of the cloth.

The *ghaghro* was worn by being wrapped around the body so that the embroidered peak (*vadkyu*) fell at the front. The ties were then tucked into the

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7 Parmar (1969) calls this type of garment a *chaniyo* as opposed to the stitched skirt, also found in Gujarat, which he calls a *ghaghro*. I have however used the term *ghaghro* for the wrapped skirt as this was the term used by Jalia women.

body and the whole garment hitched up an inch or two depending on the size of the wearer, and tucked in at the waist. It had no fastenings down the front which hung down in the form of a loose flap. The weight of the garment prevented it from opening too far and the tightness of the tucking at the top prevented it from falling down. Whilst labouring in the fields or doing household chores women usually tucked the bottom corners of their skirts into their waists. This allowed them easy movement but it also revealed most of the lower leg and was considered unrefined by high caste groups. Nowadays many young women who do not wish to wear the *ghaghro* say that they are frightened of it falling down and they do not know how to wear it.
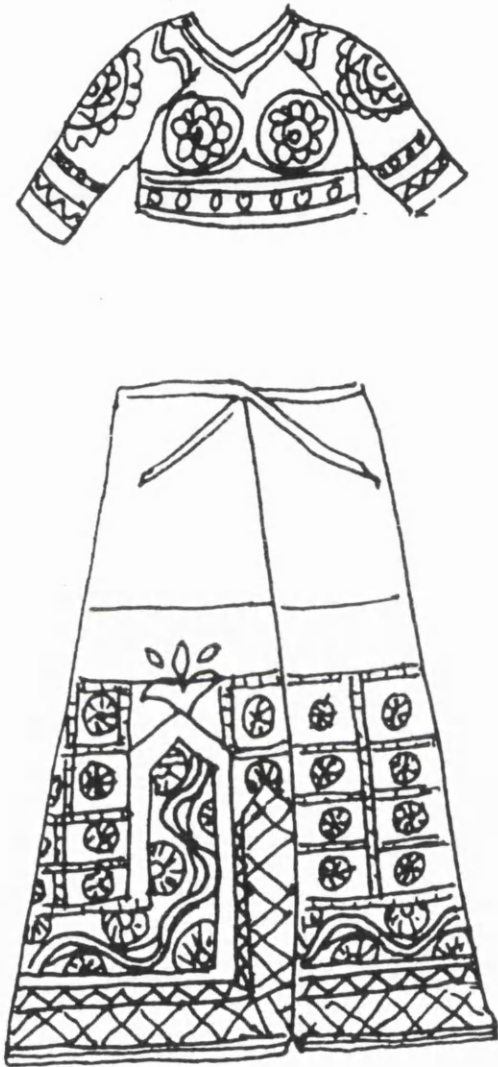
Embroidered *Kapdu* (Bodice)

The *ghaghro* was worn with a *kapdu*, which was composed of a front panel which fitted under the breasts, two breast pieces (often embroidered with roundels), two elbow length sleeves and two side panels. It was entirely open at the back, and was kept in place by two sets of strings which tied behind the neck and in the middle of the back (fig. 7:3). These *kapdu* could be plain but were often wholly or partially embroidered and were generally made from silk. Some *Kharak* women continue to wear plain or embroidered *kapdu* today whereas *Kanbi* women very rarely wear them unless they are old women who wear undecorated polyester *kapdu*..

Sadlo (Half sari)

A cotton printed or tie-dyed *sadlo* was wrapped once around the body and thrown over the head with the end piece coming over the right shoulder and hanging down the front to complete the outfit. The *sadla* worn by older farming women were usually composed of a blue and white floral and spotty patterns on a mud-red background. Younger married women wore a variety of brightly coloured *sadla*.

Jewellery

The jewellery of farming women in the 1940's was elaborate and heavy, consisting of thick silver anklets, large white ivory bracelets, a variety of gold or silver earrings worn in the upper, lower and middle ear. Round their necks they wore threads, necklaces and pendants and in their left nostrils they wore a gold nose ring, usually hooped. The middle toes of both feet were adorned in silver toe rings. Women did not wear any gold below the waist as this was considered an insult to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

(a): Front view of a *ghaghro* and *kapdu*.
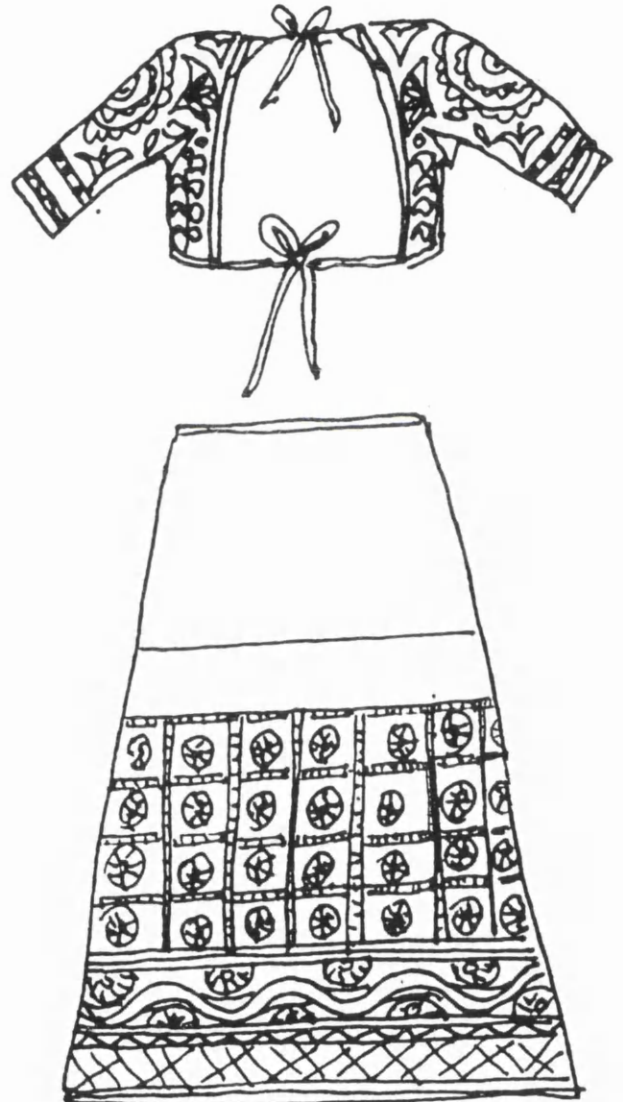
(b): Back view of a *ghaghro* and *kapdu.*, showing the strings which tie round the neck and back, leaving the flesh of the back exposed to view.
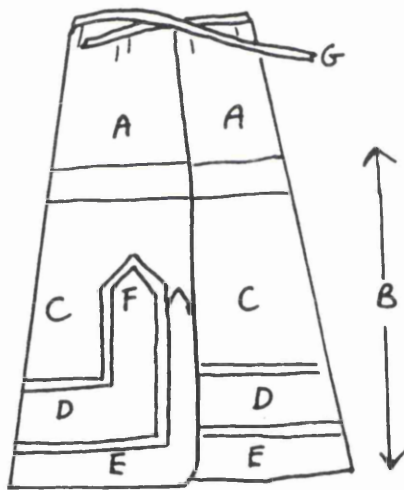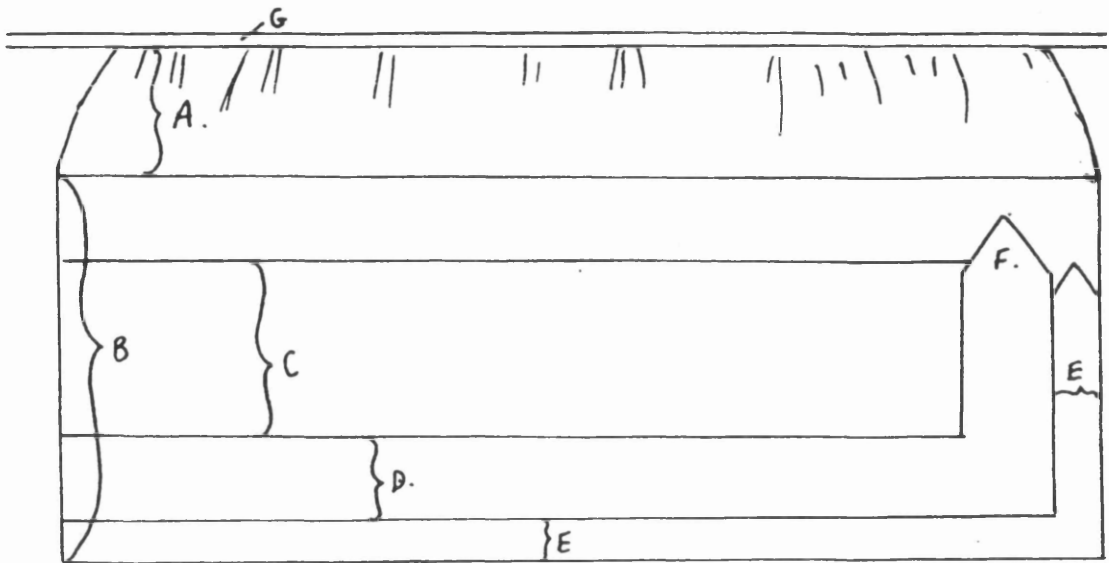
Fig. 7:3

A = *Chadavo*

B = *Choliyu*

C = Main hand embroidered area.

D = Hand embroidered border (*kor*).

E = Machine embroidered border.

F = Open flap (*vadkyu*).

G = String (*kaso*) which is tucked in rather than tied.

Fig. 7: 3 (c) Diagram showing the structure of the *ghaghro*.

Tattoos (*tajva*)

The entire neck, lower arms, lower leg and part of the chest were usually covered in tattoos, the face bearing one spot on the cheek and one on the chin. Most of these tattoos consisted of small formations of dots in simple geometric forms or motifs, each with a name. According to most village women today, these tattoos have always been purely decorative although in the past there was considerable social pressure to have them. Without tattoos a woman used to invoke the rebuke: "Do your parents have so little grain that they don't even give you tattoos?". There was also the added fear that without tattoos a woman might be reborn as a camel. One woman suggested that the facial tattoo on the chin was important if a woman died as it prevented her from becoming naked and ensured that she would be identified as human rather than animal after death.[8] Some scholars have suggested that tattoos were also prophylactic marks, designed to protect a woman from the evil eye (*najar*) (Maloney 1976), but women themselves deny such explanations.[9] Unlike amulets or black threads, which are acknowledged to be protective, tattoos are regarded as pure adornment. Even the belief in rebirth as a camel has attained the level of a saying without belief. As one old *Kanbi* woman put it:

> "They *say* we will be reborn as a camel. But have *you seen* it? Have you ever seen anyone reborn as a camel? Have you? Have you? No? Well, then. That's what I was told when I was young but our young know better."

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8 Crooke recalls a similar belief that women are judged in the next life according to whether or not they have tattoos. If not, they are told they will never see their parents in the other world but will be reborn as demons (Crooke 1926:298). He also records a belief in the Central Provinces that women can sell the ornaments tattooed on their bodies in the next life and live off the proceeds (ibid).

9 It is possible that the tattoo has undergone a process of secularisation over the years and that it once had a protective function. According to the *Vishnu Purana* the custom of tattooing originated from the time when Lord Vishnu went to destroy a demon who was wreaking havoc in the three worlds (earth, nether world, heaven). His consort, Lakshmi, begged him not to leave her unprotected and to guard her against evils. Vishnu sketched on her body the figures of his weapons, the sun, the moon and the holy basil plant and ordained that any of his devotees who bore such marks would be free from danger and evil (Census 1961, Vol 5:Pt.6:No.4:18). Whether this story and the idea of protection did in the past influence women to have tattoos, it is difficult to assess. Writing in the 1920's Crooke suggests that some tattoos are protective, some curative, and others purely decorative (Crooke 1926:196).

Change in *ghaghro* Design and Motif (1940 -1989)

Since embroidered clothing was the ordinary everyday wear of farming women there was no incentive for the women of Jalia to collect and preserve ancient pieces that might now provide historical insight into the origins and development of the craft. There is, however, substantial literature on Gujarati embroidery, much of which discusses the question of origins and some of which relates to Saurashtra (Nanavati 1966, Dongerkery 1951, Irwin 1964, Jain 1982, Masselos (n.d.), Seth 1980, Parmar 1969, Gross and Fontana 1981, Dhamija 1964, 1988).[10] Jalia women themselves were, as we have seen, more interested in the demise of the embroidery tradition than in its origins and I have confined my discussion to embroidery made in the past fifty years. By concentrating on the recent past, I was able to gain precise information concerning the embroidery made and worn by the different generations of villagers alive in the village today. Women of all generations were able to describe the contents of their own trousseaux and many still had examples of their trousseau embroidery stored in their dowry chests (see fig. 7:4). This made it possible to discuss recent changes in *ghaghro* design and motif with the people who had actually embroidered them. All contemporary *ghaghra* follow the same basic structure described below. What has changed is the content of the motifs within the structure. These changes of design are in turn related to changes in technique. The following account describes *ghaghra* from different women's trousseau collections. They are dated according to the time when these women first joined their husbands in Jalia, bringing their trousseaux with them.

Ghaghra in the 1940's and 1950's

In the 1940's and 1950's there was a fairly limited repertoire of *ghaghro* designs and motifs, with much repetition of certain basic stitching formations.

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10 Despite the voluminous literature, little is known about the origins of the craft. The *Rg. Veda* refers to embroidered garments (Dhamija 1988) but existing samples do not predate the Moghul Period. In Gujarat embroidery was clearly an established professional craft under the Moghuls and was taken up by Hindu men from the shoe maker caste (*Mochi*) who, by the 19th century, had established a distinctive style. This in turn is thought to have spread to rural women in Kutch and Saurashtra (Irwin and Hall 1973). Writing in 1838 without any of the contemporary nostalgia for rural life, Marriane Postans describes the appearance of Gujarati peasant women: "Miserable and squalid, these time-worn crones yet retain the besetting vanity of womankind; and a love of personal adornment is betrayed by bodices interwoven with bits of looking-glass, and heavy bracelets of coloured ivory which, being worn in considerable number, rattle hideously together on their bare skinny arms" (Postans 1839 vol 1:195). I have been unable to find any early references to rural women's *ghaghra*.

A young *Kharak* girl stands beside her mother's dowry chest (*pataro*). She too has been given a similar chest which has been taken by truck to her in-law's house following her *anu* ceremony earlier in the year. She wears a polyester petticoat, decorated with a few embroidered motifs, and a machine embroidered half-sari. This is a fairly unusual outfit for most modern *Kharak* girls do not wear either machine or hand embroidery.

Fig. 7:4

Black gram — Adadiya

Thicket of thorns — Kantha

Thicket of thorns — Kantha

Thread — Dori
Half closed eye — Ardakhi

Barley — Jowla

Buds — Dodva

Creeper of buds — Dodva vel

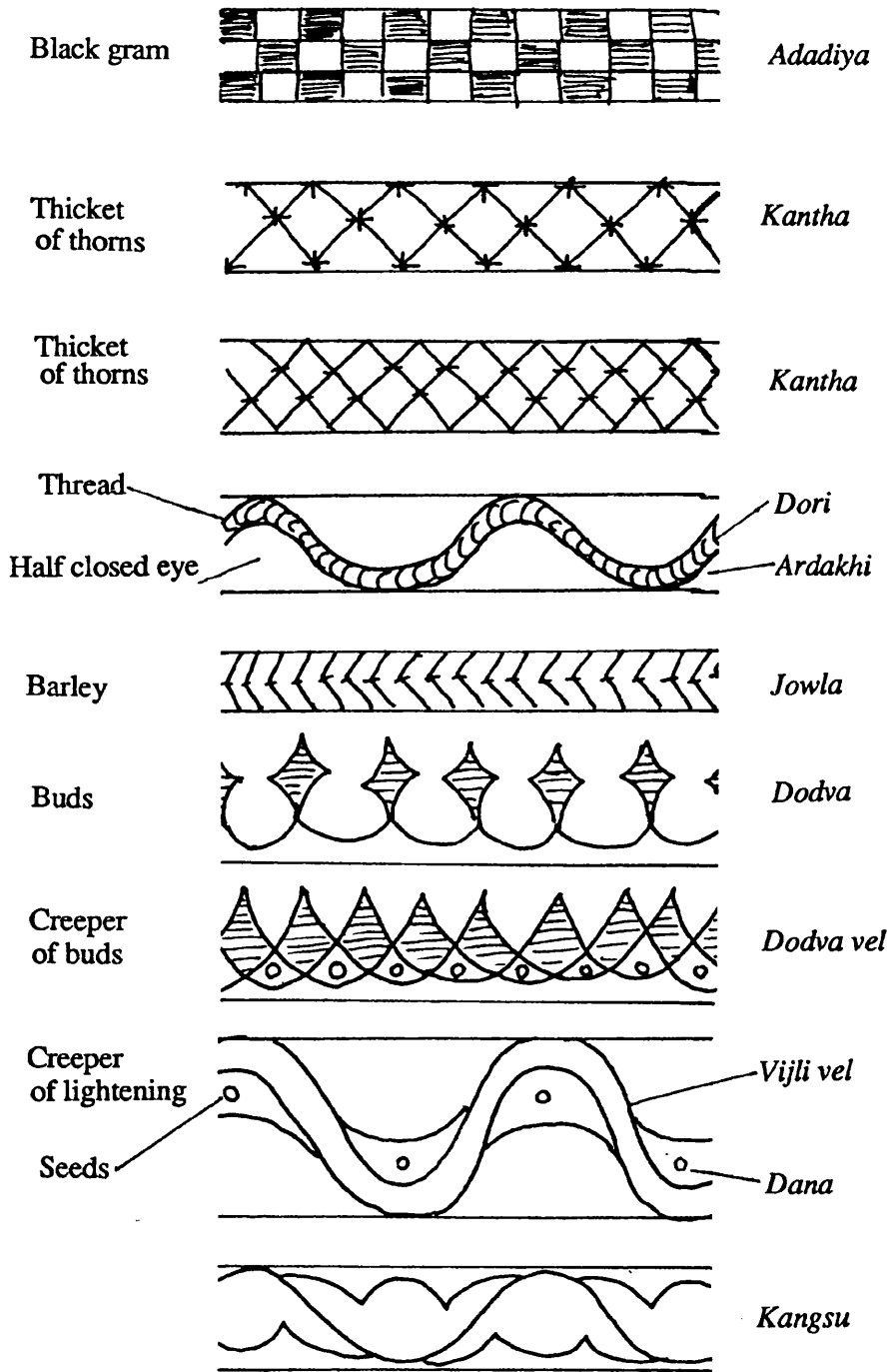Creeper of lightening — Vijli vel
Seeds — Dana

Kangsu

Diagram illustrating the stitches commonly found in the hand embroidered borders of *ghaghra*.

Fig. 7:5

Names were given, not so much to individual stitches, but to the eventual form that a combination of stitches resembled. Certain formations only appeared in the hand stitched border whilst others appeared more commonly on the main body of the embroidery. There was a strict system defining which colour of thread should be used for specific outlines or motifs. The framework of the border was always stitched in blue chain stitch (*dori*) while other outlines were in yellow chain stitch. Fig. 7:5 shows the types of stitch formation that were found in *ghaghra* borders in the 1940's and 1950's. They bore the names: seeds (*dana*), buds (*dodva*), black gram (*adadiya*), barley (*jowla*), thorns (*kantha*), lightning creeper (*vijli vel*), half closed eye (*ardhakhi*) and farmhouse door (*delo*).

These names referred mainly to aspects of the natural environment in which Jalia women lived. As agriculturalists, much of their year was spent weeding, harvesting and sorting the crops from their family farms, as well as grinding and preparing foodstuffs for the family's meals. The names of stitches appeared, then, to refer to the constituent elements of daily life: food, crops, plants, nature, the home.

Above the border, the main embroidered area was again embroidered with a series of outlines, worked in yellow chain stitch, often forming a square grid, always forming series of repeating patterns and motifs. Like the border area, the main area had its own grammar of stitches and forms which occurred repeatedly in different combinations. The most common motif was that of the *sikel* (circle), consisting of a small round mirror in the centre and a web of stitches flaring out from the mirror and forming a round. *Sikels* were always yellow or white and were embroidered in cotton when all other threads were silk or imitation silk.

Besides *sikel*, other common forms were largely taken from the plant and animal kingdom. Where motifs were filled in, they were stitched in herringbone stitches in blue, green or pink silk thread. Colours were always alternated so that two colours never appeared consecutively. The overall effect of the embroidery was elaborate and highly colourful. Popular stitching configurations consisted largely of plant forms: neem leaf (*limba*), fragrant flower (*kevda*), buds (*dodva*), seeds (*dana*), almond (*badam*), mango (*keri*), babul tree (*bavaliya*), and animal forms: parrots (*porput*), peacocks (*mor*) and peahens (*del*), and fish (*machli*) (see fig. 7:6).

A particular *ghaghro* was named according to the recurring central motif or composition of motifs on the main embroidered area. Fig. 7:7 shows four of the most popular *ghaghro* designs embroidered by wives who came to Jalia in the 1940's and 50's. The simple, fairly abstracted motifs were first drawn on the lower cloth (*choliyu*) using a stick dipped in ink. This task was usually performed by a local woman, renowned for her skill in drawing. She would be paid a few annas or given some return service in exchange for marking the design. A woman would bring her own cloth to the specialist and would choose her own design from the local repertoire which was learnt from seeing other women's skirts. She would then embroider the outline in blue and yellow chain stitch before filling in the motifs with bright blue, green and pink silk threads.

Women would start embroidering their first *ghaghro* cloth at the age of eight or nine. Most *Kanbi* and *Kharak* who came to Jalia in the 1940's and 50's completed between fifteen and-twenty five embroidered *ghaghra* for their trousseaux. As the *anu* ceremony drew near the bride's family would employ a tailor to work in their courtyard, stitching the embroidered *choliya* into complete *ghaghra* and adding simple machine sewn borders. These machine borders were three fingers wide, consisting of a simple combination of layered, applique and stitched cloth arranged in a fixed format. The tailor would also stitch together pieces of embroidered cloth for the *kapdu* (blouse) and make other trousseau items such as quilts and borders for wall hangings. Stitching charges were usually paid for by the bride's in-laws.

After marriage women would continue to embroider, particularly when they had daughters of their own who needed help with preparing their trousseaux. In the 1940's and 50's it was still possible to detect differences between the *ghaghra* worn by young wives and those worn by their mothers-in-law. Young wives wore the brightly coloured silk embroidered *ghaghra*, usually with green borders, whereas mothers-in-law wore *ghaghra* embroidered with cotton, using mainly interlacing stitch (*naka bharat*). *Naka bharat ghaghra* were composed of repeated patches of interlacing stitch, named according to their size and arrangement. Names of *naka ghaghra* were: sweet balls (*ladva*), babul tree (*bavaliya*), five betal nuts (*panch fofal*), spike and flower (*kangri phool*). Because they were embroidered in cotton and rarely contained inserts of mirror, these *ghaghra* were considerably duller than those worn by younger women (see fig 7:13a). Older women never wore green borders in their *ghaghra* or green *kapdu* since this colour was associated with youth and fertility. Those old
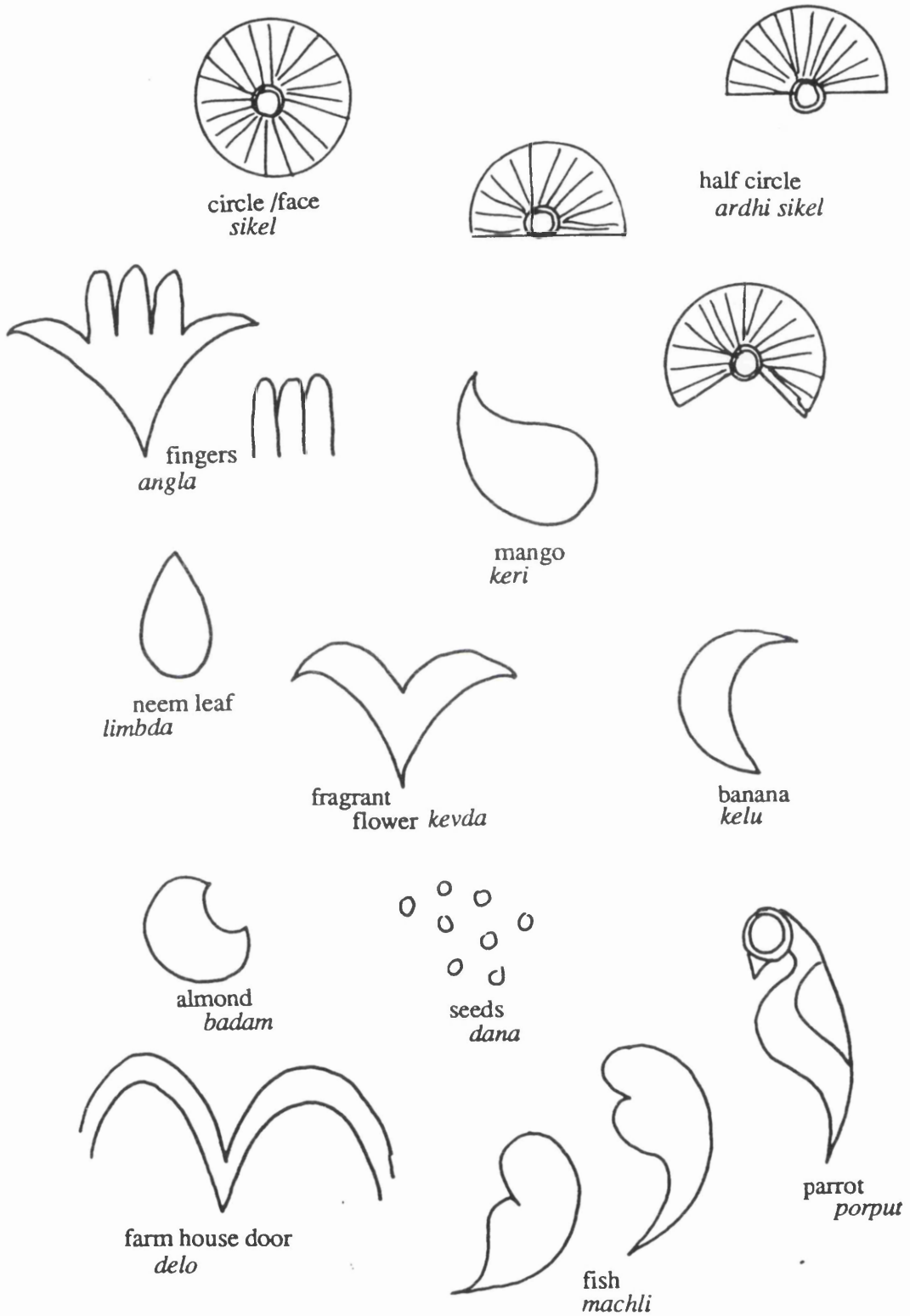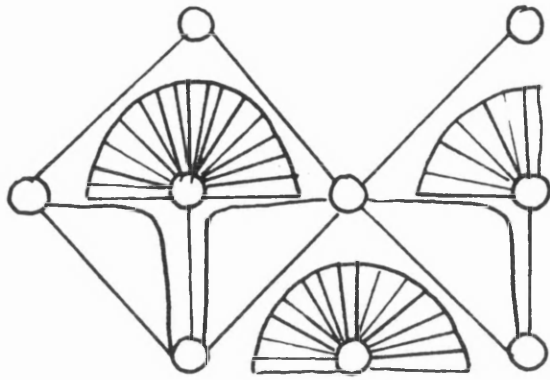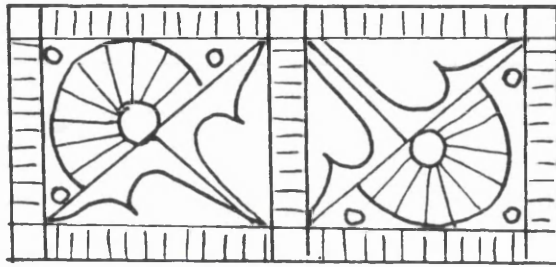
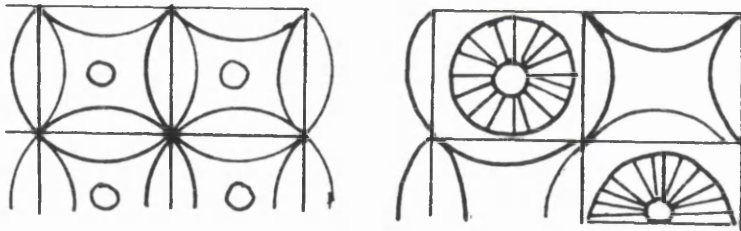Diagram illustrating the motifs commonly found in the main embroidered area of the *ghaghro*..
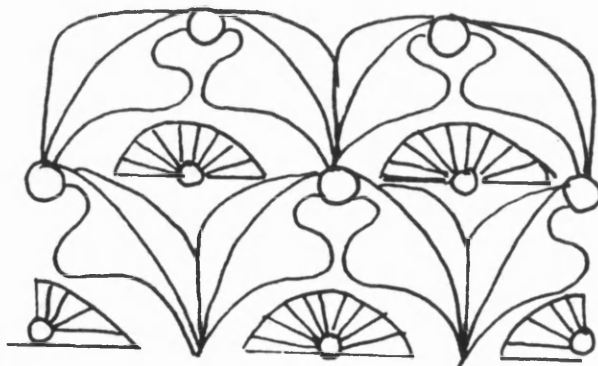
Half flower garden   *ardhi phulvadi*

Garden   *bagicho*

Whole cotton pods   *kala sakala*

Parrot creeper   *porput vel*

Some *ghaghro* designs particularly popular in the 1940's and 1950's although the designs themselves predate this time.

Fig. 7:7

women who wear *kapdu* today, tend to wear dark blue and pink *kapdu* with plain red *khadi* waistcloths and red and blue spotted *sadla* (half-sari).

Ghaghra in the 1960's and 1970's

By the 1960's and 70's, the repertoire of *ghaghro* designs found in the trousseaux of new Jalia wives had both increased and diversified from the designs popular in the 1940's and 50's. This did not involve rejection of the old designs and motifs which continued to be embroidered. It was a case of adding to these rather than replacing them. Neither did it involve any radical departure from the structural framework of the embroidery or the stitching techniques. The grammar, as it were, remained the same. What changed was the increasing variety of new motifs that appeared within the old framework of the embroidery. These were no longer restricted to depictions of the natural environment (flowers, fruits, birds, lightning). They now included a number of motifs depicting mechanised objects such as radios, clocks, ceiling fans, aeroplanes, trains (fig. 7:8). Previously, the few man-made objects that had found their way into the *ghaghro* had been taken from the immediate life and environment of village women (eg. farmhouse door, drinking bowl). But the new motifs which became increasingly popular in the 1960's and 70's depicted aspects of urban life which bore little relationship to the everyday lives of the embroiderers, for few farming families actually possessed radios, clocks and ceiling fans. These new motifs were not only incorporated within the familiar old structure of the *ghaghro* but were embroidered in exactly the same way as old motifs, using the same stitches and colour combinations. The popular *sikel* found new uses as a clock face, a wheel and a cup.

These changes in motif were related to changes in the technology of embroidery design. Many of the women who prepared their trousseaux in the 1960's had, like their mothers before them, visited the local specialist who had drawn the outlines of motifs by hand. By the 1970's, however, most women bringing their trousseaux to Jalia had visited a blockprinter's workshop in a local town or city prior to embroidering their *ghaghra*. These blockprinters were scattered in towns throughout the district where the craft was dominated by men from the *Brahma Kshatriya* caste or of Muslim origin. They had long practised the art of blockprinting but had not until recently transferred their skills to printing outlines for embroidery. They began to stock printed samples of all the available *ghaghro* designs. A woman would look through these samples, select her

preferred motifs and then pay the craftsman to print these designs on her *choliya* (*ghaghro* cloths).[11]

When block printers had first began to print embroidery designs for local farming women, they had in fact relied on these women for their design sources. Since women had a fairly rigid idea of how their *ghaghra* should look, the block carvers had taken care to carve exact replicas of previously existing designs which they copied from women's *ghaghra*. Yet this dependence was soon to be reversed. Blockprinters were so quick and efficient at printing designs and had such a large selection of motifs, that village embroiderers soon began to favour them above local women artists. The demand for hand drawn designs depleted rapidly with the result that very few women retained the skill of drawing and most became entirely reliant on the blockprinter.[12] Gradually, instead of providing replicas of pre-existing designs, blockprinters began to employ artists to create new designs which looked sufficiently familiar to village women but which did in fact incorporate new forms. By the early 1970's these apparently urban motifs began to appear regularly on the *ghaghra* of Jalia women.[13]

Whether new motifs originated in villages and were copied in the town or vice versa is unknown. But perhaps more relevant than the act of designing was the

11 The idea of copying embroidery outlines from sample books is not a new one. Masselos shows how royal patrons would select motifs from pattern books provided by professional court embroiderers in Bhuj in the late 19th century. Ironically Masselos admires the appealing freehand designs drawn by rural women which he sees as less regular but also less "sterile" and "constrained" than the designs from sample books (Masselos n.d.:44). But today, the very women who Masselos claimed "escaped the constraints of the literal" are now becoming increasingly reliant on the blockprinter and if Jalia women are at all representative, are no longer capable of drawing their own designs.

12 Only one *Kanbi* woman in Jalia had retained the skill of drawing by hand but her services were rarely demanded and her repertoire was limited to only a few designs. Most women had no comprehension of how to draw and regarded my ability to copy designs from their *ghaghra* with amazement. They assumed that I must have been taught each design beforehand and would not believe that I was simply transferring the image from the *ghaghra* to the page by copying.

13 Parmar suggests that European style motifs of marigolds, garlands and dolls first began to appear in Saurashtran embroidery in the 1930's (1969:24) but these were incorporated into the embroidery of the local elite, particularly those who received school education. They did not appear in farming women's skirts. Writing in 1895 Billington bemoaned the terrible effect of missionary influences on Indian embroidery. She named Kathiawar as one of the few places where "the most interesting and uncontaminated indigenous needle-craft" could still be found (Billington 1973 (1895):192).
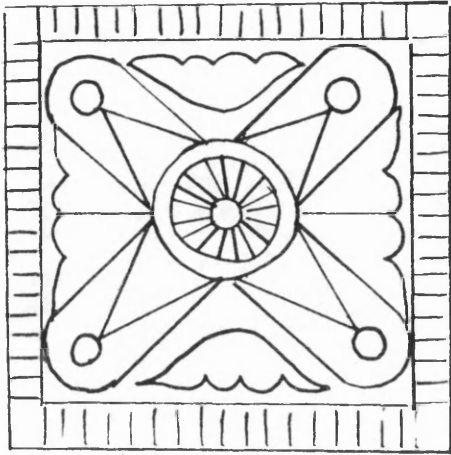
Fan *pankho*
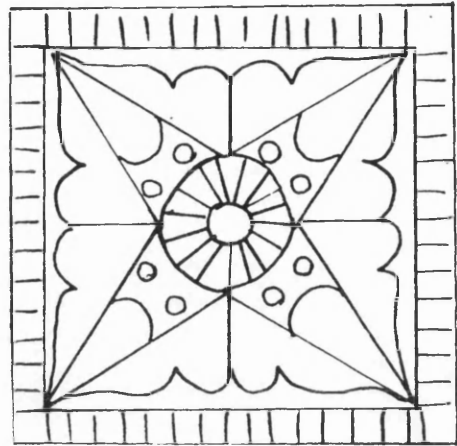
Aeroplane "Balun"

Clock *ghadiyal*
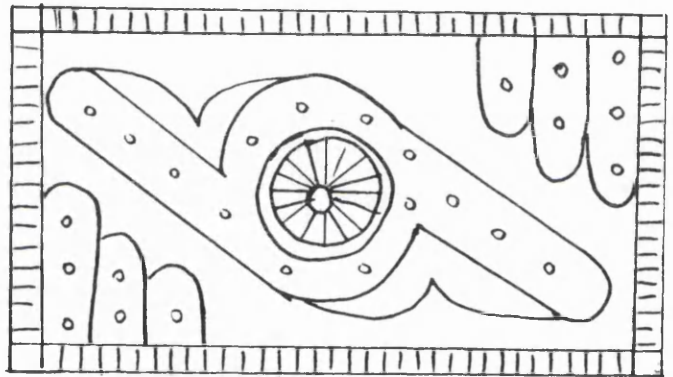
Radio "Redyo"
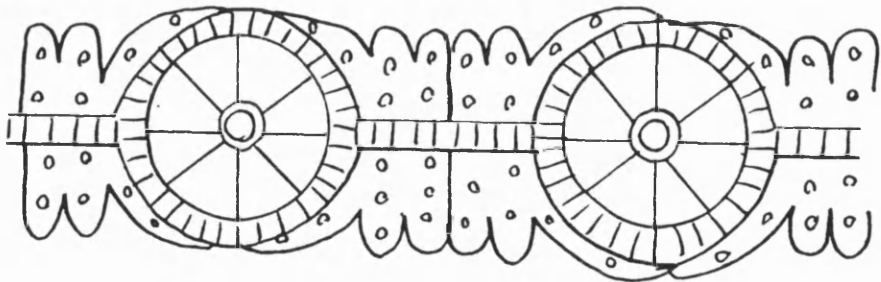
Train or Musical instrument, according to different opinions.
Gadi *Katra*

Ghaghro designs popular in the 1970's.

Fig. 7:8
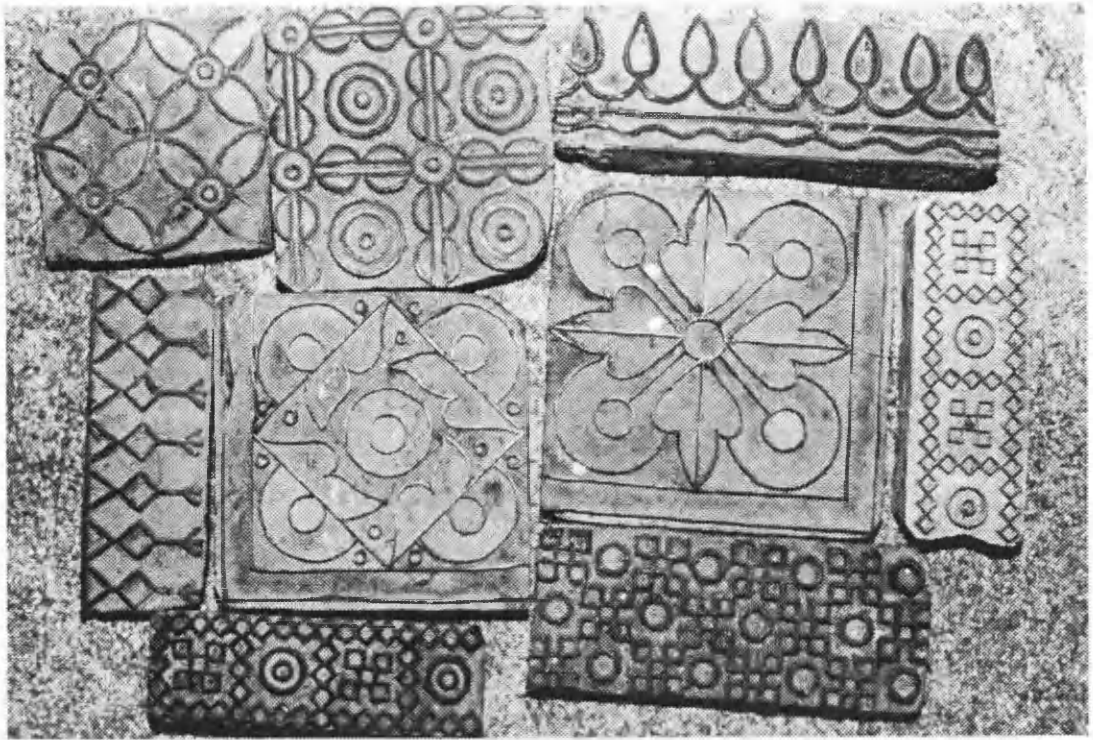
(a): Wooden blocks with metal filigree designs, used for printing embroidery outlines on *ghaghro* cloth.
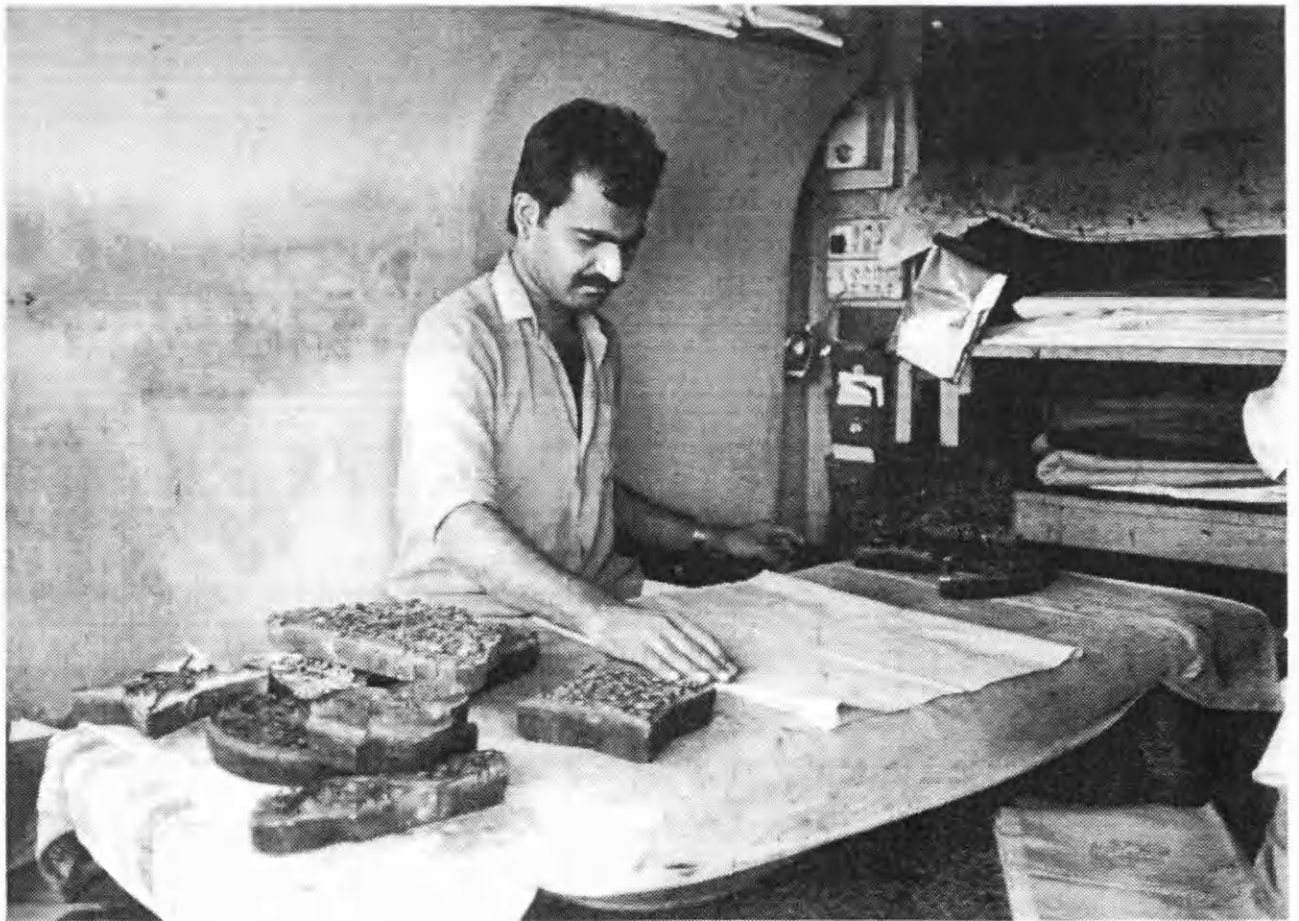
(b): A block printer in Bhavnagar city. He is printing embroidery motifs for a *Kharak* girl from Jalia. With the cloth she will make herself an embroidered bag

Fig. 7-9

act of naming these motifs. For names of *ghaghro* designs rarely came from blockprinters, but usually originated from the embroiderers themselves. It is quite possible that the person who first drew the aeroplane ("balun") motif did not think that his/her design resembled an aeroplane in any respect. What is relevant, then, is the fact that village women chose to interpret it as such and wished to incorporate it into their *ghaghra*. The most noticeable effect of the rise of blockprinting was that the printer's shop became a reservoir of designs which were now centralised in towns and became increasingly standardised throughout the district. Secondly, the skill of drawing by hand rapidly disappeared so that women were no longer in control of design which was now in the hands of men who lived outside the village.[14]

Besides displaying an increasingly large range of motifs, other changes in the *ghaghro* included a more frequent use of cotton thread rather than silk thread which was no longer easily available. The tailor's machine sewn border also increased in size slightly at this time, though it remained fairly simple. There was no difference between the motifs on the *ghaghra* of *Kanbi* and *Kharak* women in the 1960's although by the 1970's there was a marked increase in embroidery production by the *Kharak* and a decrease by the *Kanbi*. While *Kharak* women were making between twenty-five and thirty-five *ghaghra* each for their trousseaux by the mid 1970's, *Kanbi* women had reduced the number of *ghaghra* in their trousseaux to between ten and fifteen. The embroidered *kapdu* was already a rarity by the late 1970's and only some *Kharak* women continued to embroider them. *Kanbi* women were choosing to adopt machine sewn blouses (*polka*), stitched by the tailor from plain polyester material. These blouses, unlike the older *kapdu*, covered a woman's back.

Ghaghra in the 1980's

By the 1980's *Kanbi* women had stopped embroidering *ghaghra* altogether and were buying synthetic saris from the city which they wore over blouses and petticoats made from poplin, polyester or tericotton and stitched by local tailors. *Kharak* women, however, continued to embroider *ghaghra* for their trousseaux.

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14 Not only are men now playing an important role in embroidery design, but they are also becoming increasingly involved in the craft of embroidery itself at a national level. As technological innovation increases, the craft is being gradually transformed from a predominantly female home-based craft to a male dominated commercial one (L.C. Jain 1986:874). Most new machine embroidery is performed exclusively by men, often living in cities or large towns. Similarly, in Europe, men's embroidery developed commercially while women's embroidery has usually been defined as "leisure" (cf. Parker 1986).

These new *ghaghra* displayed two major changes. Firstly, there was a tendency towards favouring larger and increasingly pictorial compositions of motifs. Whereas in the past the vast majority of motifs had been confined within some kind of grid, these new *ghaghra* were often without a grid and consisted of different motifs built on top of one another to form a large pattern that repeated itself only a few times within one *ghaghro* (see fig. 7:15, p.308).

This tendency to favour more open designs was again facilitated by the technological innovations of blockprinters. During the past five years these men are relying less and less on their wooden blocks and are replacing these by what they call the "kerosene technique". To make a design, they place a piece of tracing paper over a magazine image and trace the design by making a series of pin pricks. To print the design, they place their perforated tracing paper over the cloth and rub a solution of kerosene and ink over the surface. The desired image appears on the cloth below in the form of small ink dots. This innovation has freed the blockprinter from his dependence on the block maker. It has also changed the standard size of a unit of design. The old wooden blocks, being fairly heavy and unwieldy were rarely more than four or five inches squared. But the perforated paper on which new designs are prepared are commonly the standard A4 size. It is therefore convenient and quick to make holes on the entire page so that a large area can be printed all in one go. This appears to have encouraged the opening out and elaboration of the older more rigid *ghaghro* designs.

The overall effect of this is that some modern *ghaghra* appear more free in design, and less blatantly repetitive or constrained by geometric forms. The very designs that had been most favoured in the early 1970's (radio, clock, aeroplane, fan) almost disappeared completely in the early 1980's as they did not conform to the new preference for more open designs. However, the *objects* that these designs depicted re-emerged in a more literal, naturalistic form on the machine stitched *ghaghro* borders.

It is the machine-sewn borders, made by local tailors that form the most distinctive feature of the contemporary *ghaghra* made by Jalia women today. In the early 1940's these borders had occupied no more than two or three inches of space at the bottom of the *ghaghro*. Now they occupy anything from five to seven inches and display an enormous range of technical skill and new motifs. The thin layers of machine-stitched applique cloth (*guna*) which form the edge

Car
Gadi
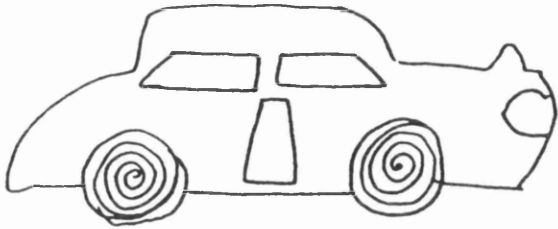
Clock
ghadiyal

Duck
Batuk
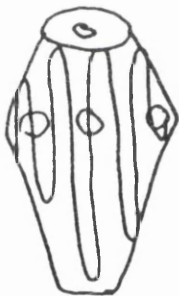
Drum
Dhol
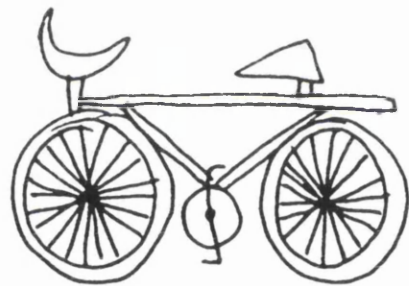
Bicycle
"Cycle"
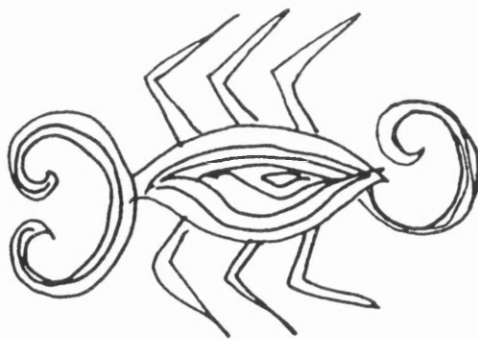
Scorpion
vichi

Motifs taken from machine embroidered borders on *Kharak* women's skirts, made in1988 and 1989. They are more naturalistic than hand embroidered motifs and are made by *Kharak* tailors who draw around cardboard cut out shapes with a pen and then embroider the motifs.

Fig. 7:10
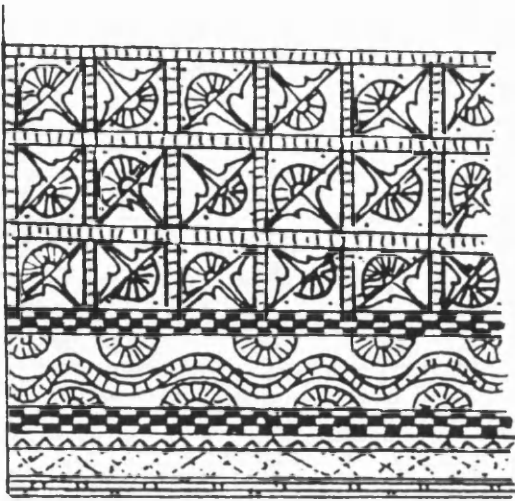
made c.1950

ghaghro name: Garden (*bagicho*)

Border name: Lightening Creeper (*vijli vel*).
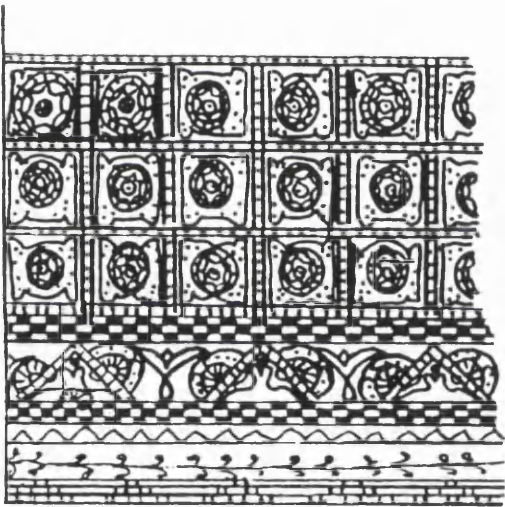
made c.1970

ghaghro name: Cup and Saucer (*rukhabi*).

border name: Parrot and Electric Fan (*pankho porput*).
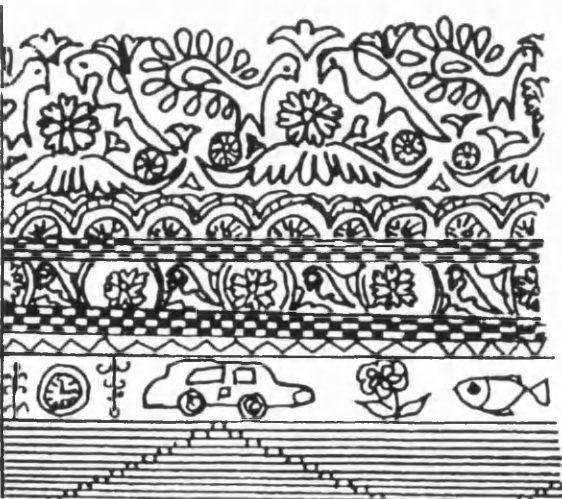
made in 1988

ghaghro name: Five Roots (*panch thad*).

border name: Parrot and Lotus (*porput gota*).

Cross section of three *ghaghra*, showing the increasing emphasis on machine made borders and the comparative opening out of designs.

Fig. 7:12

(a): Potted plant and peacocks

(b): Plant, clock, temple and flowers.

Details of the end flap (*vadkyu*) of two *ghaghra* showing the machine made borders.
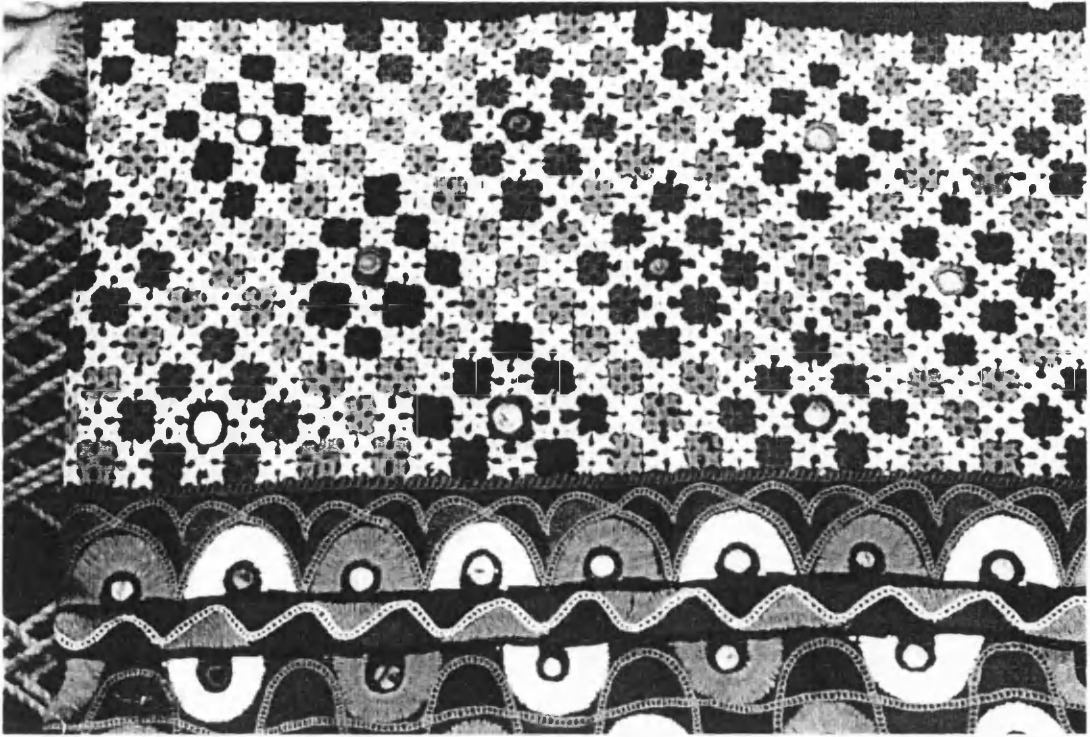
(a): *Bavaliya Bharat* or *Naka Bharat* (interlacing stitch, worn mainly by older women.
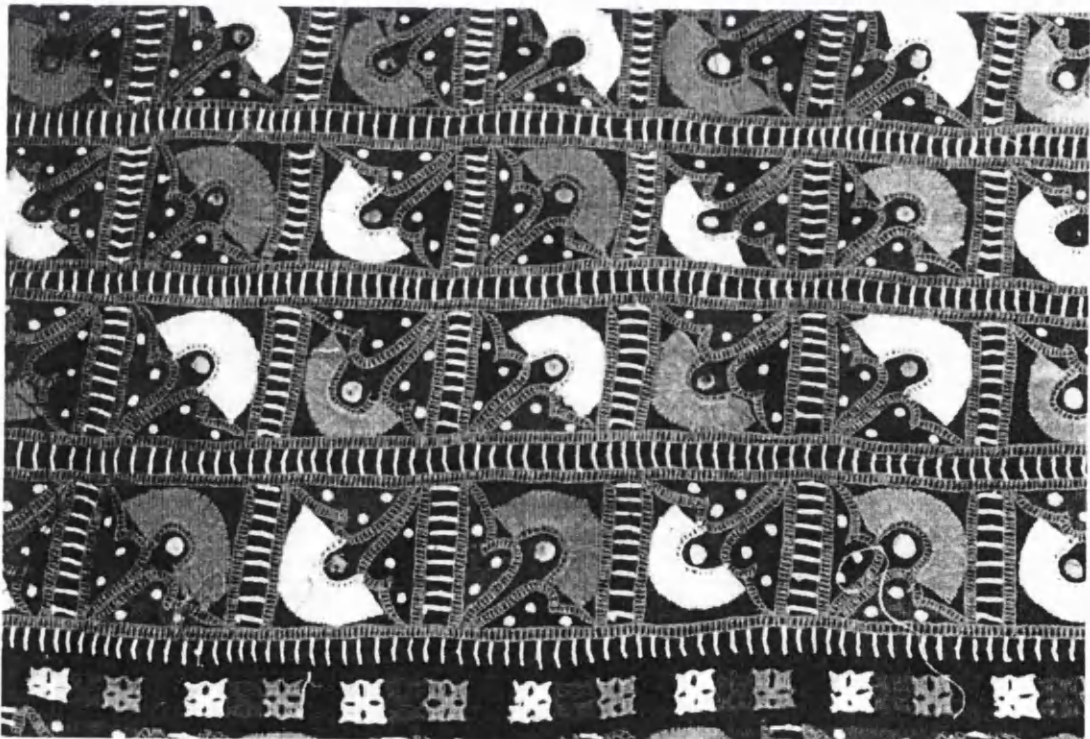
(b): *Ardhi Phulvadi* (half-lower garden).

Details of *ghaghro* embroidery. Two old designs, popular in the 1940's and before.
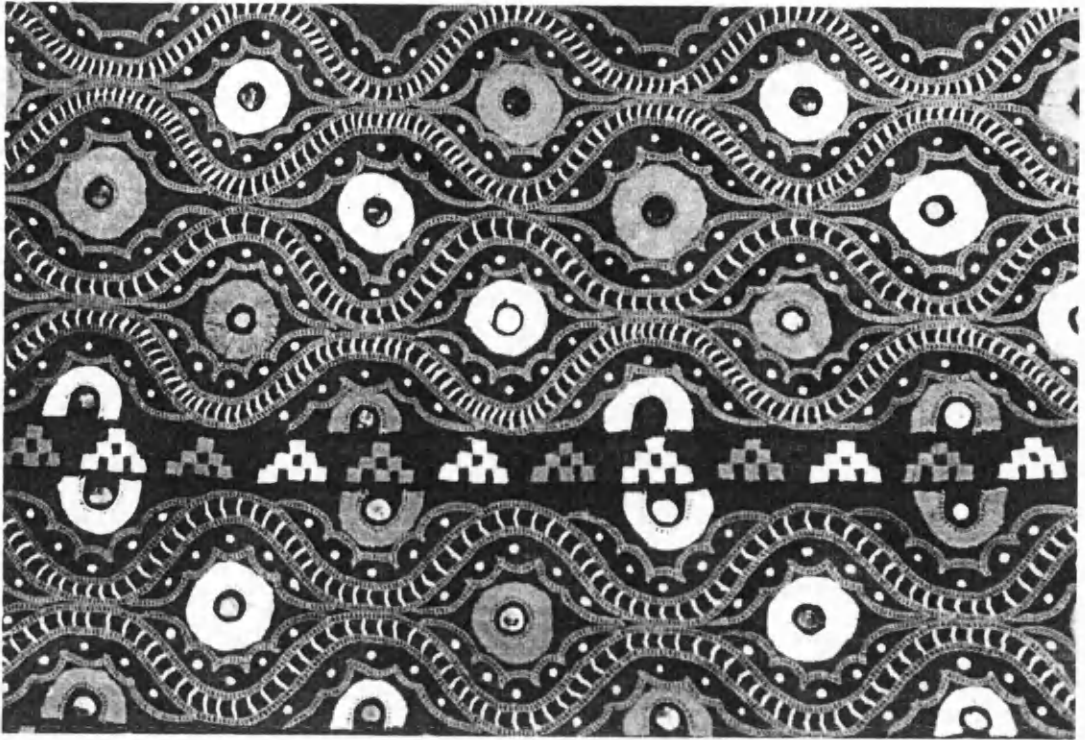
Fig. 7:13

(a): *Nau Nadi* (nine rivers)
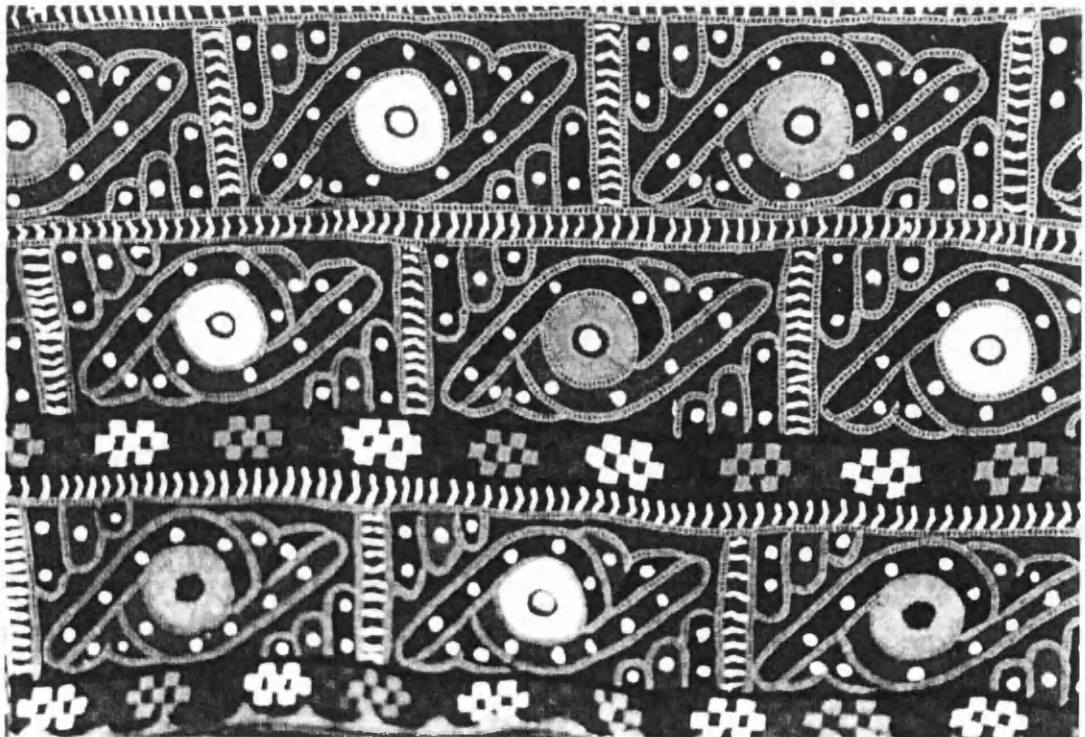
(b): "Redyo" (radio)

Details of *ghaghro* designs popular in the 1970's.

Fig 7.14
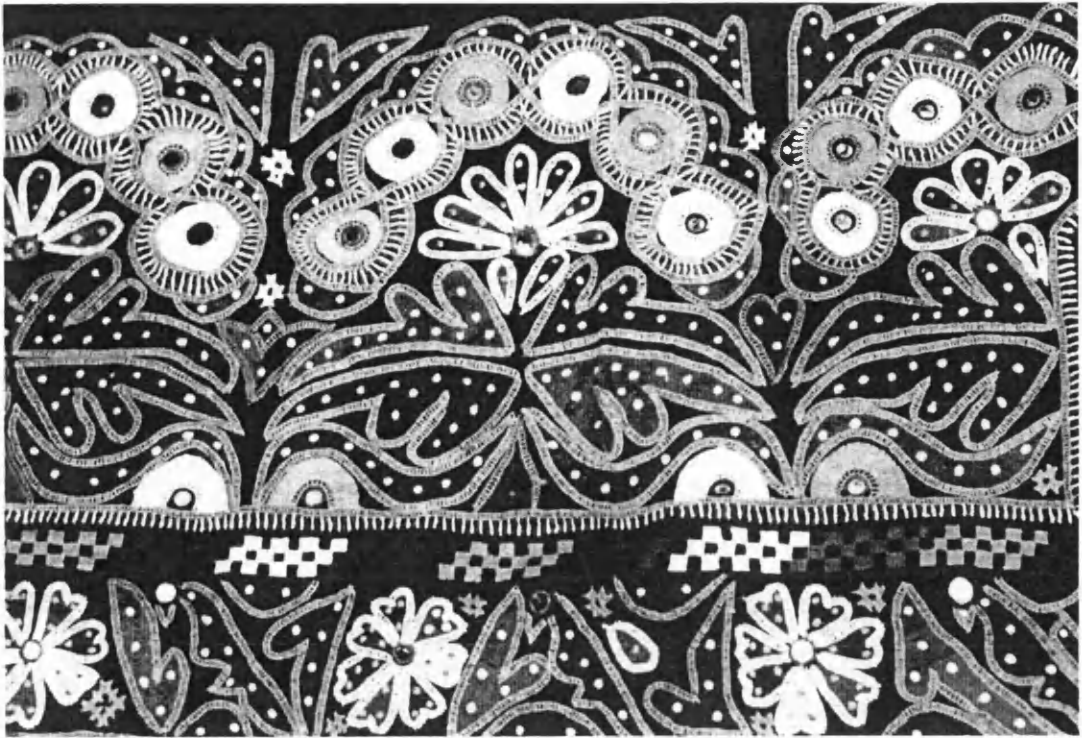
(a): *Suraj phul* (sun and flower)
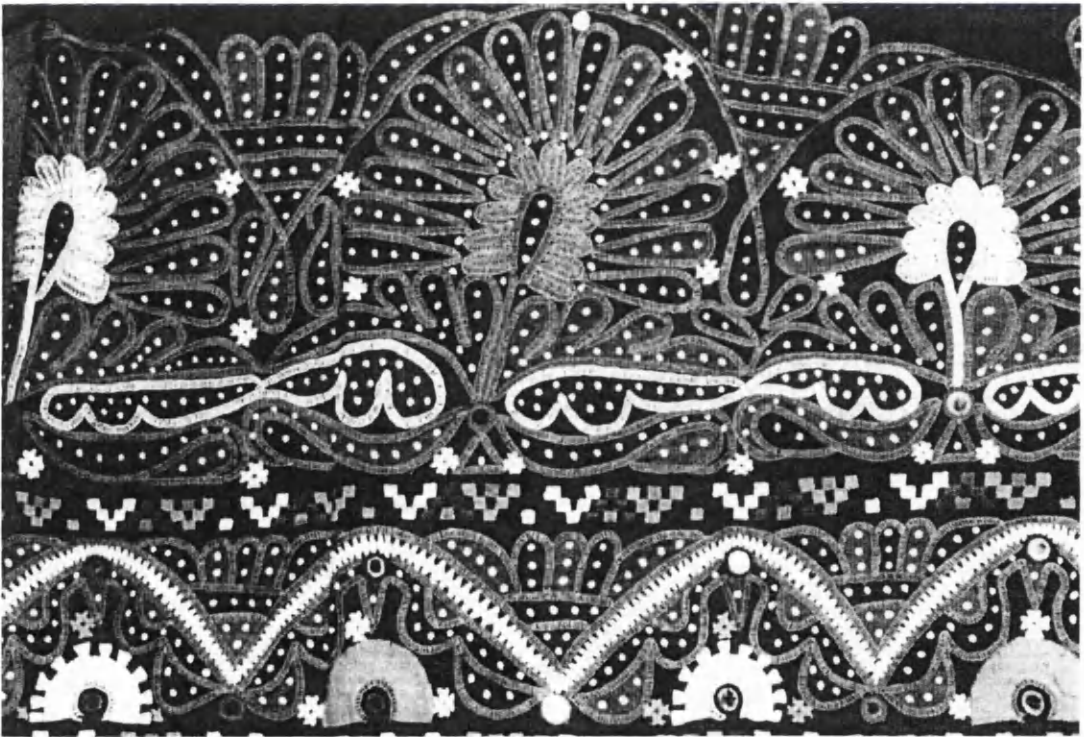
(b): *Naliya* (coconut tree).

Details of *ghaghro* designs popular in 1988/1989.

Fig 7:15

of the *ghaghro* have increased from three layers of coloured cloth to as many as fifteen layers in some *ghaghra*. New designs have been invented by tailors which involve folding, layering, and quilting pieces of cloth. Materials favoured are usually shiny, synthetic and bright, including fluorescent pinks and sometimes silver tinsel thread. And whereas in the past, the tailor had stitched wavy lines or a simple "thorn" pattern, he now does machine embroidered versions of flowers, animals, buildings, radios, clocks, cars, and bicycles (see fig. 7:10). Fig. 7:11 shows a cross section of three *ghaghra* made by three generations of *Kharak* women in one household. In the 1988 *ghaghro*, the machine made border is large and pictorial, as opposed to the earlier *ghaghra* where the borders are small and simple.

The highly complex machine embroidered borders which *Kharak* women favour today are so technically demanding that none of the Jalia tailors from the *Darji* (tailor) caste could make them. Instead the *Kharak* have a few tailors from their own caste who are scattered throughout various villages in the district. They specialise in these complex machine embroidered *ghaghro* borders, making designs by drawing around cardboard cut out shapes. These in turn have been taken from magazine images and picture books and have entirely broken away from the original highly stylized forms. Instead they are naturalistic depictions, immediately recognisable by outsiders as well as by village women. Tailors charge large fees for their services, making *ghaghra* considerably more expensive than ready-made saris and petticoats available in the shops.

In this final stage of *ghaghro* design, then, the *Kharak* have developed their own modernised versions of the *ghaghro* while the *Kanbi* have rejected the garment altogether.

Some Problems of Interpretation

I have outlined the evolution of the *ghaghro* over the past fifty years both in terms of technology and design. The question remains, however, as to how and indeed if these designs should be interpreted, and at what level. On the one hand there is clearly a definite grammar to *ghaghro* design. All have the peaked *vadkyu*, all have the set formation of two borders, and all have an established vocabulary of colours: outlines are yellow or blue; *sikels* are yellow or white; *jowla* (barley) are blue and white; *dana* (seeds) are white and the filling in of

motifs and forms is blue, green and pink. These rules present a framework which is rarely rejected or questioned by Jalia women, even today. When I began to embroider a *ghaghro* and once used yellow instead of blue for a border outline, it was quite simply "wrong" and I was told to unpick it and start again. The structure of the *ghaghro* was therefore fundamentally fixed, but no one could ever suggest why this should be or what this represented. Neither, of course, did they consider it a reasonable question to ask. "A *ghaghro* must be made like this because this is how *ghaghra* are made" was the closest I could get to an explanation. Jalia women were no more or less able to explain the grammar of their *ghaghra* than the average English woman is able to explain the structure of the English language.

Regarding the significance of the content or forms embroidered on *ghaghra*, there was also much ambiguity. Take, for example, the *sikel* form. Though the term *sikel* is a Gujarati word for face, the *sikel* form did not have the fixed meaning of face and it was used more like an equivalent of the English word "circle". On some figurative embroidered wall hangings the *sikel* did indeed act as a human or animal face. Yet on *ghaghra*, it often represented a flower head, a tree or a cotton pod. And when *sikel* forms appeared in isolation, they were not intended to "represent" a row of faces. They were seen quite simply as decorative round forms. Asking the meaning of *sikel* was, therefore, inappropriate for a *sikel* was simply a round formation of stitches with a mirror in the centre which could be used to represent a variety of different things. As Paine has pointed out, names of embroidery patterns often refer to what the patterns resemble rather than what they represent (Paine 1990:17).

Similar ambiguity surrounded the names of other design elements. The checkboard design, found in most *ghaghra*, was known as *adadiya*. Some women would insist that this did not refer to anything while others would say it was a reference to *adad*, a black pulse with which they cooked. Such women claimed that each check represented a dried pulse.[15] The design itself was, however, an ancient one, found in early Jain manuscripts and paintings. Here each check represented a unit in a cosmological system of counting and dividing. In Gujarati the word for division into two parts is *adadhun* and it is possible that the word *adadiya* is a corruption of this and that over the years a

15 According to Fischer and Shah who found the same design in wall paintings in the Saurashtran village of Ratadi, *adadiya* means "small slices of sweets made from black *adad*-grains" (Fischer and Shah 1970:63).

system of counting and division has come to be interpreted as pulses owing to the similarity in the two linguistic terms. Certainly the local specialist in Gujarati art and folklore, Khodidasbhai Parmar, regarded the chequered design on women's *ghaghra* as a representation of a divine system of counting (interview). But no woman in Jalia ever came up with such an explanation. This raises the question as to whether women had once copied the design into their embroidery, knowing its religious significance, or whether instead they had copied it in ignorance or had simply invented it for themselves. Perhaps after all, such cosmological interpretations never existed at a village level or have been lost and transformed over time. Or perhaps, as Cardew suggests, it is simply inappropriate to seek verbal explanations of visual phenomena which may take the very form that they do "precisely because they cannot be explained away" and are "not amenable to articulation in words" (Cardew:1978:18).

The fact remains, however, that *ghaghra* are composed of set formations and stitches which take their name from natural phenomena and which, when joined together, make up representations of certain aspects of the local environment. Yet, as Masselos has pointed out, embroidery is not a form of graphic realism, for women are selective about the aspects of life that they choose to portray (Masselos n.d.:41). Taking birds as an example, women embroider peacocks, peahens and parrots. These are the birds that appear in their farmsteads and fields. They are thought beautiful, auspicious and romantic and frequently appear in local songs. The dancing peacock in the early morning is, they say, the herald of the rains, the sign of a good monsoon in the coming months. And although such birds were common everyday sights, people never ceased to point them out to one another and appreciate their beauty. Yet other local birds like crows and kingfishers were never embroidered on *ghaghra* as these were considered inauspicious, the heralds of potential misfortune.

Similarly, the fruits, nuts and flowers that appeared on early *ghaghra* were all considered auspicious. They were highly valued, desirable and worthy of offering to the gods. And the *ladva* (sweet balls), found on the *ghaghra* of older women, were not merely sweets, which are themselves associated with auspiciousness, but were the specific sweets eaten and distributed at weddings, that most auspicious of all occasions. What these *ghaghra* designs portray, then, is an idealised picture of the pleasurable and auspicious things in life, the pleasant aspects of the local environment (cf. Masselos n.d.:43).

But do the women of Jalia attribute anything more than this general auspiciousness to their *ghaghra*? From what women say, it seems not. Yet around the border edges of the *ghaghro*, other seemingly less desirable images appear such as *kantha* (thorns) and *kangra* (spikes). Although women never explained these, it is possible that they originated as motifs of protection. Frater, describing the embroidery of the *Rabari* women of Kutch, writes "the *kungri* design is found decorating and so protecting especially those elements of greatest importance in Rabari life" (Frater 1975:53). Paine suggests a similar explanation of the zig-zagged embroidery that lines the edges of Palestinian clothing, and is locally known as *tishrifeh*, meaning "to make good". She illustrates how zig zags and triangles are commonly found in the borders of embroidery in many parts of the world, and suggests that cuffs, skirt edges, necklines, and other openings are particularly vulnerable to malevolent forces and are in need of heavy embroidery for protection (Paine 1990:133-4). In Jalia the *kangra* design is also found in the borders of wall hangings, in the tattoos on women's arms and sometimes on shepherd's faces. Again there is a discrepancy between local explanations which focus on the decorative and outsider explanations which interpret tattoos as a form of diagrammatic protection against the evil eye (cf. Maloney 1976, Frater 1975) The two explanations are not as incompatible as they first appear. What originates as a sign of protection may in time become a sign of beauty, since beauty is in fact indicated by the suggestion that it is worthy of protection. Similarly although women claimed to choose tattoos for aesthetic and social reasons, their fear of what might happen if they were not tattooed suggests that the tattoos may indeed have been protective. Certainly the belief persists that desirable things should be protected from the evil eye. Hence a *Bharwad* (shepherd) woman binds her new ivory bangles with black threads, destroying their perfection so that "the eye will not occur" (*najar na lagse*) and many women place a black mark on the foreheads of their babies for the same reason. But these are cases where the prophylactic qualities are acknowledged. It is possible that where protective designs have become incorporated into larger more decorative designs, as in the case of embroidery, they become just another decorative element, and the once protective function dissolves over time.

What is clear is that local interpretations of the meaning of design elements can vary both over time and place (cf. Jain 1982). The scorpion motif presents another example of this. In Jalia I did not come across any scorpions embroidered by hand on womens' *ghaghra*, although I did occasionally come

across scorpions in the machine embroidered borders made by tailors. Women did not express any particular attitude to these embroidered scorpions, but regarded them as just one amongst many images of flowers, rabbits, drums, bicycles and cars. But according to Parmar, the scorpion motif, which also appears in tattoos, is a sex symbol that was in the past commonly found at the top of the *vadkyu* of the *ghaghro*, at the entrance to the woman's thigh. These scorpions were not, it seems, merely decorative. They were potentially malevolent to anyone who should usurp a woman's *ghaghro* and by implication, her husband's bed. Parmar recalls a song which runs:

> "Manibai is having her bath, *matavala lal*,
> The scorpion has climbed her *ghaghra*,
> It climbed up and bit her, *matavala lal*."
> (in Parmar 1969:57-8)

Here the scorpion in the song bit a woman's husband's lover. According to Parmar, dying women would often say: "If my *ghaghra* are worn by my husband's second wife, she will be bitten by the scorpion". Here the scorpion seems to be at once decorative, protective (of the wife's rights), malevolent (towards the impostor) and phallic. Yet in Jalia women have ceased to embroider it altogether and where it does appear, it no longer occupies a unique position against the woman's thigh, but is now incorporated along with other animals, plants and objects into the machine embroidered border where it is just another motif without specific value.

Yet although women in Jalia today do not make elaborate symbolic interpretations of their embroidery designs, they none the less select and favour certain motifs with great consistency in their popular arts. These motifs manifest themselves not merely in *ghaghra*, but also in other embroidered items which women make for their trousseaux and in tattoos. The question arises as to what extent these represent a change in the value system or life style of village women. In order to tackle this question, it is necessary first to examine the changes that are taking place in other popular arts besides embroidered clothing.

Changes in Popular Arts (1940-1989)

Tattoos

Fig. 7:16 illustrates new developments in tattoos between the 1940's and the 1970's. The 1980's have been omitted since the art of tattooing had by then diminished. Few parents encourage their children to wear more than one or two facial marks today but most older women still bear the tattoo marks they were

given as children. Many are embarrassed by these as they feel tattoos mark them out as backward.

The early tattoos consisted mainly of a series of dots and simple shapes. Today many young women are unable to name their tattoo marks, but others recognise the forms of shrine, swastika, crescent, sun, flowers, seeds, bracelets, tree, scorpion and peacock. Like the images depicted in early *ghaghro* designs, these are stylized representations of the auspicious mixed with some more explicitly religious symbols such as the swastika and shrine. By 1975 however, tattoos, like embroidery, had become increasingly naturalistic and were beginning to depict a new range of desirable objects. These included the watch motif, drawn on the wrist as a substitute for a real watch[16] (some well-to-do women now wear real watches over the tattooed image). They also included the radio motif, scissors, aeroplanes, household utensils, waterpumps and increasingly naturalistic depictions of flowers and peacocks.

Household Arts

In household arts, a similar evolution was taking place. In the 1940's and 50's, farming women were embroidering not only their clothes, but also items for household decoration for their trousseaux. These consisted of wall hangings, door hangings, hangings to decorate shrines, wedding booth hangings and animal regalia for bullocks (fig 7:17). Most of these were used as a form of display only on special occasions such as weddings when the plain mud walls of houses were temporarily transformed into a bright array of colourful embroidered cloth. Like *ghaghra* they were embroidered with a mixture of geometric forms, parrots, peacocks, flowers, buds and sometimes other animals such as lions and elephants. The only item of permanent display was the *toran* (doorhanging) which was hung in the doorway of every house to protect its entrance and to welcome guests.[17]

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16 This might be compared to the recent custom in Greece of wearing T shirts with depictions of seat belts drawn across them (Brian Moeran, Personal communication).

17 In some of the wealthiest households of the ruling families of Saurashtra, embroidery was on permanent or semi-permanent display in the late 19th century. Much of this embroidery was made by high caste women or by professional embroiderers from the *Mochi* caste. In particular the *Kathi* community who ruled many of the central principalities were renowned for their fine silk embroidered house decorations. Much of their work now features in Museum collections of Indian textiles (cf. Calico Museum, Ahmedabad, the Shreyas museum Ahmedabad, and the Barton Museum, Bhavnagar).

Designs taken from the arm of
a woman now in her 60's. She
was tattooed in the 1940's.

Designs taken from the arm of
a woman in her mid twenties. She
was tattooed in the late 1970's.

ELBOW

shrine

bracelet

seeds
and flower

crescent

tree

swastika
flower

sweet balls

sun

shrine

scissors
peacock

sweet balls

sun ,
kitchen pincers

cot,
sweet balls

ladder,
    radio,

crescent,

seeds,

watch

WRIST
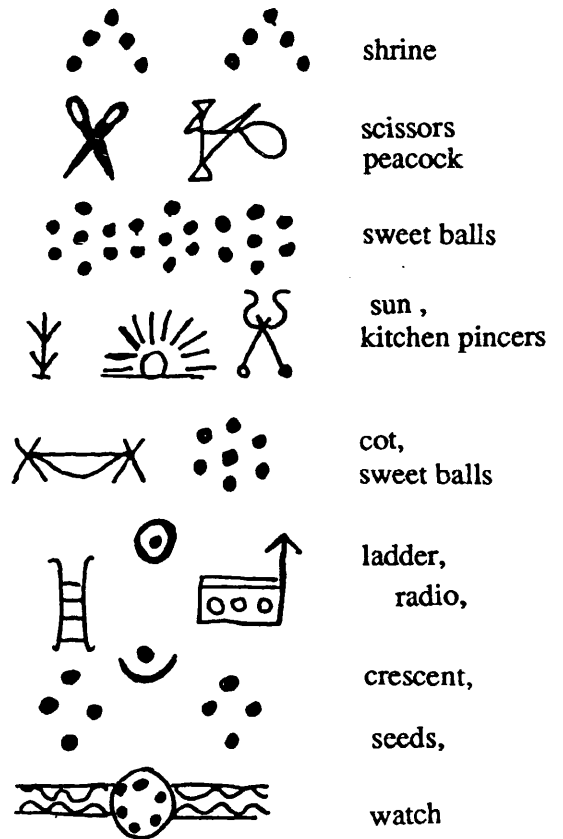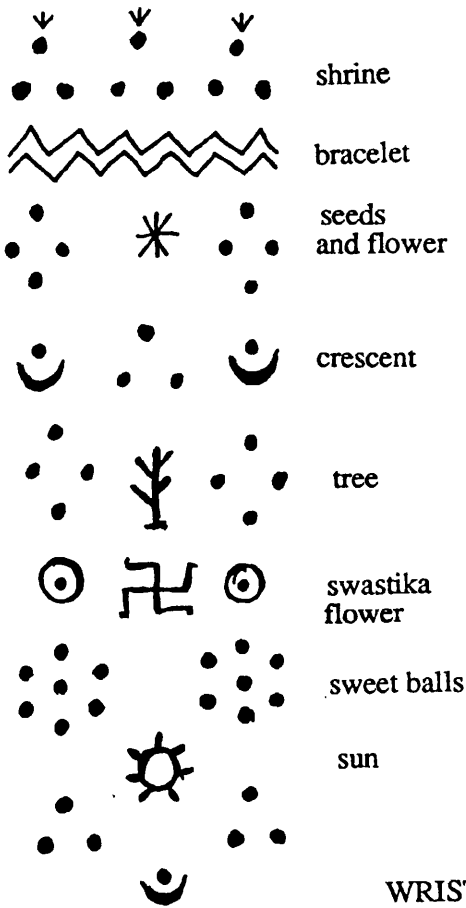
Diagram illustrating recent changes in tattoo designs. Like embroidery motifs,
new tattoo motifs do not so much replace old ones as co- exist with them.

Fig. 7:16

(a): Bullock, decorated with an embroidered blanket (*jhul*).
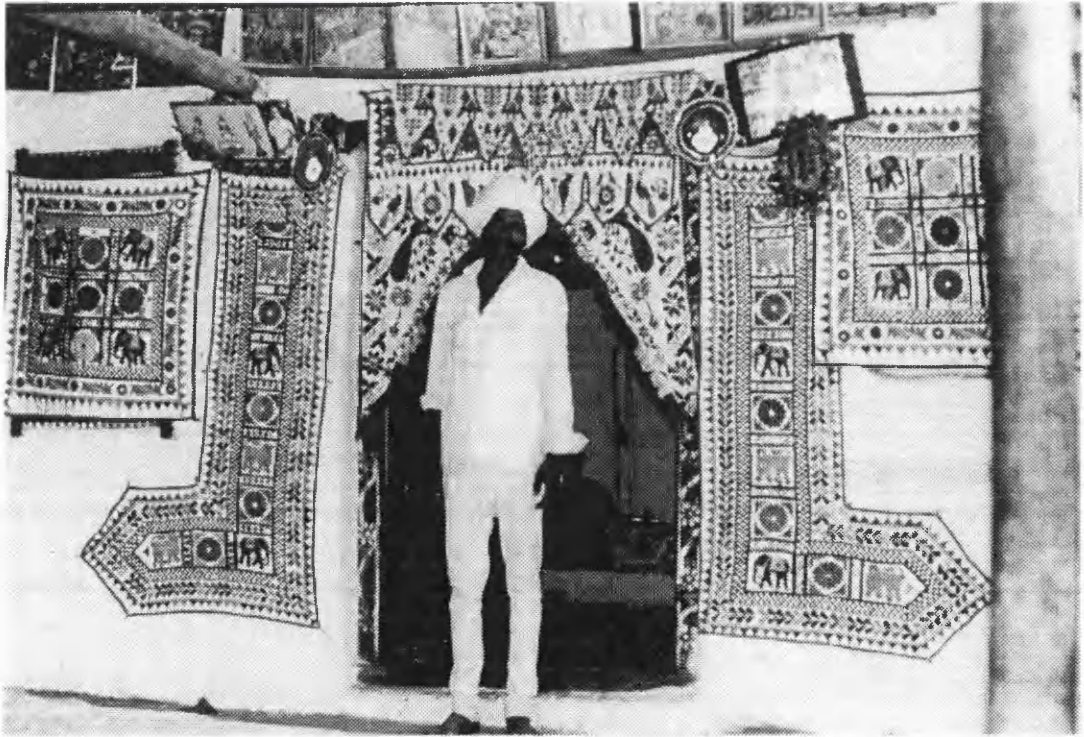
(b): House decorated with embroidered hangings (*toran, chakla, bar sakiya*) (made c. 1980, using block printed motifs. Earlier designs were hand drawn. Hanging in the doorway are the flaps of a *pardo.* , showing the influence of foreign floral creepers.

By the 1970's, some women were continuing to embroider wall hangings and door hangings but a new embroidered item had become an obligatory part of the farming woman's trousseau. This was the *pardo* (curtain) which was a new style of doorhanging[18]. It was always embroidered on a white background with a new range of motifs which could be easily obtained from the blockprinter. These motifs consisted of animals (peacocks, parrots, deer, rabbits, lions), some of which had been popular in embroidery previously, but all of which now appeared in a new naturalistic style; gods (Laxmi, Ganesh, Hanuman, Krishna); flowers (flower pots, roses, creepers); other objects (bicycles, gramophone players, clocks) and, for the first time, written messages or slogans (such as *Jay bharat*, welcome, good luck etc), usually embroidered in English lettering, sometimes in Gujarati.

The *pardo*, though another form of embroidery, represented a major break from local tradition for two main reasons. Firstly, the motifs were no longer composed of the elementary embroidery forms such of *sikel*, neem leaf, thorns and so on. Whereas in the past designs were produced by joining together these familiar embroidered forms, in the new *pardo*, the local grammar of embroidery composition was ignored. Each motif was first and foremost a naturalistic drawing which, after being printed on to the *pardo* cloth by a blockprinter, could be embroidered using simple herringbone stitch, rather in the way that crayons or paints can be used to colour in designs. Secondly, the *pardo* was the first embroidered item to include written inscriptions which were to become increasingly popular amongst these illiterate farming women. By the 1980's such written messages had become common on cloth bags, table cloths, wedding canopies (*mandap*) and door hangings (*torans*).

Trousseaux given in the 1970's were also beginning to include a number of other household arts, using new materials such as plastic beads, plastic wire, sequins and crochet. In particular the light bulb flourished as a new form of decoration. This was before Jalia and the surrounding villages were to obtain a supply of electricity. The light bulb or "globe" as it was known, was something that most women only saw when they visited the city. It was greeted with a

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18 The *Pardo* is a door hanging with two flaps which hang down on the inside of the door. It seems to have been inspired by the sight of European style curtains, tied back in the windows of elite houses. Such *pardo* first came to Gujarat as early as the 1930's but it was not until the 1950's and 60's that some of the high castes in Jalia began to make them. Amongst the *Kanbi* and the *Kharak* the *pardo* did not become popular until the early 1970's.

mixture of wonder and in some cases fear, but redundant light bulbs were rapidly to become a popular and desirable source of artistic expression. Sometimes they were simply strung together in rows and hung above doorways, performing the same role as the embroidered *toran.* (see fig. 18b). More inventive women stuffed the interiors of bulbs with pieces of shiny coloured paper or rags to give the effect of a row of coloured lights. Yet others crocheted an elaborate covering for the bulbs using plastic wires (fig. 19 and 21a) or covered bulbs with a network of plastic beads and hung them from the beams of the verandah, in imitation of the functioning light bulbs they had seen in the city. But there was no intention of using these bulbs as a form of lighting, nor would this have been possible since the plastic beads and wires would have instantly melted. These lightbulb arts flourished throughout the early and mid 1970's but went into a rapid decline in the 1980's by which time most villages in the district had a supply of electricity and functioning electric lightbulbs replaced earlier decorative ones.

Although decorative lightbulbs still hang in some farming houses, the artistic emphasis of the 1980's trousseau is on collections of beaded ornaments which are displayed in the popular new item of village furniture, the "show case" (see fig. 19 and 21a). These items consist of small ornaments which women make from plastic beads, knitted together with plastic thread. Beaded items include animals (elephants, parrots, rabbits, scorpions, cockerels, fish, camels, deer, butterflies), often the same animals found in the embroidered *pardo.* They also include beaded images of Lord Ganesh, Shiva and of Krishna's carriage. Amongst these usually crowded displays are miniature replicas of electric fans, radios, dolls in Western dress, bicycles, tables, aeroplanes, and the most popular item of all, the beaded sofa set. There is hardly a single girl in Jalia today who is not making a small beaded sofa with two accompanying chairs for her trousseau. These sofa sets are available in the shops in Bhavnagar but women generally prefer to make them themselves. If a girl is from a reasonably wealthy family she is usually given a small wooden show case in which she will be able to display all her beaded arts and ornaments in her new home.

Along with the increasingly popular plastic beadwork display, there is the more delicate glass beadwork, also popular in the village. Here tiny glass beads are
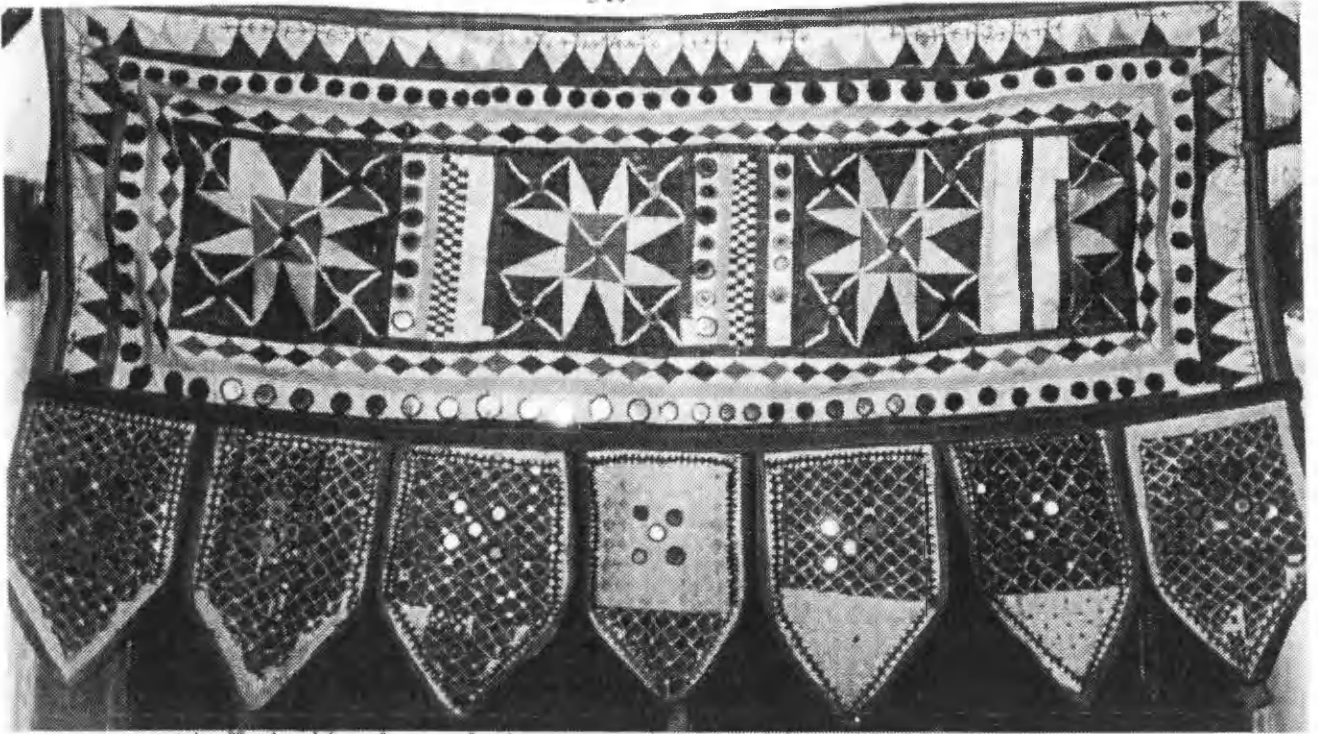
(a): Embroidered *toran* in the geometric *koliphul* design (made c. 1920), embroidered in coloured silk thread with mirror inserts. This is thought to be one of the oldest embroidery designs of the area.
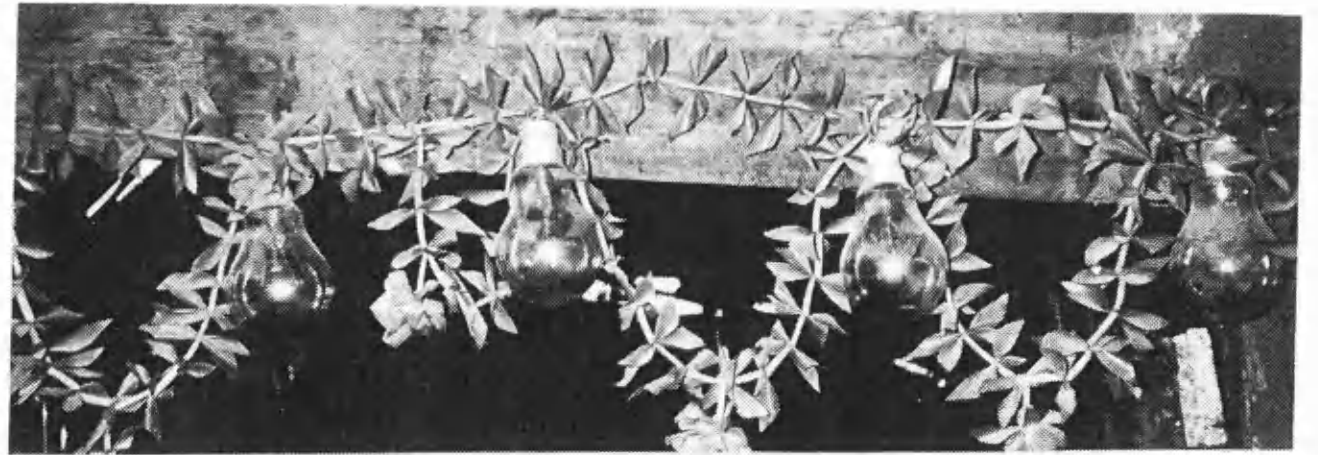
(b): A light bulb *toran*, hung in conjunction with a plastic flower *toran* (made c. 1985).
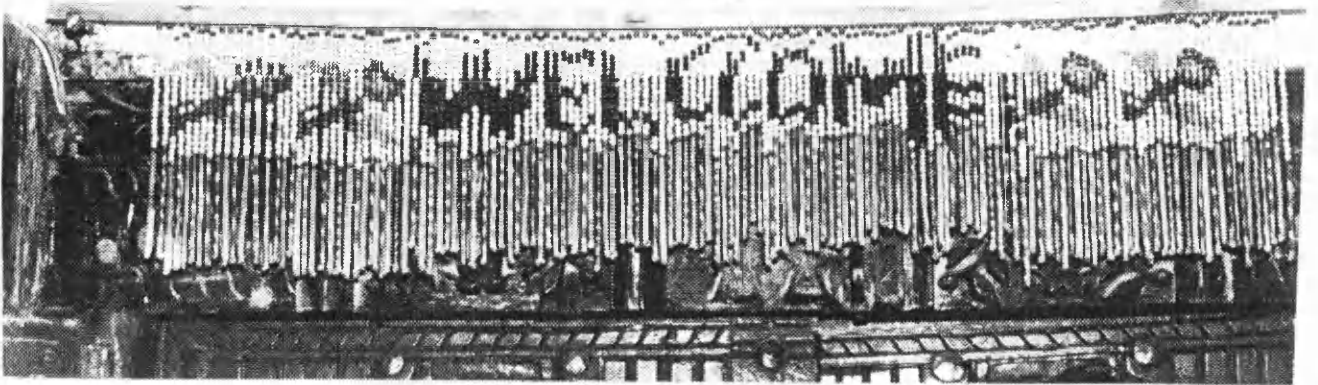
(c): A plastic beaded *toran* with the misspelt message of "Welccome" (made in 1989).

Fig. 7:18 The Evolution of the *Toran* (door hanging).

Fig. 7:19 Interior of a show case (1989), containing top left to right: plastic beaded horses, camels, parrots and glass beaded model of water pots. Middle: elephant, plastic crochet around a glass bottle, pot, doll and beaded Ganesh. Bottom: beaded table and chair, gold sequin ball, crochet covered light bulb and beaded rabbit.
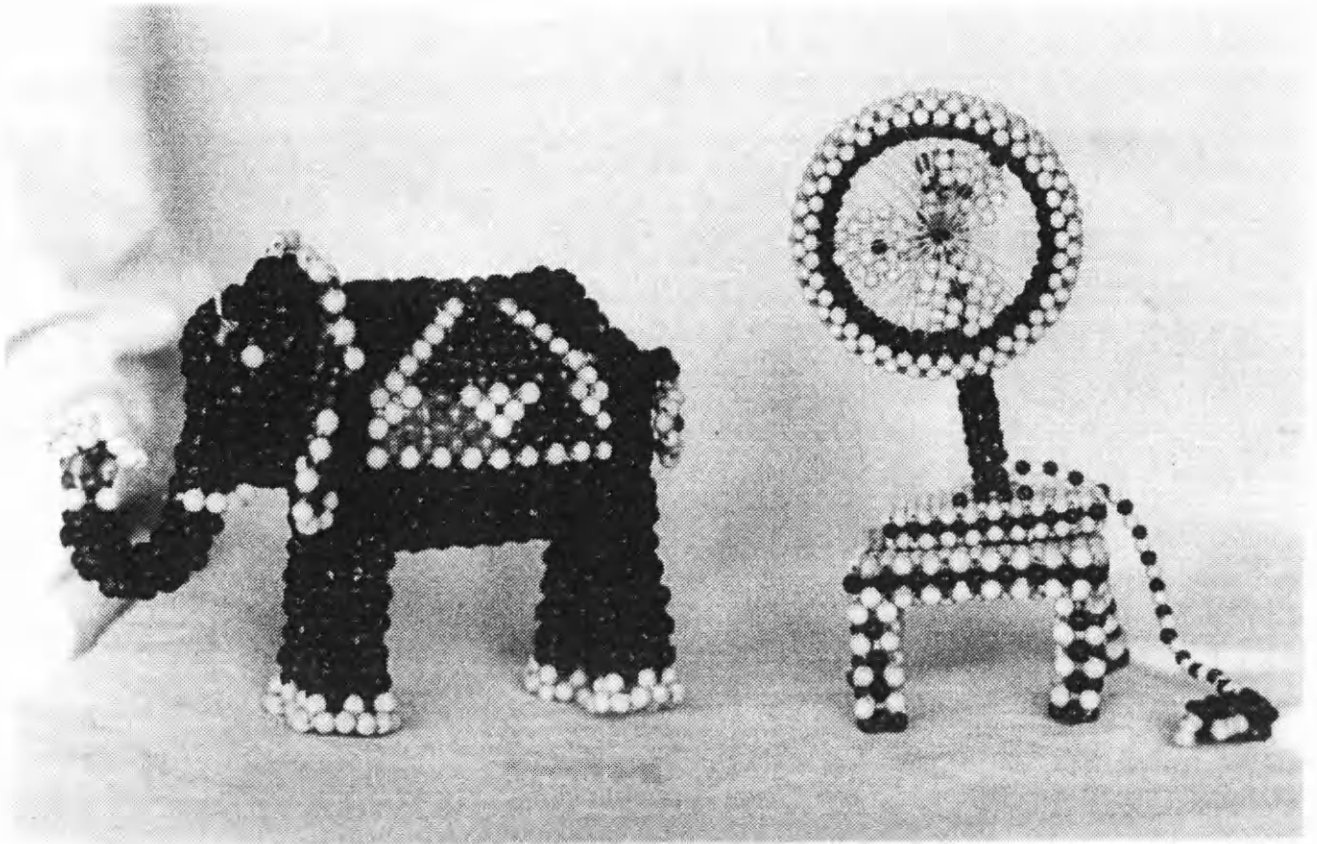
(a): Elephant and beaded electric fan (made in 1988).
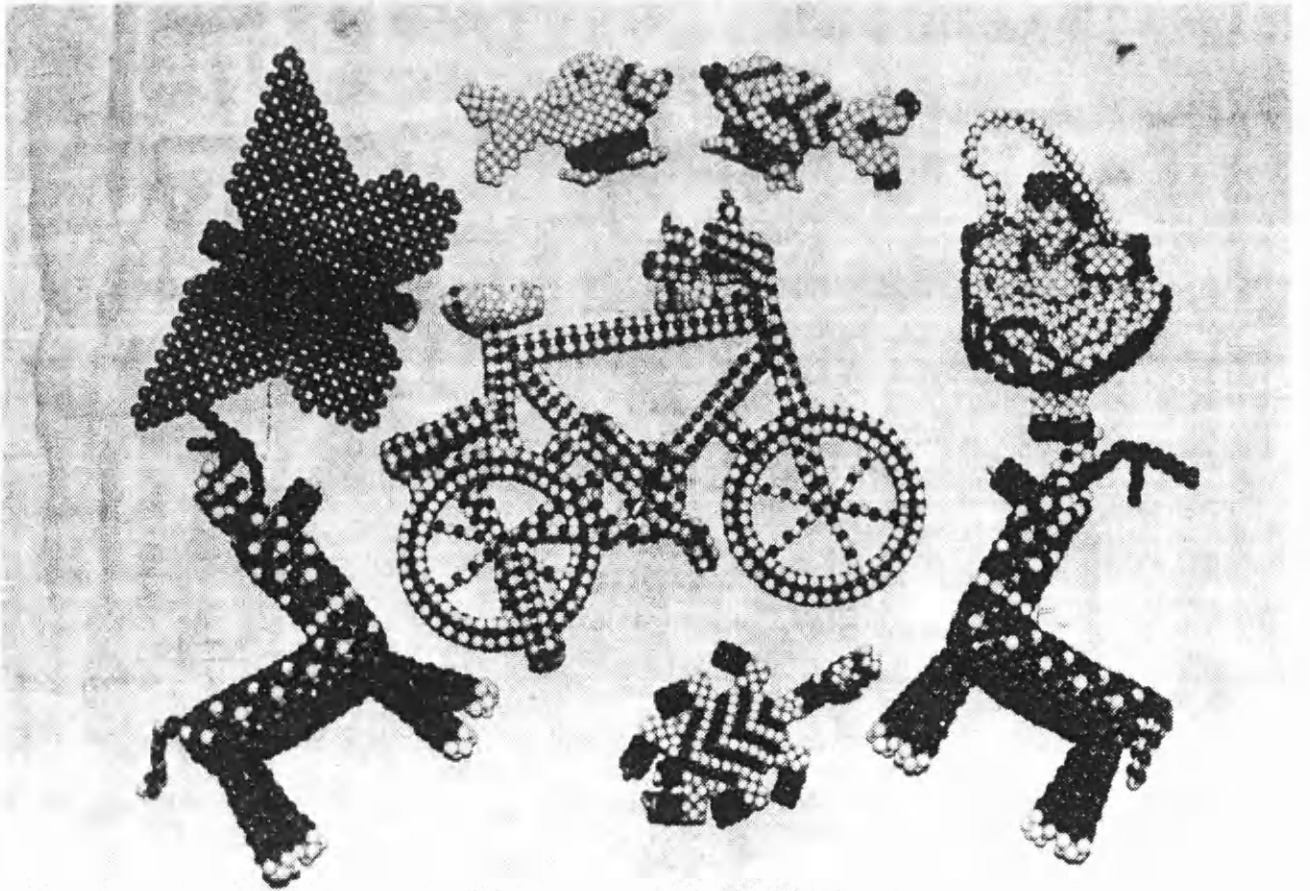
(b): Fish, doll, butterfly, deer, scorpion and bicycle (1989).

Fig. 7:20 Details of plastic beaded ornaments.

(a): Interior of a show case containing ornaments made by three generations of women, including the ritual glass beaded coconut, pot and head ring (top left), worn on the head of a young girl when greeting her sister's groom.
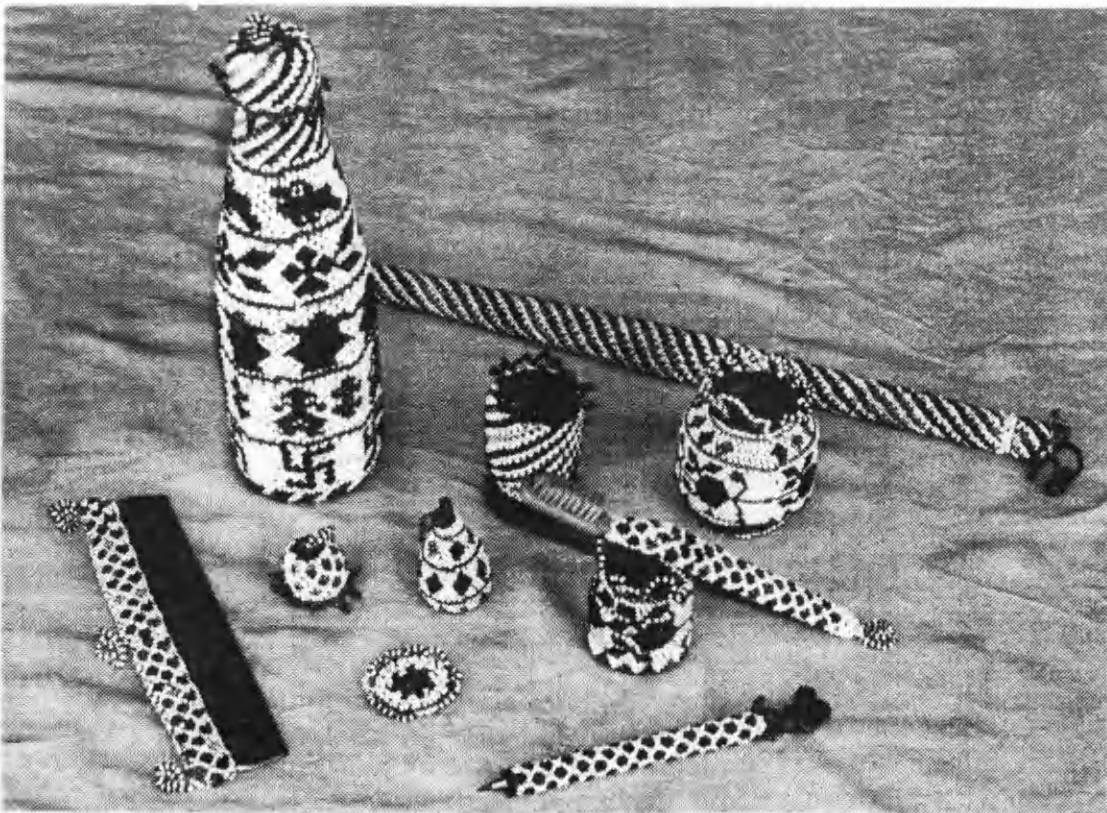
(b): Items decorated with small glass beads, including a tooth brush, comb, biro, rolling pin, a betal nut, a bottle, a rupee coin and two small pots used for carrying vermilion powder. They are a combination of ritual objects and highly prized items.

Details of the finer glass beadwork from which the plastic beadwork has derived.

Fig. 7:21

knitted together (see fig. 21).[19] Usually, they do not form miniature models, but rather they are knitted around actual objects. Some of these are auspicious objects used in rituals, such as decorated coconuts, betel nuts, rupee coins, *indhonis* (ring worn on the head to help balance a load). These items are used during the marriage ceremony, then returned to the show case where they are kept on permanent display along with the plastic beaded items, crochet light bulbs and other glass beaded objects such as biros (without ink), glass bottles, empty nail varnish pots and toothbrushes. A single show case usually contains a mixture of items from two or three different trousseau collections and therefore holds the arts of different generations simultaneously. Along with the beaded arts, is an increasing emphasis on different techniques for decorating the house. *Toran*s made from plastic straws, imitation flowers, paper roses, plastic beads, crochet, sequins and imitation leaves now adorn doorways. Women also make "photo frames", consisting of elaborate sequined pictures of peacocks, gods and flowers which have a small blank area in the middle in which a family photograph can be inserted. Other items include plastic mobiles, sequined or embroidered pictures, and items such as bags, decorated with embroidered writing and floral creepers. Designs are learnt from borrowing and copying the ornaments and decorations of friends and neighbours.

Interpretation of Changes in Clothing and Popular Arts

The above survey of changes in embroidery, tattoos and household arts reveals certain consistent trends: firstly there has been a steady incorporation of new motifs which appear to take their inspiration from outside the village (electric fan, radio, car, aeroplane, light bulb, sofa, chairs, watches, clocks and written inscriptions); secondly, there is a progressive movement away from stylization towards naturalism; and thirdly, there is an increasing preference for new decorative media and techniques which are favoured above *deshi* embroidery, (lightbulb arts, crochet, plastic weaving, beadwork, machine embroidery on *ghaghra* borders).

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19 The knitting together of small glass beads is by no means a new craft in the area. It flourished in the latter half of the 19th century amongst the wealthiest families of Saurashtra (cf. Nanavati et al. 1966). They knitted together beaded wall hangings, ritual objects and ornaments using imported Venetian beads. It was an art practised both by professionals and women in their own homes. It never flourished amongst the poorer agricultural castes as beads were extremely costly. In Jalia the new fashion of making beaded coconuts and ornaments is in fact the remainder of this much older tradition that declined amongst the Saurashtran elite earlier this century. The beaded items made today are much less sophisticated than earlier beadwork.

These various aspects of change are, of course, interrelated. To many lovers of folk art, they represent the gradual destruction and banalisation of "traditional" skills (Nanavati 1966, Dongerkery 1951, 1964). But what is their significance in local terms? What do they represent to the women of Jalia themselves? Taking the new motifs found in embroidery, beadwork and tattoos, it is clear these do not simply document changes in village life. They are more imaginative and inventive than descriptive. Images of radios and clocks appeared in embroidered *ghaghra* before the objects themselves appeared in farming houses. Cars now appear on machine made borders even though there is not a single family in the village who owns a car. Similarly, light bulb arts preceded the instalment of electricity and acted almost as the herald of electric lighting itself. Furthermore the current trend for making beaded sofa sets does not have anything to do with local furniture since there is not a single farmer's house in Jalia that actually contains a sofa.

Yet many farming women, when asked to imagine their ideal home would say it must be *pakka* (made from brick or concrete) and must contain ceiling fans, electric lighting, wall clocks, a radio and a good show case full of things. Ideally it should also have a water tap so that water could be obtained without going to the village well. And finally, "everything should be up", meaning that it should have furniture so that people did not have to sit on the floor or cook at ground level. These were popular conceptions of a good life, derived from the idea of how "well off people" (*sarawalla*) and "progressive people" (*sudharo manus*) live. Most such *sarawalla* were thought to live in the city, but some lived in the village. These were mainly *Brahman* and in particular *Vaniya* families, some of whom had furniture and televisions in their homes. When I asked where "feshen" came from, I invariably received one of two replies: "it comes from the *Vaniya*" or "it comes from the city". In fact many a *Kanbi* girl claimed to have learnt beadwork from *Vaniya* girls. Both *Vaniya* houses and city houses seemed to represent wealth, comfort and success. While some farming women liked the idea of actually living in the city, others claimed that they prefered their village and the farms, with animals and fruit trees. They would describe the mangos and the custard apples which grew so big on their farms. But they too wanted the benefits that they saw in the city; the good shops, the tables, the chairs; the signs and proof that they too were "forward, progressive people".

Some of these modern aspirations have been fulfilled in the houses of farming women in Jalia, particularly amongst the *Kanbi* caste. Over the past twenty years, most *Kanbi* have built themselves *pakka* houses on the new "plot". These houses now have electricity and an increasing number have electric fans, radios, wall clocks and occasional items of furniture, such as small tables, show cases, steel cupboards and metal framed beds. *Kanbi* women no longer embroider clothes or hangings depicting these desirable objects, perhaps because they have the objects themselves. *Kharak* women too have ceased to make light bulb decorations since the arrival of electricity in their houses. The only house in the village with a newly made light bulb *toran* was a small mud (*kachcha*) house without electricity belonging to a poor *Vaghri* family. This suggests that the light bulb arts act as a kind of precursor to electric lighting itself, perhaps even encouraging its advent in the minds of the artists.[20]

Such findings suggest that the new motifs that have appeared in embroidery, beadwork and tattoos in the past twenty years portray not merely the auspicious but also the desirable, the things that people want within their own homes. Far from rejecting modernisation, these creators of popular art portray their aspirations for an improved life style in their house decorations and their clothes. Electronic goods such as fans, radios and electric lightbulbs are not in conflict with the older notion of the desirable, based on flowers, fruits, animals, and birds. Rather, the two co-exist simultaneously. And just as an electric fan appears beside a parrot in a *Kharak* woman's *ghaghro*, so a plastic beaded bicycle or toothbrush appears beside an image of Lord Shiva or a beaded scorpion in the show case. Meanwhile Ganesh, that favourite of household gods, is often given the place of honour on top of the beaded sofa in the middle of the show case or is placed, on sofa or chair, in a separate household shrine. And it is appropriate that he, the remover of obstacles, should have such fine surroundings, for it is he who might assist the people of the house to achieve one day a similar grandeur in their own lifestyle.

With the actual attainment of clocks and radios, their desirability does not disappear but attention shifts away from images of the object and towards decorating or framing the object itself. Again a comparison may be drawn with

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20 There is a custom in some Indian shrines of placing the image of a desired object at the shrine, along with an offering to the god or goddess. Worshippers make vows hoping that the gods will bring them the objects of their desire.

the treatment of household gods, who are placed in shrines decorated with miniature *torans* and given suitable clothing and food. So too, a valuable acquisition to the house should be well treated. Fig. 22(a) shows a small embroidered hanging, originally made to protect an embroidered image of Ganesh, now used to protect and frame the new radio, which had been purchased recently from Bombay. This same family had hired a photographer from Bhavnagar to come to the village and take photographs of different family members seated with the radio on their laps. Fig. 22(b) reveals a similar use of household arts to emphasise and frame a wall clock that had recently arrived in Jalia in a young *Kharak* woman's trousseau. In this case, it is plastic beaded images of flowers in their pots that flank the desirable object and ensure that it is noticed by anyone who comes to the house. Similarly, family photographs are given a place of honour in the middle of elaborate sequined pictures.

With the arrival of new motifs and the changing values attached to them, women have altered not only the subject matter of their embroidery and arts, but also their attitude to certain embroidery styles, materials, forms and stitches. Not only do certain forms appear old fashioned to village women, but they have attained a negative connotation through their association with illiteracy and backwardness. As I described earlier, the embroidered *ghaghro* had its own grammar of stitches and forms which could be combined together to achieve certain motifs. With the availability of block printed designs, traced from magazine images and photographs, a new emphasis on naturalistic depictions has encouraged young village women to scorn the older more abstract motifs as inaccurate and ridiculous. They are more impressed by a life like peacock than by a *deshi* one that is scarcely recognisable as such. With the possibility of realism, the stylized forms found in their mothers' embroidery are seen as defective as if they represent an inability to portray things as they really are. Those *Kanbi* girls who make embroidered bags and bed covers rarely combine together the old stitches of barley, thorns, *sikel*, and pulse. Rather they choose just one type of stitch at a time such as babul tree (interlacing stitch) or the new and fashionable cross stitch. Their emphasis is on neatness, simplicity, symmetry and realism. They embroider floral creepers, roses, baskets of fruit that are clearly of European inspiration.[21]

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21 Billington described how educated Indian women were adopting European embroidery styles at the end of the 19th century. With the value judgements of a Victorian lady, certain in her opinions, she writes "in no branch of Indian art has British influence been so mischievously detrimental as in needlecraft. The native women are quick to seize upon a small novelty that can be passed on from one to another, and the vulgar showiness and easy accomplishment of our Western woolwork, in all the worst hideousness of Berlin cross-stitch and crewels, seems to have pleased some innate sentiment in them, for, unfortunately, they have adopted and perpetuated these in the vilest form. The mission schools are to be held responsible for most of the evil that has been wrought in this direction" (Billington 1973 (1895):189). One of the most popular styles of embroidering bags and cloth in Jalia today is cross stitch using brightly coloured wool.

(a) An embroidered hanging (1988) frames a much prized radio from Bombay. Such hangings are usually hung above an embroidered image of Lord Ganesh.
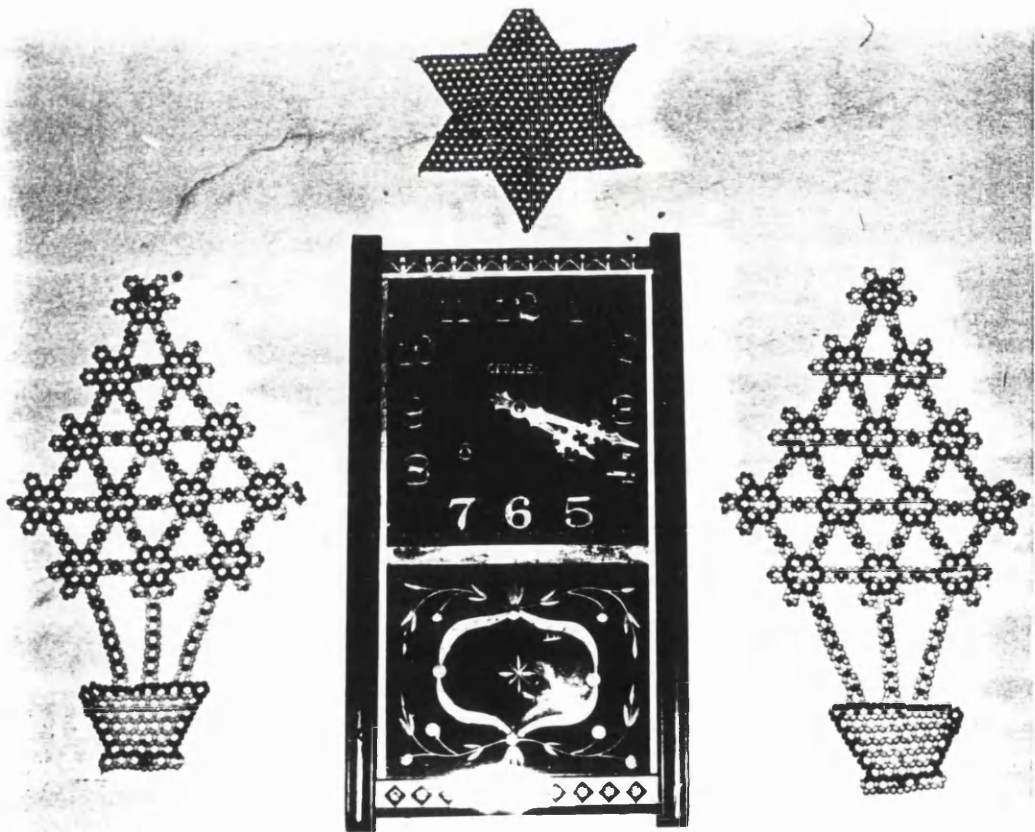
(b): Plastic beaded flowers frame a new wall clock (1988).

Fig. 7:22

(a) Portion of a *Kanbi* trousseau (1989), showing a wide variety of beaded items and plastic straw chandliers. The only embroidery is a woollen bag , a sequined *toran* and two floral pictures, embroidered in cross stitch.

(b) Portion of a *Kharak* trousseau (1989), showing embroidered *ghaghra*, displayed with the machine made borders showing. Below are beaded pictures, sequined photo frames and an embroidered wedding canopy (folded).   Fig. 7: 23

The increasing trend away from abstraction is in turn related to women's feelings about literacy and education. In the same way that realism is hierarchically opposed to abstraction, so literacy is hierarchically opposed to the old fashioned *deshi* embroidery which seems to represent illiteracy in people's minds. Hence their embarrassment and confusion at my attempting to embroider a *ghaghro* myself. For a literate person, doing such embroidery was quite simply inappropriate. It represented a confusion of categories. When both men and women told me that my brain would curdle or my abilities would leave me if I spent time embroidering a *ghaghro*, it was as if they felt that the ignorance that such embroidery represented would somehow disrupt my educated mind. Embroidering a *ghaghro* was, as one woman put it, an activity for "people who know nothing".

The relationship between literacy and popular household arts was by no means straightforward. The act of embroidering a polyester shopping bag or a sequined photo frame of the new style was not considered degrading or demeaning in the least. Neither was the act of knitting together plastic beads. In fact these were regarded as high fashion, and were considered a sign of refinement and more generally progress. But these skills had spread from the town to the village rather than vice versa, and were the type of household arts that educated girls in the city learnt at school. Similarly the idea of embroidering written messages such as "welcome", "sweet dreams" and "good luck" came from outside the village and were not therefore defined as *deshi*. While these were usually written in English, none of the farming girls who were embroidering them or knitting them in their beaded *torans* were able to read what they said. And, with the exception of the word "welcome" which has now been assimilated into Gujarati vocabulary, the messages were not only unreadable but also unrecognised when read aloud. When I asked women why they embroidered English writing, they often replied: "it looks educated" (*bhunella lage*). Similarly their husbands and sons agreed that such messages were good as they made the people of the household look as if they had studied.[22]

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22 Sanso, who has worked amongst poor Madrassi women found that being a "bag person" (*theliwalla*), in other words carrying a hand bag, was considered important, not on account of the bag itself but on account of the fact that carrying a bag implied needing something in which to carry a pen, which in turn implied being literate. She found women classified each other into "bag-people" and "thumb-people". The latter were the illiterate women who had to give a thumb print instead of signing their names (Personal communication).

Written embroidered and beadwork messages seemed to encapsulate the predicament of village women. While few farming families showed much interest in educating their daughters, they were beginning to develop a sense of awareness and embarrassment about their lack of education. Some, particularly *Kanbi* parents, were sending their daughters to the village school in their early childhood. Here a basic knowledge of the rudiments of the Gujarati language was considered a very adequate education. But although farming women were on the whole far removed from literacy and especially from the English language, they were keen for their sons to study and felt that the greatest sign of advancement in the modern world was for a boy to one day become a bank official or at least have an office job. Some even suspected that my own willingness to go so far from home and study for so many years, must mean that I was trying to get a qualification for a banking post.

Farming women were not by any means yearning for education, but they recognised it as something of value in the contemporary world and were often embarrassed and apologetic about their own lack of it. They wanted to "appear" educated rather than "to be" educated. The ambivalence of their position is perhaps best expressed in the contorted misspellings that often occur when one illiterate woman copies another woman's writing. On the embroidered bags and *torans* of Jalia women, the following welcomes appear: "Weccome", "mellome", "Wel Cowe", "welccome", "mflcowf, "mellow" and other variations where all the letters are reversed as in a mirror image.

Writing embroidered messages and slogans was a clear case where the medium (embroidered writing) was more important than the message. As a medium, it bridged that uneasy gap between ignorance, which was seen as characteristic of *deshi* embroidery, and knowledge, which was seen as characteristic of literacy. Through the embroidered message, the ability to read and the ability to embroider, two skills which were diametrically opposed in local thought, were temporarily though precariously united.

The Divergence of *Kanbi* and *Kharak* Dress Reconsidered

Throughout this chapter I have emphasised the fact that while *Kanbi* women no longer make embroidered *ghaghra*, *Kharak* women continue to embroider them. And while the former now wear synthetic saris, the latter still wear embroidered clothes even though the younger generation hope to avoid wearing them. These

differences do not in fact reveal a conflict between the values of the two castes. For members of both castes agree that the *ghaghro* is an old fashioned *deshi* garment of the past, a thick and clumsy, backward garment that marks out its wearer as a villager and farmer. The self conscious comments of Liliben and her cousins and their reluctance to admit that they will one day wear their *ghaghra*, reveal that *Kharak* girls can be just as embarrassed by *deshi* embroidery as their *Kanbi* counterparts. So why do *Kharaks* continue to make and wear embroidery when the *Kanbis* no longer do so? And what has enabled the the latter caste to rid itself of the "backward" village label while the *Kharak* continue to bear the village stamp? Ask any villager about these matters, and you will invariably obtain a simple response along the following lines:

> "The *Kanbi* are developed people (*sudharo manus*). They are diamond cutters (*hirawalla*) and that is why they no longer wear embroidery. But the *Kharak* are *deshi* people and only farmers (*khetiwalla*)."

Such replies refer to the changing lifestyle and fortunes of the *Kanbi* caste and the relatively unchanging lifestyle of the *Kharak*. The *Kanbi*, as I have shown in chapter 5, have in the years following Independence become increasingly involved in the diamond cutting industry as a supplement to agriculture. This has brought them new wealth which they have invested in a number of ways which in local terms, *prove* their progressiveness. Such proof is seen in their houses, their customs and their clothes. The new "plot" area where they have built their *pakka* houses is considered the most prosperous part of the village. Apart from two *Bhungi* families with small one room houses, the plot is the exclusive home of members of the *Kanbi* caste and contains large and sturdy houses of concrete and brick that are considered far superior to previous mud constructions. These houses have been painted white or blue and people now consider it inappropriate to decorate them with *deshi* embroidery which is, they say, suitable only for covering mud walls. Most *Kanbi* families have sold their old embroidered house decorations, either to passing traders in exchange for stainless steel or money, or else to poorer people in the village from the *Bharwad* (shepherd) caste. These are people who still live in mud houses and who never had a tradition of making embroidered house decorations as they could afford neither the time nor the money to do so.

Not only have the *Kanbi* improved their living conditions; they have also begun to adopt the customs more often associated with high castes in the village. They have, for example, raised the age of marriage so that they no longer keep a gap

of some years between the marriage and the *anu* ceremony. Like *Vaniya* and *Brahman* families, they now send the bride to join her husband immediately after marriage, and the custom of lavish ritual wailing at her time of departure has been curtailed since it is considered backward and excessive. Furthermore the *Kanbi* are switching increasingly from brideprice towards dowry in their marriage payments. There is a new trend for the bride's parents to refuse brideprice and to concentrate instead in giving an increasingly large and costly trousseau. *Kanbi* men now stress that it is a sin to accept money for the bride, as the *Kharak* do. And although most brides today are still illiterate, the new generation of brides will be increasingly literate in Gujarati as most *Kanbi* parents now consider it necessary to send their children to the village school for at least a few years. All these factors are considered by other villagers to be proof that the *Kanbi* are now advanced and wealthy people.

This leads to the question of how and why these changes should have affected *Kanbi* women's clothes. Although the *Kanbi* do on the whole live in superior housing conditions to the *Kharak* and are generally more prosperous, the lives of *Kanbi* women have otherwise changed remarkably little. It is not as if the new money from diamond cutting has made them exempt from working in the fields. On the contrary, whilst their husbands or sons cut and polish diamonds, they themselves continue to cook, clean and work on the family farm as before. Far from gaining more leisure, these women are in fact labouring harder than ever since they lack the help of the new generation of young men and boys who now cut diamonds instead of farming. Why then, when their daily life has changed so little and they are clearly still "farming people", have they ceased to wear their embroidered *ghaghra*?

This was best explained by a *Kanbi* woman herself who argued:

> "It all started with the diamond business. First my little brother, then my son, went to learn the business in Surat. We have relatives there. There they stopped wearing *deshi* clothes because they felt ashamed and embarrassed. So they became fashionable and wore "bush shirt" and "pant". When they came back here they laughed at us and told us that we looked like village people. Then I wanted to visit my second son. He rebuked me saying "What will people think if they see my mother dressed like that in thick heavy cloth? They will all laugh and laugh". The first time I went to Surat I was wearing a *ghaghro*. But I felt *sharm* because all the women were wearing thin saris. I am old. For me it does not matter. Who cares what an old woman wears? But I would not want my daughters to look so backward. My eldest daughter married fifteen years ago. She took only two *ghaghra* to her in-law's place. Now my

two other daughters have married and they took only saris from Bhavnagar in their trousseaux. They have never worn a *ghaghro*. My first daughter-in-law came here with fifteen *ghaghra* in her trousseaux, but some years back we sold them to some passing traders who came to the village and with the money we bought her saris. Now she wears only thin cloth (saris)."

Kanbi men did not have the same level of control over their women's clothes as the *Brahman* men discussed in the previous chapter, particularly since *Kanbi* women had until recently made their own clothes. But the young men of *Kanbi* families, through their travel and their new employment, developed a self conscious and critical attitude to the clothes of their wives and mothers and this attitude has gradually been assimilated by the women themselves. Although they continue to work in the fields, like their *Kharak* counterparts, *Kanbi* women no longer call themselves *khetiwalli* (farmers), but rather *hirawalli* (diamond people). This does not mean that the women themselves cut diamonds, but rather that, as the wives of diamond cutters, they consider their status above that of farmers. And as diamond cutters' wives it is no longer appropriate for them to dress in farmers' clothes.

This concept of appropriate behaviour was a strong influential factor in the question of how people should dress. It was readily agreed in the village that as wealthy people, living in *pakka* houses and no longer reliant on the land, it was appropriate for *Kanbi* women to dress in saris which were both the product and the proof of their advancement. This did not mean, however, that they could wear anything they liked. Asked why they did not wear the *salwar kamiz*, a group of young *Kanbi* girls replied that people in the village would laugh and say things like : "look! They have become *feshen- walla*", or "They think they are *Vaniyas* now!", or "Why do they dress like educated people when they have not studied more than one book?" For, although the *Kanbi* were recognised as *sudharo* (advanced), they were still not considered as *sudharo* as the more educated *Vaniya* or some wealthy educated *Brahmans*. Similarly, married women dared not anger their husbands by wearing the "Bengali" sari. As one girl put it:

> "We must keep within our own customs. We can't just put shame on the roof. If I dressed in the Bengali sari, I would be cutting off my father's nose".

But while the Gujarati sari was considered acceptable and appropriate for *Kanbi* women, it was less acceptable for the *Kharak*. Amongst them it was interpreted

as trying to step out of their own caste and tradition. For the *Kharak* were still defined as "farming people" and their women were expected to dress accordingly. Many still lived in houses with mud plastered walls, albeit large and prosperous ones, and even some of their menfolk were still dressed in *deshi* clothes. Furthermore, owing to the exceptionally limited geographical distribution of their caste which did not extend outside the Bhavnagar district, their marital ties and kinship links were almost entirely local. As a caste, the *Kharak's* identity was not merely defined in farming terms but also in local terms.

This helps to explain the ambivalence of *Kharak* attitudes towards the *ghaghro*. Whilst on the one hand, they recognised a certain superiority in the saris of the *Kanbi* and other wealthy families in the village, on the other hand they lacked the same intensity of urban contacts and they lacked the education and general level of caste "improvement" that was considered appropriate to the sari-wearer. At a time when the *Kanbi* were beginning to reject embroidery (in the 1970's), the *Kharak*, contenting themselves with the local idiom, chose then to increase their embroidery production and developed new styles of machine embroidered borders which incorporated their modernising aspirations within the original structure of the *ghaghro* itself. While *Kanbi* families were installing electric fans and radios in their new *pakka* houses, *Kharak* women were embroidering images of fans and radios on their *ghaghra* and employing tailors to embroider images of cars, clocks and bicycles.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, *Kharak* women exploited the potential of the *ghaghro* to its greatest degree. But now even they are beginning to reject it. What was once considered a fashionable new embroidered design, has now fallen into the general category of "old fashioned", "village-like" and "backward". For, as the *Kharak* know, to people outside the village and even to many people within it, there is no particular difference between an "old" *ghaghro* and a "modern" one. All are essentially hand-made *deshi ghaghra*, which by their very nature and origins, are old fashioned. Even with sophisticated machine-made borders occupying an increasingly prominent space, nothing can hide the overall "backwardness" associated with the garment.

The new generation, like Liliben and her cousins, are embarrassed about the fact that they are still making *ghaghra* and including them in their trousseaux.

Like other girls in the village, they are more interested in making beaded sofa sets and decorative items for a show case or for photo frames. These they make alongside their *ghaghra*. They hope their mothers-in-law will be lenient and let them one day sell their *ghaghra* and wear saris in their marital homes. They look to the *Kanbi's* progress as a model for their own future when they too will be free to wear synthetic saris and rid themselves for ever of their ancestral embroidery. Their hope will, it seems, be fulfilled, for already *Kharak* girls are including saris alongside their *ghaghra* in their trousseaux, and already they are not expected to wear *ghaghra* for the first few years in their marital homes. It is even possible that the very *ghaghra* that Liliben and her cousins were embroidering will never be worn by them, for by the time they are "of age" to wear them, the fashion will have advanced yet one step further away from the *deshi* embroidery. But the fact remains that *Kharak* girls are still illiterate and show little signs of going to school. And until the day when they begin to replace their knowledge of embroidery with a knowledge of writing, they will perhaps be destined to continue embroidering *ghaghra,* even if they never have to wear them.

Conclusion

It is often assumed that synthetic fabrics are replacing hand woven and hand embroidered dress in India simply because they are cheaper. And certainly price can be an important factor. Many of the poorer artisan communities in the village have adopted cheap synthetics and no longer wear locally produced cloth. Struggling as they are to provide clothing and food for their families, they often favour cheapness *above* other factors. But economic theories cannot adequately explain the complexity and variety of the different choices people make when they decide which type of dress to buy or wear (cf. Bayly 1986, Cousins 1984:159). In the *Kanbi* and *Kharak* case, it was the wealthier of the two groups who adopted the cheap synthetic sari whereas the less wealthy group spent both more time and money making *ghaghra*. In the same way that *khadi* was worn by nationalist sympathisers in the 1920's *despite* being more expensive than machine-made cloth, so the *ghaghro* is still worn by *Kharak* women today *despite* being more expensive than the cheaper range of saris.

In such cases price is not the primary factor effecting people's choice. But neither are aesthetic considerations paramount. Just as *khadi*-wearing sometimes took the form of a moral obligation rather than an aesthetic preference, so *ghaghro*-wearing has become, for the *Kharak*, a social

expectation rather than a personal choice. These examples illustrate how people may be obliged (socially, culturally or politically) to remain in a particular type of dress despite the apparently easy availability of more desirable alternatives. In both of these cases the obligation to remain within a certain category of clothing gave rise to an outburst of creativity as different individuals and groups exploited the full potentialities of the fabric without actually abandoning the category of clothing type. Thus many *khadi*-wearers chose to embroider, dye and tailor their *khadi* in order to beautify it, while the *Kharak* introduced new motifs and inserted increasingly large machine-made borders into their *ghaghra* in their attempts to update what had become an outmoded form of dress. Individual motivations no doubt varied from wishing to enjoy the full potentialities of a given medium to actually wishing to conceal the medium by embellishing it to such an extent that it was scarcely recognisable. Yet one important motivation in both cases was that people wished to escape the burden of the *deshi*, with the connotations of backwardness and lack of refinement that it implied.

In the same way that the *Kharak* retention of the embroidered *ghaghro* cannot be explained in economic terms, so the *Kanbi's* rejection of the *ghaghro* was not motivated primarily by economic factors. It was the social kudos attached to wearing the sari rather than its cheapness that attracted the *Kanbi*. For them, being dressed in saris was a means of participating in a modern world that extended beyond the limited confines of the village. Cousins has shown how low caste Rajasthani women describe those high caste women who have adopted saris as "coming from here, but taking on the manners of elsewhere" (Cousins 1984:159). It was this outsider connotation that attracted the *Kanbi* and made them recognised as progressive in the village, but it was this same connotation that made it inappropriate for *Kharak* women, who lacked outsider connections, to wear the same dress. As Douglas and Isherwood suggest, "Consumption uses goods to make firm and visible a particular set of judgments in the fluid processes of classifying persons and events" (Douglas and Isherwood 1980:67). For the *Kanbi*, adopting a sari was a means of moving one step closer to the social elite and one step further away from the category of local "farmer".

Examination of developments in the clothing of high and middle ranking groups in the village reveals the emergence of an overall progressive trend, led by the *Vaniya*, followed closely by *Brahmans*, *Kanbis* and finally *Kharaks*. Although

different castes are at different stages within this progression, they are nonetheless moving in the same direction, away from more caste-specific Kathiawadi styles towards the sari, worn in the Gujarati style. And while women are gradually expanding their regional sartorial borders, men have largely escaped the confines of regional dress altogether by wearing Western styles. But not all men. There was one group in the village that took an active stand against this dominant trend. They were the goat-herding *Bharwads* (shepherds). Their men still dressed in the smock (*kediyun*) and pantaloon (*chorni*) or *dhoti*, and still wore turbans, even when young. And their women continued to sport the open-backed *kapdu* which other groups have unanimously rejected. In the next chapter I shall examine some of the reasons for their sartorial conservatism. I shall first present a number of case studies and tales which, taken together, serve to demonstrate the "*Bharwad* view" of dress. After analysing the *Bharwad*'s desire for caste distinctiveness, I shall contrast this with the *Harijan*'s desire to break away from a caste-bound notion of identity.

Chapter 8

SOME LOW CASTE DILEMMAS (*BHARWAD* AND *HARIJAN*)

Bharwads, the Traditionalists

There was only one *Bharwad* man in the village who dressed in a definitively Western style[1] on a daily basis. His name was Dilipbhai and he was unusual in many respects. Unlike most men of the caste who had been brought up to keep goats, sheep and cattle, Dilipbhai had been educated at school and was now, at the age of twenty-four, studying for a qualification in Ayurvedic medicine. Most of the year he lived and trained in the city of Baroda where, not surprisingly, he wore trousers and a shirt. But even during his lengthy sojourns in the village, he continued to wear Western styles, making him highly conspicuous amongst his more traditionally dressed family and caste-fellows. It was therefore with some surprise that I viewed his family's photograph album which contained pictures of Dilipbhai's wedding in 1985, with Dilipbhai dressed as a conventional shepherd in a white cotton smock, baggy pantaloons, bright red and gold turban and plentiful wedding jewellery. Dressed in such clothes he looked much like any other *Bharwad* groom in Jalia.[2] But the difference was that these other grooms both worked and dressed as shepherds in their daily lives whereas Dilipbhai claimed that he had never tended to goats or sheep and had never worn *deshi* clothes either before his wedding or since.

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1 By Western I mean the type of garments that originated in the West. This is not to say that Indians have not developed their own style of wearing and tailoring what I call "Western garments". In general trousers are worn far tighter in India than in Europe today, and are often worn with a tight long sleeved shirt which hangs outside the trousers. Though not uniquely Indian, this manner of wearing Western clothes is more common in India than in Europe where long sleeved shirts are commonly tucked into trousers. With the exception of some young boys, shepherds in Jalia do not wear such clothes.

2 Some scholars have pointed to the fact that people often retain some form of "traditional" clothing for religious or ritual occasions even when they have rejected such clothes in everyday life (Picton and Mack 1979, Kuper 1973). This is certainly true in some contexts in India, but it is by no means systematic. In most of the weddings I attended in Jalia those men who normally wore European styles continued to wear trousers, shirts or "safari suits" for their own weddings. Some added a turban to these otherwise Western outfits, but there were other grooms who remained bare headed throughout the ceremony. The educated village groom dressed in European styles may be contrasted to the educated upper middle class urban groom who nowadays favours a more "traditional Indian" look; often a *kurta pyjama* with turban.
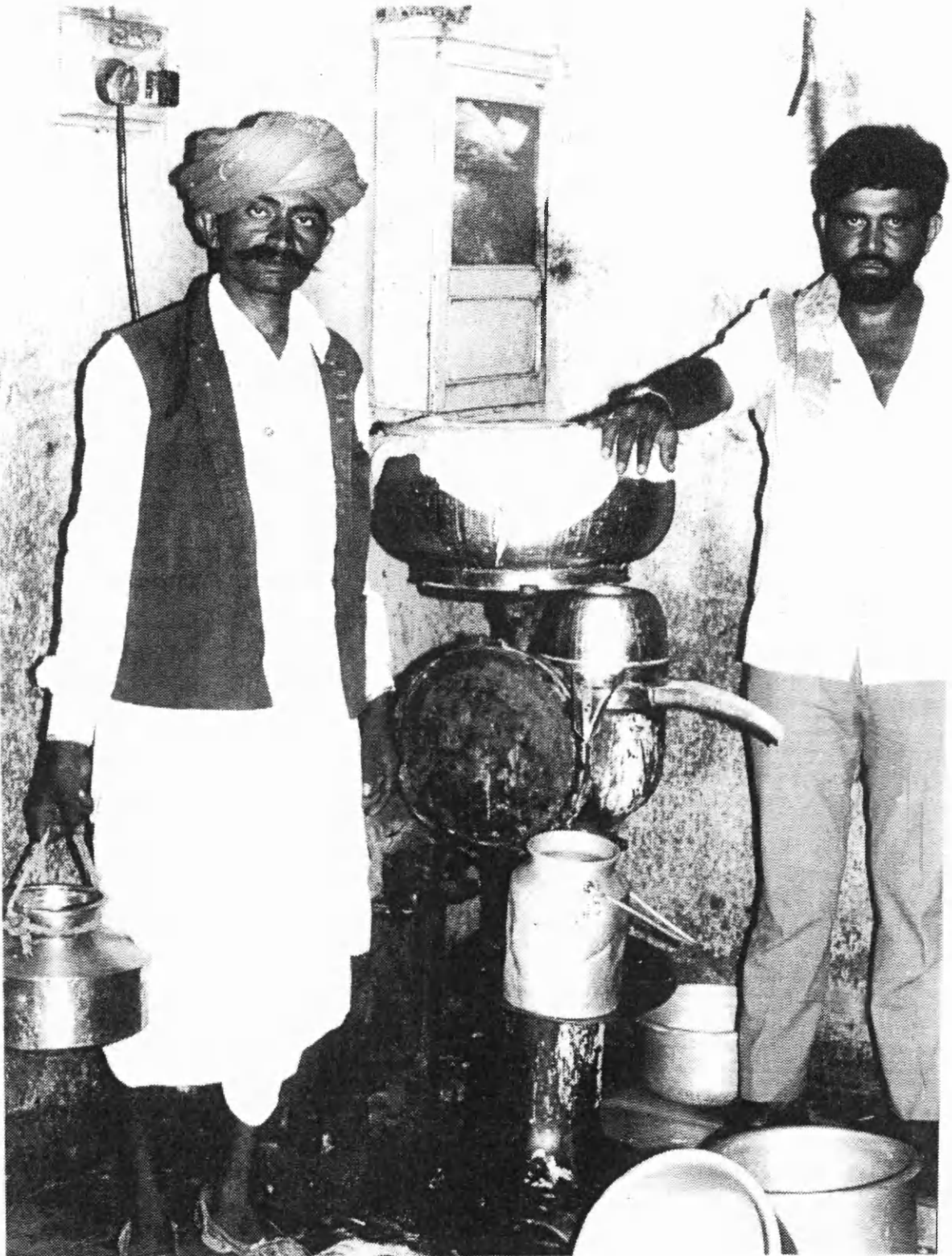
Bharwad men in Bhavnagar city, demonstrating the new milk-separating machine at a milk co-operative. On the right is one of the few educated *Bharwads*. He wears trousers, shirt, shoes and watch. On the left is a more "traditional" looking caste fellow, wearing a *dhoti*, shirt and waist coat with an untwisted woollen and acrylic turban. The waistcoat, which is green, is commonly worn by those *Bharwad* men who do not wear the *kediyun*.

Fig. 8:1

Fig. 8:2 A young *Bharwad* groom (aged 7) dressed for the marriage ceremony. He wears *chorni* with a shirt and waistcoat and large brocaded turban. Around the turban is a sequined turban band (*bokani*) and round his neck is a pompom (*mala*)., both worn only on festive occassions. His ear stud and silver bracelets are worn daily. (1989).

Noticing my surprise at his conventional appearance in the photographs, Dilipbhai explained that he had agreed to compromise his dress for the wedding day. It was a decision directly motivated by the embarrassing events that had occurred some two years earlier at his cousin Kathabhai's wedding in Bhavnagar. Below is a rendition of the events, based on Dilpbhai's eye-witness account.

The Embarrassing Case of the *Bharwad* Groom in Trousers

Dilipbhai's cousin, Kathabhai, had been brought up in the city of Bhavnagar and, like Dilipbhai, was unusually educated for a *Bharwad*.[3] His father continued to work in the milk trade, despite living in the city, but Katabhai never became a shepherd and was sent to school instead. As a school boy, he dressed in shorts and later trousers and never wore the conventional *kediyun, chorni* and turban distinctive of his caste. When it came to his wedding day he felt awkward about wearing such clothes, especially since he was training to become a teacher. He thought it inappropriate for someone as educated as himself to be seen in *deshi* dress. So he decided to wear trousers and a shirt and even donned a tie for the occasion. His mother was upset to see him going to his own marriage in such dull "foren" clothes but his father consented to Kathabhai's choice for he was proud of the fact that his son had become an important and respected, educated boy.

Katabhai's wedding had been arranged since he was five years old. He was to marry a *Bharwad* girl whose family also lived in Bhavnagar where they kept cows and goats, and sold milk products. She was eighteen and he was twenty two at the time finally fixed for their wedding which had been delayed several times by Kathabhai's parents on the grounds that Kathabhai needed to complete his education first. On the appointed day of the marriage Kathabhai, mounted on a decorated horse, arrived at the bride's home with the groom's party (*jan*). But when his father-in-law saw him dressed in trousers and a shirt, he became angry, saying: "How can you come to your own wedding dressed like that? Do you have no *sharm*?"

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3 According to an educated *Bharwad* in Bhavnagar, the literacy rate amongst the *Bharwad* caste in Gujarat as a whole is one percent with women almost entirely uneducated (interview with Megjibhai Mir)

Katabhai's father-in-law then turned to the *jan* and remonstrated:

> "How can you allow the groom to dress in bushcot-pant? How can you do this to our caste? Are you real *Bharwads*, that you allow such a thing? Well, my daughter is a *Bharwad*. I have brought her up as a *Bharwad*. She does shepherd's work, wears shepherd's dress, and when she was still a baby I made arrangements for her future by finding her a good shepherd boy to marry. And now you bring me this. Do you call this pant-wearing boy a *Bharwad*? To give my daughter to him would be like throwing her out of the caste. To do such a thing is a sin. A *Bharwad* girl can only marry a *Bharwad* boy. I cannot give her to you. I shall find another groom, a real *Bharwad* for my own daughter who has lived till now as a shepherd and knows only the shepherd's way of life."

Kathabhai remained silent throughout this tirade for he was young and it was inappropriate for him to address his elders in front of the crowd, but the *jan* was in an uproar. They felt insulted. They were not even allowed entry into the courtyard for Kathabhai's father-in-law had shut the gate in their faces and refused to admit anyone to his house. So they stood in the street and began to argue back. Some tried to argue that Kathabhai was educated, that he had progressed and he had never worn a *kediyun* and *chorni*. Any normal father-in-law would be pleased that his daughter was marrying such an important man. It would be impossible to find another such groom in their caste. But the bride's father would hear nothing. He was furious with the senior men of the *jan* for even allowing this to happen. He cancelled the marriage there and then and declared the engagement void.

The whole *jan* was left in the street, humiliated and insulted. What should they do? How could they cancel this marriage after all the preparations had been made and the time was astrologically right? Many senior men of the *jan* were themselves unhappy about Kathabhai's dress and suggested that he should change his clothes. Although angry and insulted, everyone wanted the marriage to take place, and after much squabbling, a solution was agreed upon. Katabhai was lead to a relative's house and given a clean *kediyun* and *chorni* to wear, and a large red and gold brocaded turban with an embroidered turban band (*bokani*). They put a silver chain (*kandoro*) around his waist, and a large silver anklet (*toda*) on his ankle and he remounted the horse, arriving at the bride's home, richly adorned as a conventional *Bharwad* groom. This time his father-in-law opened the door and welcomed him and the marriage took place.

Dilipbhai was in the groom's party and witnessed the entire scene. It was, he claimed, a very bad day for the caste. Marriage was meant to be the most auspicious time of one's life. The groom was meant to be king. He was supposed to be welcomed with admiration and respect. But his cousin had been gravely humiliated in front of everybody. Dilipbhai interpreted this as a sign of the great backwardness of people in his caste who felt that failure to wear a *kediyun* and *chorni* meant deserting the caste itself.

When it came to Dilipbhai's own marriage time, his father approached him anxiously and asked him what he would wear for the wedding. He told Dilipbhai:

> "It is your choice. I cannot tell you what to wear. But you remember the wedding of your cousin and all the trouble and humiliation of that day. As your father, I beg you to wear *Bharwad* dress, just for your wedding. You see that even Katabhai's father-in-law accepts that Kathabhai wears bushcot and pant everyday. But for his marriage it was different. If you have love for your parents you will do this thing. You will wear *kediyun* and *chorni* like a shepherd just for one day in your life, and then you will be free to dress as you like."

Dilipbhai, unable to resist these persuasions, agreed to his father's request. He said his parents had provided everything for him and allowed him be educated which was unusual in his caste. How could he deny them this one thing and upset them in front of the community? So he told his father that he would wear full *Bharwad* dress for his wedding without making any fuss. This he did as the photograph album bears witness.

But Dilipbhai's photograph album required careful scrutiny. For, tucked behind a photograph of Dilipbhai and his wife at the marriage ceremony, there was an *extra* photograph that Dilipbhai was only prepared to show me when his mother had left the courtyard. Drawing this second photograph from behind the first, he announced with a smile:

> "This is the *secret photograph*! Nobody knows it is here except my sisters and my wife. If my mother saw it she would throw me out of the house and never speak with me again. But she would never think of looking under here. She does not know how the photos are attached to the page and would never try to move them."

The secrets of the Secret photograph

The secret photograph showed Dilipbhai and his wife standing in a corn field, with corn up to their waists. They were arm in arm and both were smiling broadly. Dilipbhai looked much the same as ever in his fawn coloured trousers and white synthetic shirt, but his wife was almost completely unrecognisable from the timid woman I had seen earlier, sheltering beneath her *sadlo* (half-sari), dressed in the typical waistcloth (*jimi*), and *kapdu* worn by the women of her caste. Not only was she wearing a bright red synthetic sari in the photo, but she had it flung back from her head to reveal her hair and her bold and smiling face. Dilipbhai explained:

> "This is how my wife would look if I had the choice. But I cannot control it. Her parents would refuse to send her to me if she changed her clothes and my parents would have refused to accept her as their daughter-in-law. Even if she came to live with me in Baroda, she would have to wear *kapdu* and *jimi*. For what if my parents came to visit without warning? They would see her in a sari and we would be thrown out of caste. I am controlled by my parents. They are controlled by the caste association. *Bharwad* people are very backward looking, especially the women. They say "if you change your clothes, then you change your nature". My mother especially thinks this."

The "secret photo" had been taken by Dilipbhai's friend from Bhavnagar who had borrowed a camera for the day and had also provided one of his wife's saris for Shantaben (Dilipbhai's wife) to wear. The actual taking of the photo was planned a week in advance and on the morning of the event Dilipbhai and his friend set off "to visit a temple" in the hills. Shantaben and her sister-in-law followed soon afterwards. They were supposed to be taking bread (*rotlo*) and buttermilk (*chas*) to some men in the fields. But they made a quick diversion and met up with Dilipbhai and his friend. There in the corn field, Shantaben took off her *sadlo* and exchanged it for the red sari. Then she and her husband posed for the shot. Only one pose was taken, since this friend had obtained the camera to take photos of his own family. But Dilipbhai was very pleased with the result. As he said, "It could be from a movie, don't you think?"

The photograph might have had less impact were it not concealed immediately beneath a photograph in which Dilipbhai's bride, Shantaben, was completely concealed beneath her marriage veil (*gharcholu*). She was doing *akhi laj* and was sitting opposite Dilipbhai who was dressed in his *kediyun, chorni* and turban. The two were linked by a cotton thread. Just as Dilipbhai's desired

Bharwad women, wearing faded black waist cloths (*jimis*) with machine embroidered and sequined bodices (*kapdu*) and synthetic half-saris.

Fig. 8:3

A group of *Bharwad* men dressed for a fair at a village near Jalia. Most of them wear the *dhoti* and *kediyun* combination. Note the variety of ways in which they wrap their turbans. Second from the right, a man wears locally made studded leather shoes.

Fig. 8:4

image of a modern couple was suppressed in every day life, so the illicit photograph was concealed behind the overtly conventional *deshi* image.

When I spoke with Shantaben about the photograph, she laughed and said that it would be impossible for her to wear a sari in everyday life. She said: "if you wear a sari then you can no longer be called a *Bharwad*. That is the way it is amongst our caste. Better to die than to change your clothes."

Although the *Bharwad* were the only group in the village to show such sartorial conservatism regarding both men and women, there were other shepherd communities in the area, such as the *Rabari*, who shared a similar style of dress and a similar reluctance to accept change. Even as far afield as Ahmedabad city, they tended to cling tenaciously to their traditions. In Ahmedabad it is common to see prosperous *Rabari* men, delivering milk on expensive Honda motorbikes, but still dressed in *kediyun*, *dhoti* and turban, despite living in a large industrial city. Like Kathabhai, they met with considerable resistance if they tried to cast off their habitual dress. One example of such resistance took place in 1985 when a reluctant *Rabari* wife threatened to reject her husband on account of his clothes.

The tale of the reluctant *Rabari* wife

This tale was recounted to me by a professor who was teaching in a University Department in Ahmedabad. In one of his classes he had a bright young student who came from the *Rabari* community, but who apparently suffered from bad body odour because he always wore the same dirty trousers and shirt. One day the professor asked the student why he never changed his clothes, and received the following reply:

> "Sahib, I am a *Rabari*. We people keep goats and sell milk. I too must do this work even though I am studying. When I come home from college I deliver milk on my bicycle. But I have a problem. At home I am expected to dress in *kediyun* and *dhoti* like the rest of my caste. Most of them are still dealing in milk and are very backward looking. When I came here to college I could not wear *kediyun* and *dhoti* for people would have laughed and said: "Look! A shepherd in college!". So I purchased one pair of trousers and this shirt that you see me wearing. But it became very difficult for me at home. My wife despised me in these clothes and refused to allow me to come to her. She said that she had married a *Rabari* man and she could only sleep with a *Rabari*. She said that if she saw me in trousers and shirt again then she would never again share the same bed. So you see, I don't let her see me in my college dress. I leave the house each morning in a *kediyun* and *dhoti*. Then I visit my friend's house where I keep these college-going clothes.

I change into trousers and shirt for college and then, in the evening, I change back into *deshi* (dress) before returning home. Because of this I only have one shirt and one trouser and so I never wash them. And certainly I cannot ask my wife to wash them. She would refuse."

Before analysing some of the reasons for *Bharwad* conservatism, I shall first include two last stories, translated from Kavakshibhai Barot's collection of *Bharwad* tales from the villages of Saurashtra (Barot 1977). From these it becomes clear that even when clothing traditions were questioned and criticised by members of the herding communities, doubts rarely resulted in the wholesale rejection of a custom. Rather, the retention of a custom such as a particular style of dressing, often acted as a barrier which actually served to prevent other forms of social change. The first story concerns women's inability to give up the custom of wearing *boloya* (ivory bangles) and the second story concerns the difficult relationship between clothing and education. Together with the clothing incidents from Jalia and Ahmedabad, they help to provide some overall view of the attitudes of shepherds to their dress.

The tale of the *Boloya* (Ivory bangles)

Boloya are the thick white ivory bangles given to a young wife by her in-laws. As I have shown, it was customary for members of all castes in the village to give at least one pair of ivory bangles to a new wife. The term *boloya* refers only to the heavy bands of undecorated ivory worn by *Kanbi*, *Kharak*, *Bharwad*, *Koli* and those low caste women who could afford them.[4] Such bangles were usually given to the bride a few weeks before the *anu* ceremony and were one of the symbols of marital bliss (*saubhagya*). Today *boloya* are very costly, particularly in view of increased restrictions in the ivory trade.[5] They are also renowned for the pain they cause when they are first squeezed

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[4] The origin of the custom of giving ivory bangles to married women is unknown. Parmar suggests that women wore conch shell bangles before they adopted ivory (interview). Certainly in Bengal conch shell bangles are worn by married women (Fruzzetti 1982). According to a census report on ivory manufacture in Saurashtra, it was only wealthy married women who wore ivory bangles "in early times" but the practice gradually spread down the social hierarchy. The original *boloya* worn by peasant women were apparently made from wood which was dipped in oil to give the bangles a deep maroon colour. Once ivory bangles were adopted they were often dipped in red dye to obtain the same deep red colour (Census of India 1961, vol. V, part VII-A, no. 4:3-5).

[5] Recent attempts to protect the elephant have resulted in a prohibition on the export of raw ivory from Africa and a restriction on ivory production in India. This has reduced the stock of ivory available and sent prices soaring.

onto the wrists which have to be bound and greased for the purpose. Most communities have given up the custom of wearing *boloya* and have replaced them with gold or plastic bangles. Amongst the *Kharak*, those women who wear *ghaghra* usually continue to wear *boloya* but young women are reluctant to wear them. Like the *Kanbi*, they now regard them as clumsy and old fashioned. Amongst the *Bharwad*, however, *boloya* are still highly valued and are still given to new young wives. The tale of the *boloya* runs as follows:

There was a *Bharwad* girl who was still living at her parents' house but was married into a poor family which had fallen on difficult times. Because of their desperate poverty, the girl's in-laws did not send her *boloya*. According to custom, the girl's mother refused to send her daughter to her in-laws' house until she had received the *boloya* which were her due. Three times the groom's relatives arrived to fetch the bride and each time the girl's mother refused to allow her daughter to leave, saying that she would never join her husband until she had received her *boloya*. On the fourth occasion, the mother relented and agreed to send her daughter on the condition that the daughter should receive *boloya* within one week. The groom's family, despite their poverty, agreed.

When the girl arrived at her in-laws, the wife of her husband's elder brother was jealous and annoyed. She was older than this newcomer and she still had not received *boloya* owing to the family's financial problems.

Within a week of arriving at her in-laws, the women of the household set out for town to visit the ivory shop. They were given the choice of real or false ivory and said they could only accept real. The shopkeeper asked for 1,800 rupees, and accepted 1,400 rupees after bargaining. The women said that the *boloya* must be tightly fitted. They celebrated the purchase by eating chick pea snacks and sweets. Then, at an auspicious moment, the new wife's arms and wrists were greased with butter and her fingers and thumbs bound together. The girl screamed in agony but the women held her down and the shopkeeper forced the *boloya* on, scraping and bruising her hand. She cried and screamed and said that she no longer even wanted *boloya*. Finally, she fainted with the pain and when she came round, she felt so frightened and ashamed that she wet herself and had to ask for clean clothes.

Meanwhile, many city people gathered around to see what all the commotion was about. They looked at the *Bharwad* with disgust and told them they must

give up this bad social custom. Why didn't they invest in gold or silver instead?.

When she returned home, the girl's wrists and hands became septic and swollen. She could not work and her hands smelt bad and the family wasted a lot of money on ointment and medicine. Finally, they had to break each *boloya* off into three parts. When, after three months, she had recovered, they re-fixed the *boloya*, but this time using metal joins so that they looked ugly.

Seeing all this the women began to wonder if they really should wear *boloya* but they felt they must because they feared what might happen if they broke this old tradition.

The Tale of the *Bharwad*'s Dislike of Education

A *Bharwad* boy went to school. But it was against *Bharwad* custom to sit still in one place. His own people scolded him and accused him of no longer mixing with the rest of the caste. One day he went down with fever and they called the exorcist (*bhuva*) who said that he had been affected by the evil eye (*najar*). The *bhuva* was given a coconut and tied a thread around the boy's wrists to protect him. His family refused to allow him back to school. Three days after the fever, he was ambling along when a bullock raised its tail and knocked him over. The women exclaimed: "It is because he is reading that he did not see the tail. It has made his eyes weak."

Some time later, Lakshman, the boy, went to his teacher's house and was impressed by the cleanliness and order. The teacher encouraged him to continue his studies and not to bother about what people said. The teacher put him into school lodgings.

Lakshman's father wanted his son to study but was worried about *najar*. The teacher told Lakshman's parents that they could not see their son for six months. The teacher agreed to pay all of Lakshman's expenses himself.

Lakshman's mother disapproved. She said, "people will talk", "he will be different from the others" and "he will be affected by the evil eye". She cried and cried, and finally after four months, she begged the teacher's permission to see her son. But Lakshman's mother did not recognise him because his skin was so pale and he was no longer wearing a *dhoti*, earrings and bangles and his

A young *Bharwad* boy from Jalia who wished to be photographed with one of his father's goats. Like many *Bharwad* children he is uneducated and does not wear Western style clothes.

Fig. 8:5
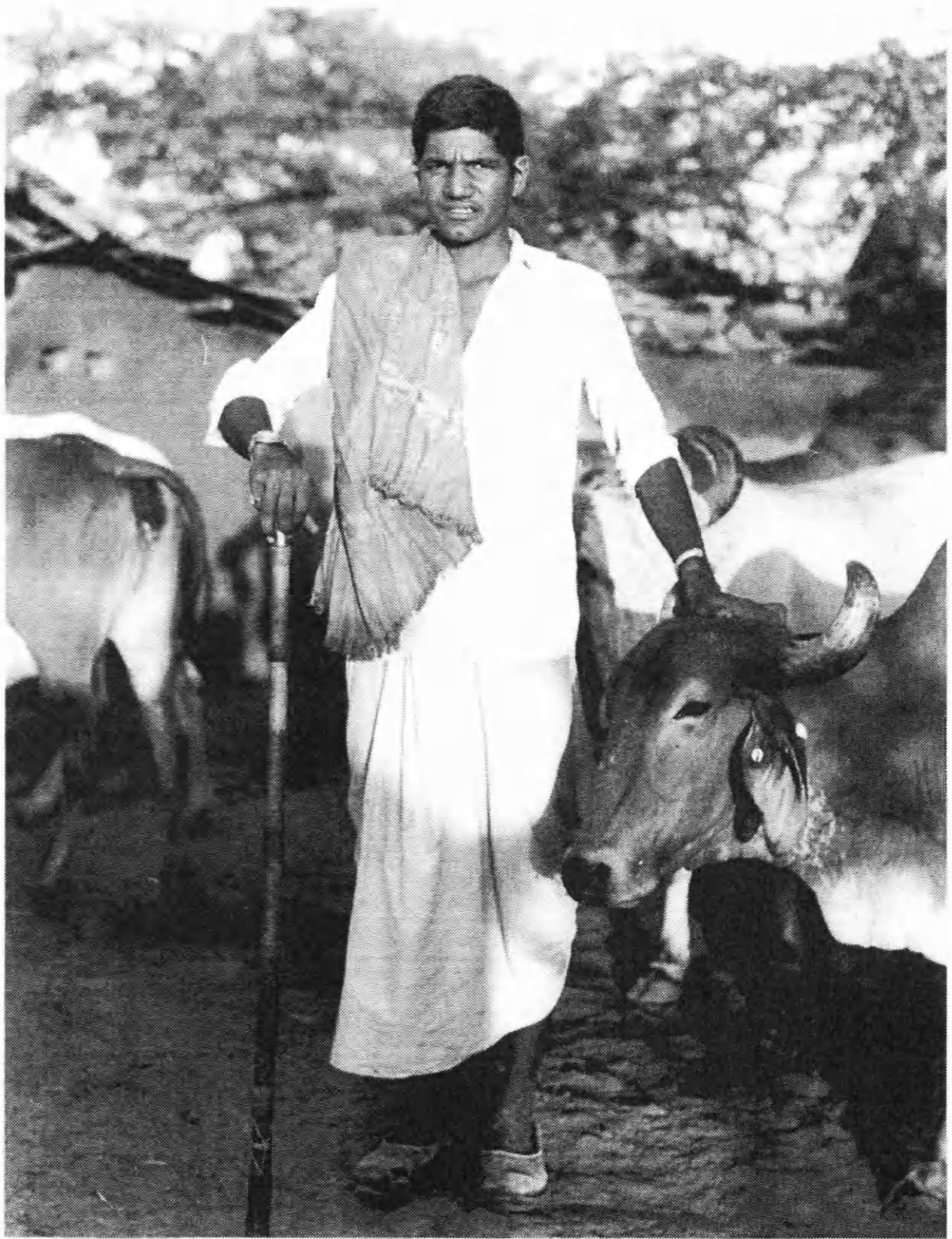
A *Bharwad* youth with his flock , having just returned from the fields. Previously he was wearing his shawl around his head. He chose to be photographed with his cows and borrowed his father's watch for the occasion.

Fig. 8:6

hair was all one length. She was frightened by his whiteness which looked as if his blood had turned to water. She thought that without his silver bangles he looked like a widow. If her mother-in-law saw him now, she would surely object. She was frightened also because his tuft of uncut hair (*chotli*) had been removed. This was a pledge and should only be removed by the *bhuva*. Now that he was without a *chotli,* the mother goddess might become upset.

The head teacher explained that all the other pupils would have laughed at Lakshman if he had kept his *chotli*. And with his earrings and bangles, he might have injured himself when playing sports. The teacher returned the jewellery to Lakshman's mother, but she did not believe his explanations. She thought his skin had turned white from disease. Lakshman said he was better off at school than at home but his mother would believe none of it. She returned home and told people that her son had turned as white as buttermilk (*chas*). She would never allow him back to school.

At *Diwali,* Lakshman came home for vacation, dressed in neat clean clothes and wearing shoes and socks. People were impressed by this but they did not like the way he had turned so white. At the end of the *Diwali* vacation, Lakshman prepared to return to school but his family did not allow it.

Summary of *Bharwad* attitudes to dress

The above accounts provide a general picture of *Bharwad* attitudes to clothing and identity which may be summarised as follows. To fulfil the expectations of the *Bharwad* community a *Bharwad* had to be clothed in something that conformed to the idea of "*Bharwad* dress". The mere fact of being born of *Bharwad* parents was not enough to convey the full requirements of *Bharwad* identity. Rather, such identity needed to be reconfirmed by a willingness to look like a *Bharwad* and to be seen to be a *Bharwad*. Failure to achieve this was not merely considered a threat to the caste but was interpreted as a visible sign of a person's unwillingness to *be* a *Bharwad*, and was therefore perceived as a *desertion* of caste. This was summed up in the two common phrases: "if you change your clothes, then you change your nature" and "better to die than to leave your clothes". In other words, embodied within a person's clothes was part of the *Bharwad* way of being, some kind of contribution to a more general *Bharwad*ness which included all manner of *Bharwad* customs.

Rejection of *Bharwad* dress meant, then, rejection (voluntarily or involuntarily) by the *Bharwad* community at large. Like the *Rabari* wife who refused to sleep with her husband if he wore "foren" (non-*Rabari*) apparel, so Kathabhai's father-in-law refused to marry his daughter to a man dressed in non-*Bharwad* clothes. Implicit in these disputes were the two ideas of caste exclusiveness and endogamy. These ideas were major concerns of the *Bharwad* Association which sought to keep *Bharwads* in line. Almost all decisions concerning the *Bharwad* were taken through such caste associations and *Bharwad* matters rarely, if ever, went to court. At times of difficulty members of the caste came together and elected their own jury. Minor decisions were made by local associations, composed of members of a few neighbouring villages, while major decisions were discussed in larger assemblies, containing *Bharwad* representatives from a number of different districts.

The local association to which Jalia men were affiliated did not have any fixed policy concerning dress but members were opposed to the introduction of "too many foren elements", especially on such occasions as marriage. They felt it better to reject a groom and his clothes rather than marry a *deshi* girl to a "foren"-looking boy, and so risk mixing unlike categories and diluting the *Bharwad* community. In some stricter associations unmarried men were made to swear to keep *Bharwad* customs for the rest of their lives before they were allowed to marry. If they failed to keep to their vow they risked being excommunicated. In one case in a neighbouring district, a groom announced his intention to wear trousers at his wedding. An emergency caste meeting was immediately held and a jury voted not only to boycott the wedding but also to kidnap his mother. This was reasoned on the grounds that the groom's mother should remain within the community even if her wayward son was willing to desert it by wearing trousers.

Thus in the same way that wearing Western clothes was perceived by Gandhi and his followers as an act of disloyalty to India at a national level, so, at a local level, it was perceived by the *Bharwad* as an act of disloyalty to the caste. And in the same way that Indian women earlier this century remained faithful to Indian clothes even when their husbands deserted them, so *Bharwad* women were even less willing to desert caste dress than their menfolk. There were fewer disputes about women's dress than men's dress amongst the *Bharwads* because women were conformists, and until their husbands had changed their own sartorial image more radically, the women were unlikely to "step out of

caste". In one of the few incidents where women's dress was at the centre of a controversy, it was a dispute concerning female modesty rather than caste loyalty. The incident took place at a wedding in Bhavnagar during which an educated *Bharwad* man announced that it was backward for the bride to be fully veiled. The bride's maternal uncle, upset by this insult, lifted back the veil to expose the young girl's face. Horrified at seeing the bride, the older generation turned their backs on the wedding ceremony, saying that if the bride would not keep *laj*, then they, the old men and women of the community, would have to keep *laj* themselves. Such, they argued, was the perversion caused by people deserting the *Bharwad* tradition and losing all sense of shame.

Marriage, being an important and auspicious occasion when members of the community created and reaffirmed their social bonds, was, as we have seen, a particularly sensitive time for sartorial disputes. Sisters or female cousins from the same village were often married on the same day to grooms who came from other villages, each bringing their own wedding parties (*jan*). Such group marriages brought large crowds of *Bharwads* together and such numbers heightened the likelihood of disagreement, particularly when the uneducated majority met with the small minority of educated *Bharwad* men. Furthermore the practice of direct exchange marriage and the ideology of equality associated with it, reinforced the idea that clothing traditions should not be changed. During a discussion about village fashion, one *Bharwad* man attributed the impossibility of *Bharwad* women wearing saris to the principle of exchange marriage itself:

> "If I dressed my daughter in a sari, then she would never be able to marry. For in our caste we give our daughters *hame hame* ("opposite opposite", meaning in exchange) and when we arrange their engagements they are just small children. Now suppose it came to *anu* time and one girl was wearing a sari and the other wearing *jimi* and *kapdu*, how could it be said that they were equal? They would not be the same and one or other family would feel cheated. So the marriage, arranged for so many years, would have to be cancelled."

Similarly, fear of *najar* (the evil eye) served to reinforce the idea that all *Bharwad* should look alike, for any peculiarity in dress or manners risked attracting the envious and destructive glance of others. Pocock has shown how the beliefs associated with *najar* serve to constrain individual interests in favour of group ones, for the eye strikes hardest amongst those of the same caste who *should* in theory be equal but are not quite so (Pocock 1973:39). He sees *najar* as "symptomatic of a whole dimension of village life....particularly expressive

of a conflict between the desire to do and be well and the fear of appearing superior" (ibid:2). In the last *Bharwad* story quoted above, Lakshman's somewhat brief school career was cut short because his parents feared he would attract *najar*. Wearing shoes and socks and other clothes associated with education, seemed to imply a sense of superiority which in turn risked inviting the envy of other *Bharwads*. As Pocock shows, *najar* is linked to the dual feelings of envy and guilt which, taken together, serve to discourage blatant displays of individualism within a caste.

In Lakshman's case it was his altered appearance and the suspicion it caused that made his parents remove him from the school. In the case of Jalia women, it was the fact that being educated would *necessitate* a change of dress that actually served to *prevent* their being sent to school at all. For women reasoned: "How can we go to school when we wear the *kapdu*? It is totally open (at the back). People would laugh at us and call us backward". Yet, asked why they did not wear a blouse like other village women and girls, they reversed their argument:

> "How could we wear that? Those things are for educated people. They are for progressive people. We have not studied at all. How can we dress like *bhunellawalla* (educated people) when we are not educated? Our people would say we were stepping over the limits of our caste and trying to look more important than we actually are".

Thus in the same way that women could not go to school because they could not change their dress, so they could not change their dress because they had not been to school. Such reasoning was caught in a tautological bind, whereby each custom was justified simply by the fact of its existence. So even when the women recognised the physical discomfort and financial burden caused by their custom of wearing *boloya*, they could not reject the custom because they feared what would happen if they did. According to *Bharwad* reasoning, the *Bharwad* could not leave their clothes because if they left their clothes "they would no longer be called *Bharwad*". A favourite saying amongst women was: "You can change your *desh* (locality) but not your *vesh* (clothes)".

Defining *Bharwad* Dress

It is clear from the above discussion that, amongst the *Bharwad*, dress plays a vital role in creating and maintaining caste identity. The fact that failure to wear *Bharwad* dress is treated as an act of desertion, suggests that for the *Bharwad*, clothing not merely symbolises social identity but also "transforms" it (cf.

Bayly 1986). According to Bayly, the distinctive feature of pre-colonial Indian ideas about cloth lay in this transformative aspect. By this he means that cloth, being porous to purity and pollution, not merely marked out the status of its wearers, but also altered their physical and moral properties. In other words cloth was capable of actually transforming the bio-moral substance of the individuals who wore it (Bayly 1986:287). According to such reasoning a person dressed in silk was not merely considered wealthier than someone dressed in cotton, but was actually considered morally and physically superior through their contact with the cloth.

Of all the people in Jalia, the *Bharwad* would appear to believe more strongly than most in the transformative aspects of cloth. But the precise nature of this transformation needs to be examined. For although clothes help to define caste identity, they are not considered sufficient in themselves to actually confer caste identity any more than eating the appropriate foods can transform a *Harijan* into a *Vaniya.* A *Brahman,* dressed as a *Bharwad,* would not, I was assured ,"be" a *Bharwad,* even if he or she looked the part to perfection. Yet a *Bharwad* without *Bharwad* dress was somehow "not a *Bharwad*", in view of the fact that he or she was not dressed in the appropriate way. This raises various questions regarding definition. Firstly, what exactly is *Bharwad* dress and to what extent has it remained constant over time? And secondly, are there any specific criteria of *Bharwad* dress which enable us to see which types of changes are permissible before a single garment crosses the boundary between the *Bharwad* and the non-*Bharwad*? Is it the specific type of fabric, the clothing style, the colours, the designs, the mode of production, the geographic origin or a mixture of some or all of these factors that makes *Bharwad* dress into *Bharwad* dress? Or is it, as Bayly might suggest, the bio-moral properties of the cloth which actually serve to transform the wearer's physical and moral being?

In table 8:1 I analyse the various changes that have occurred in different articles of *Bharwad* woman's dress since the early 1900's. Whilst on the one hand, it might seem artificial to carve up the different aspects of an item of clothing in this way, it is, on the other hand, helpful in trying to locate precisely what is meant by *Bharwad* dress. The table refers to the clothing of adult *Bharwads* from the *Nanabhai* division.

TABLE 8:1

BHARWAD WOMEN'S DRESS (1900-1989)

LOWER GARMENT	Early 1900's	1989
Garment style	unstitched waist cloth (*jimi*) for adult women	no change
Colour	red for young women black for older women	no change
Pattern	plain (with decorative border for weddings)	no change
Raw Materials	wool	polyester or poplin
Producers	woven by *Harijans* spun by *Bharwads*	factory
Mode of Production.	hand woven	machine woven
Place of Production	local villages	Ahmedabad

UPPER GARMENT	Early 1900's	1989
Garment style	*Kapdu*	no change
Colour	multicoloured	multicoloured (brighter colours)
Pattern	floral decorative	simple floral decorative
Raw materials	cotton cloth silk thread, threads, mirror inserts	polyester synthetic & sequins
Producers	*Bharwad* women	factory & local tailor
Mode of Production	hand embroidered	machine embroidered
Place of Production.	Jalia	Ahmedabad

HEAD COVERING	Early 1900's	1989
Garment type	veil	no change
Colour	red,purple,green (for young women); black and red (old women)	no change
Pattern	tie-dyed spots, occ. embroidery, red border	printed floral or dotted or, machine embroidered
Raw materials	wool	polyester or cotton or wool
Producers	spun by *Bharwad* woven by *Harija*	factory
Mode of Production	hand woven	machine woven
Place of Production	Jalia	Ahmedabad

These changes may be summarised as follows: there has been a systematic change in the raw materials used to make *Bharwad* women's clothes, with natural fibres being replaced by synthetic ones. This fits well with Bayly's hypothesis that in India there is a cultural preference for fine fabric, a preference which has been easily satisfied by the ready availability of machine manufactured cloth (Bayly 1986:308). For amongst the *Bharwad* each garment worn in the early 1900's has been replaced by a new finer machine manufactured version. *Bharwad* women were, however, pragmatic about this change. Not only were the machine produced goods finer and lighter to wear, but they were cheaper too, especially bearing in mind the fact that women could sell the wool they once used for their veils at a higher price than they now paid for new synthetic materials. Most *Bharwad*s were poor and for them cost was an important factor in their choice of fabric type. While *Kanbi* and *Kharak* women favoured synthetic fabrics because they wanted to boost their social image and escape being classified as backward or uneducated, *Bharwad* women favoured them for predominantly financial reasons and were not concerned with whether or not other castes regarded them as backward. This was clear from the fact that they made no attempt to adopt the sari and were, on the whole, proud of retaining a *deshi* look.

Changes in material were, of course, related to changes in the mode of production and in the identity of the producers of *Bharwad* clothes. Whereas in the past, women embroidered their own *kapdu* by hand, they were now buying ready-made polyester versions of the *kapdu* which were machine embroidered with colourful and glittering threads and gold brocaded or lurex-type borders. Similarly, they were no longer spinning their own wool for their veils which were now factory produced and machine printed with new patterns. These changes suggest that it was not necessary for *Bharwad* clothes to be hand-made, or for them to be made by the *Bharwad* themselves in order for them to fulfil the criteria of *Bharwad*ness. City merchants were quick to recognise this fact and in Bhavnagar there were a number of shops which specialised in ready-made versions of shepherd's clothes. They relied almost entirely on the *Bharwad* and the *Rabari* for their custom, for most other women in the area no longer wore such *deshi* styles.[6] From the readiness with which *Bharwad* women have accepted these innovations we can conclude that it is not in the act of creation that *Bharwad* clothes gain their particular *Bharwad*ness. Neither is it in the texture or bio-moral substance of the fabrics employed.

When it comes to decorative elements, the situation becomes more complicated. Although patterns and motifs have undergone many changes, these can best be described as transmutations rather than innovations. The *jimi* (waist cloth), being plain has remained largely unchanged, although the silver tape and tinsel-like strips used to create the decorative vertical border for festival *Jimis* has become more lavish. In the *kapdu*, patterns have become more symmetrical and less complex. The *kapdu*, which in the past combined a variety of stitched motifs with mirror work, now relies on synthetic fabrics such as lurex and gold brocade for its shining quality. Those modern *kapdu* that are still embroidered are embroidered with simple machine-stitched flowers and patterns. They are commonly embroidered in only one colour (often gold or white) since this enables the man operating the sewing machine to continue sewing without having to change the thread too often.

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6 In Ahmedabad there are some equivalent shops which cater to the *Rabaris* of the city and neighbouring area. These *Rabaris*, unlike Bhavnagar *Rabaris*, used to embroider their own skirts and wore a strip of embroidery on their veils. Nowadays many of them get their skirts decorated by machine embroidery which they order through the city merchants. Unlike Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad attracts tourists largely from India and to some extent from abroad. To tourists these specialist shops appear exotic and the merchants now cater to a mixture of *Rabari* and tourist demands.

Machine embroidery has also become the most popular decoration for young girls' veils on festive occasions. Whereas in the past embroidery was sparse or non-existent on *Bharwad* veils, since women had little time or money to embroider, nowadays embroidery often covers the veil cloth, creating a rich and colourful effect. Yet again the modern patterns were often transformations of past patterns. The tie-dyed spotted patterns worn by married women in the past were often replaced by machine printed imitations of tie-dyed patterns or simple floral patterns. In the case of old women, their black woollen veils (*dhabla*) which were decorated with red tie-dyed spots are sometimes replaced by black cotton veils with a red floral print which, from a distance resembles the old *dhablo* in its overall effect and colour. Thus although it cannot be said that the *Bharwad* have insisted on retaining certain patterns, they do retain a preference for patterns and colours that resemble those worn by past generations.

The most constant factor that *Bharwad* women have retained since the beginning of the century, is the garment style and to some extent its colour. It is these elements which could not be altered without being perceived as a threat to caste identity. When a woman said that she would rather die than leave her clothes, it was the combination of these two aspects to which she referred. To be a true *Bharwad* she had to wear certain specific garments (*jimi, kapdu,* veil) in a range of certain specific colours. And while there was some flexibility in the colours and styles worn by young girls, there was no flexibility in the style of the garments worn by women once they were married and living in their conjugal homes. A veil could not be replaced by a sari, and a *kapdu*, though it could be machine made, could not be replaced by a blouse. And this was one of the reasons why Dilipbhai and his wife were so secretive about their illicit photograph. Not only did it show that they had sneaked out of the house together, but also that Shantaben, dressed in a sari and with an uncovered head, was willing to question the necessity of wearing *Bharwad* dress.[7]

While women have remained consistent in their choice of clothing style, men have been less so. Despite their insistence on the importance of preserving "*Bharwad* dress", it remains difficult to define just what this dress actually is

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7 Had this photograph been taken formally in a studio, it is possible that such sari wearing would have been acceptable since dressing up and presenting a transformed image is an important aspect of Indian photography.

for it seems to embody a number of different alternatives. Writing in 1920, Enthoven described it as follows:

> "The true *Bharwad* dress for men is three woollen blankets of undyed wool, one wound in broad bands around the head, a second tied around the waist reaching the knee, and a third thrown across the shoulder" (Enthoven 1920, vol 1:119).

The fact that Enthoven spoke of "true *Bharwad* dress" suggests that already by 1920 there were some *Bharwad* who did not wear this type of dress. Certainly photographs of *Bharwads* in the early 1930's show that many men were wearing cotton *dhotis* rather than woollen wraps (cf. Hopkinson 1930's). And today, in Jalia, *Bharwad* men wear mainly white cotton or white poplin, and no longer restrict themselves to wearing simple unstitched cloth. On their upper bodies they wear either the smock (*kediyun*) with a vest (*gunji*) or sleeveless shirt (*bundi*) underneath, or a long shirt which is sometimes worn with a green waistcoat. On their lower bodies they wear either pantaloons (*chorni*) or *dhotis*. On ritual occasions the *Kediyun* and *chorni* combination is the favourite although some men do appear in *dhotis* or wear shirts with their pantaloons. On such occasions men often add other items of adornment such as socks, watches and additional jewellery (silver waist bands, silver button ornaments and woollen pom poms round the neck). Young men wear red turbans and old men wear white turbans, wrapped in a variety of styles which, though fairly uniform on ritual occasions, often appear haphazard in daily life. And in the past five years, young *Bharwad* men have also adopted a new shoulder cloth which is usually bright pink, (occasionally bright red), and is made from a mixture of wool and acrylic and embroidered by machine in coloured threads (see fig. 8:7). This has replaced the thick hand woven woollen blankets that *Bharwad* men wore in the past. The new garment acts not only as a shawl, but also as a scarf that can be draped around the neck or over the shoulders or even wrapped around the head instead of or on top of a turban. Despite the fact that Jalia *Bharwads* have only been buying and wearing these "shocking pink" cloths during the past few years, they have none the less incorporated them into their image to such an extent that few young men are seen without them. At social gatherings and marriages when large groups of *Bharwads* get together, there are always some youths in Western dress, but even they don one of these distinctive pink shawls to show their allegiance to the caste. In fact this new machine made acrylic and woollen pink shawl is, in a sense, the single most recognised symbol of *Bharwad* dress, even though it is also the most recent.
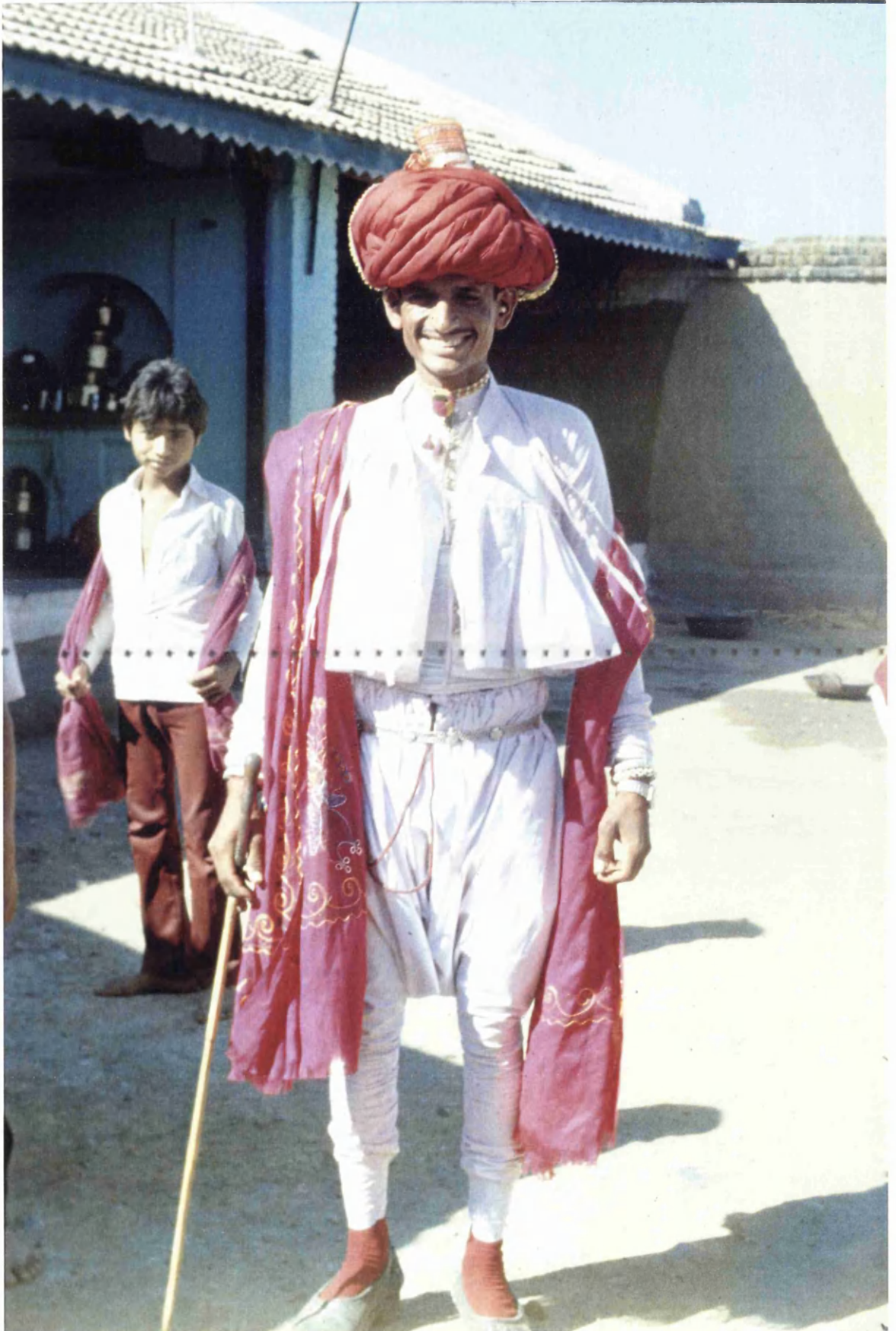
Fig. 8:7 A *Bharwad* man attending a wedding in Jalia. He wears a large twisted red turban and a white *kediyun* and *chorni* . Around his shoulders he wears the pink wool and acrylic shawl, now so popular amongst the *Bharwad*. In the background a boy from another village is wearing Western style trousers and a shirt. His only vestige of *Bharwad* identity is the pink shawl.
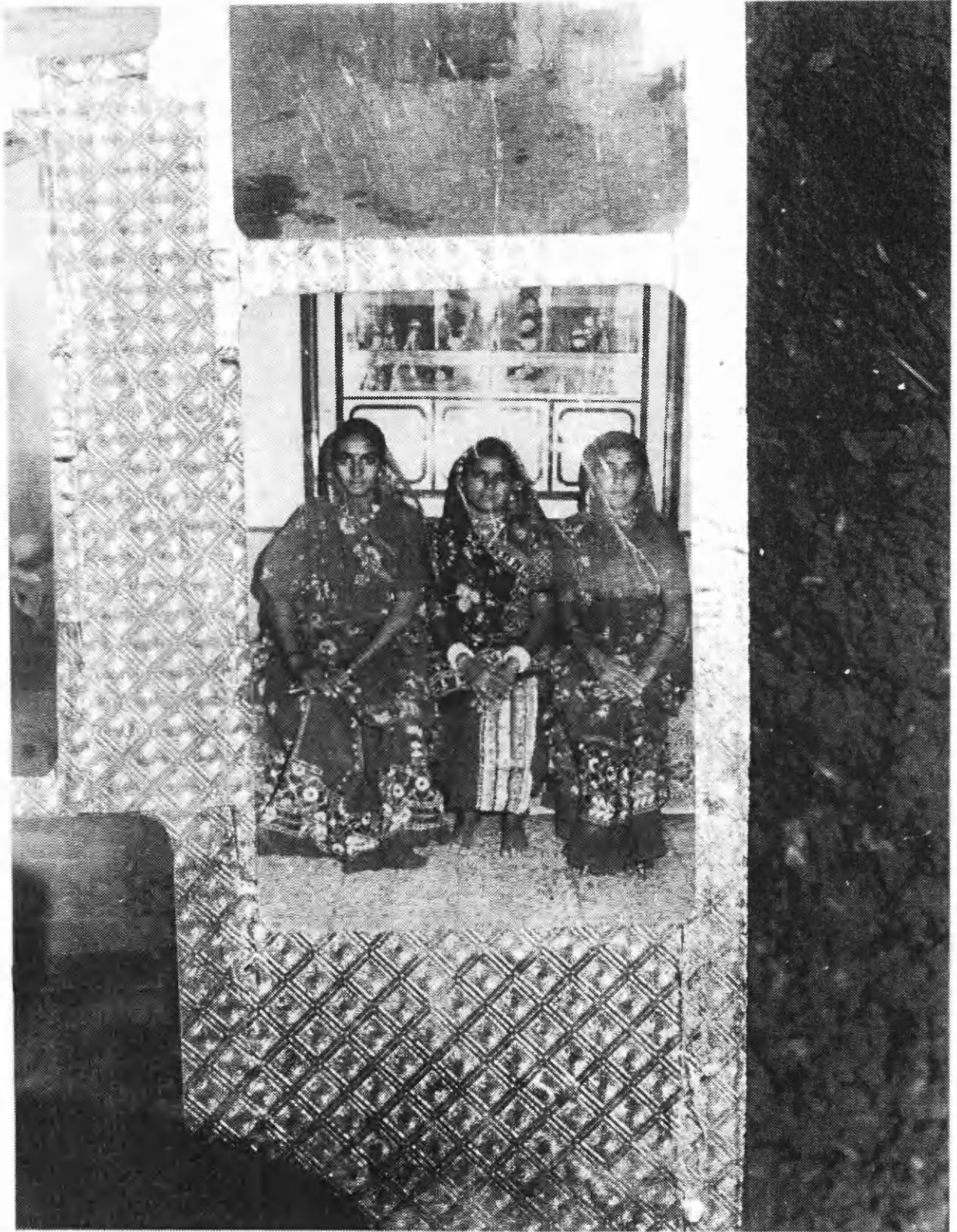
A photograph taken at a photographer's studio in Bhavnagar, showing three*Bharwad* girls from Jalia. In the centre a girl wears a decorated *jimi* of the type worn on festive occasions.Sitting left and right are *Bharwads* dressed in embroidered *ghaghra*, similar to those worn by *Kharak* women. *Bharwads* never wear such clothes in everyday life.

Fig. 8:8

Examination of the actual features of *Bharwad* men's dress reveals two interesting points. Firstly, the *kediyun* and *chorni* which now seem to epitomise *Bharwad* tradition on ritual occasions, have in fact only been adopted by *Bharwads* in the last one hundred years. And secondly, although the *Bharwads* have a strong sense of the need to preserve *Bharwad* dress, the actual features of this dress vary considerably in both material and style and have incorporated some very recent elements. Yet, despite this variety, it remains easy to recognise a *Bharwad* or a *Rabari* from members of other castes, for most other men, (with the exception of old men), no longer wear the styles that the *Bharwads* now favour. And it is perhaps this that is the most important feature of *Bharwad* dress: it is, and always was, distinctive. The precise materials employed, the bio-moral properties of the weave, and even the styles chosen were perhaps less significant than this one fact of caste distinctiveness. And if *Bharwad* men today are free to choose from a wider range of styles than ever before, that is perhaps partly because other men in the village no longer bother with such styles. *Bharwad* women on the other hand are less free to change their styles, partly because there are still other Jalia women who wear distinctive forms of local dress, such as the *Kharak* women, who wear the embroidered *ghaghro*. It is unlikely that *Bharwad* women will ever decide to adopt hand embroidered *ghaghra*, even when the *Kharak* have ceased to wear them altogether, for making *ghaghra* requires considerable time, effort and skill at a time when machines provide cheap and reasonable substitutes. None the less, I noticed that one *Bharwad* family who had visited a photographer's studio in Bhavnagar, had dressed their women up in *ghaghra* for the photograph (see fig. 8:8) implying that the idea of wearing such clothes was not unattractive to *Bharwad* women. Furthermore many of the embroidered house decorations that the *Kanbi* have rejected are being bought up by *Bharwads* for use in their own weddings. And some *Bharwad* girls make embroidered wall hangings that they never made in the past.

The Importance of Caste Distinctiveness to the *Bharwad*

One question that remains unanswered, and would be worthy of further research, is the question of why the *Bharwad* and the *Rabari*, the two main shepherd groups of Gujarat, should show a stronger determination than other groups to resist the pressures of mainstream fashion and to maintain a clearly caste-specific image? Their resistance to change applies not merely to dress, but also to education, Western medicine, and to their refusal in general to reform

certain customs which other castes now regard as humiliating or backward. They are, for example, the only castes in the district who continue to marry their daughters and sons whilst they are still in early childhood. Furthermore *pet chandla* (marriage of children whilst they are still in the womb) is, according to Jalia *Bharwads*, still practised today by some members of the caste. Added to this is a complex network of beliefs in and fear of *najar*, exorcists and diviners which seem to play a more important role in the lives of shepherds than in the lives of other social groups.

The answer to these differences lies perhaps in that aspect of the shepherd's lifestyle that differs from the lifestyles of other groups in the village. Whereas most communities are fully settled, travelling only for jobs or training purposes, the *Bharwad* lead a semi-itinerant existence, moving with their animals in search of suitable pasture during the hot dry summer months. Since Saurashtra is subject to regular droughts, not many years go by before shepherds are forced to round up their livestock and move on. Sometimes it is only the men who travel, leaving their women and children at home in the village. At other times it is whole families who may leave the village for weeks, months or in extreme cases, years at a time.

On the one hand it might be argued that such an itinerant existence would put shepherds in touch with many outside influences, all of which might become incorporated into their dress, making it heterogeneous. But on the other hand, it should be remembered that the continuity and persistence of itinerant groups, the members of which are often forced to separate, relies and is indeed dependent upon, a strong sense of group solidarity and shared values. In order to survive, such groups literally have to preserve their distinctiveness in relation to the outside world and the shepherds of Gujarat appear to have done just that.[8] Dress, along with other customs, was one of the means by which men and women reconfirmed their allegiance to the caste and expressed their loyalty to the group. The women's saying, "we can leave our *desh* (locality), but not our *vesh* (clothes)" was not merely metaphoric; it was descriptive of the code of conduct and indeed the very life-style on which the *Bharwad* community was built. It was therefore vital to the future of the caste's well-being that educated men, like Kathabhai and Dilipbhai, rather than emphasising their difference

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8 Gypsies are, of course, the clearest example of this process at work. Scattered throughout the globe, they have retained some form of recognisable dress that distinguishes them from the settled populations around them.
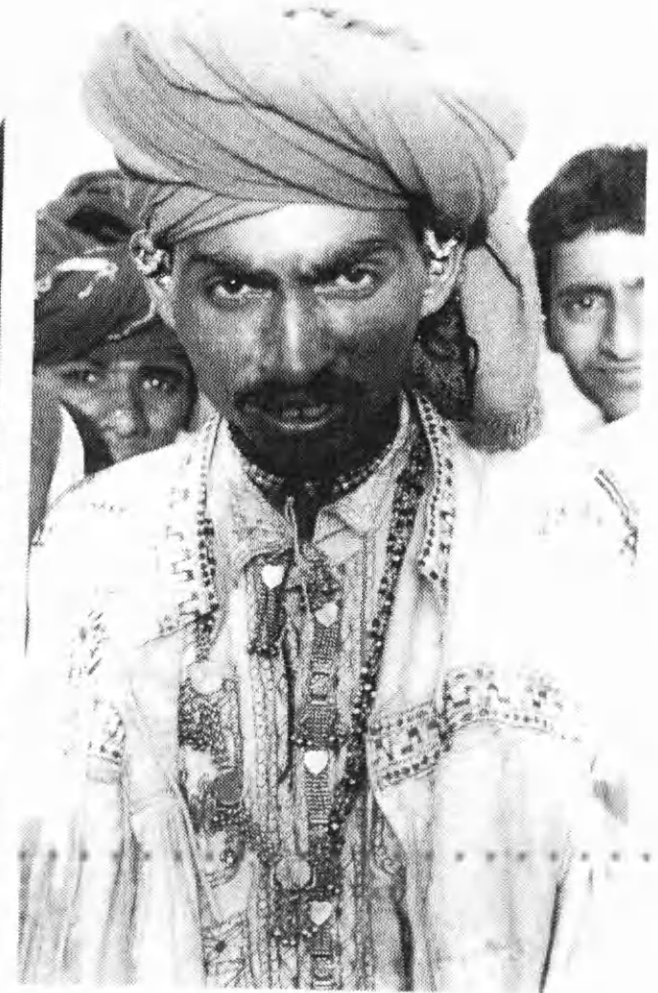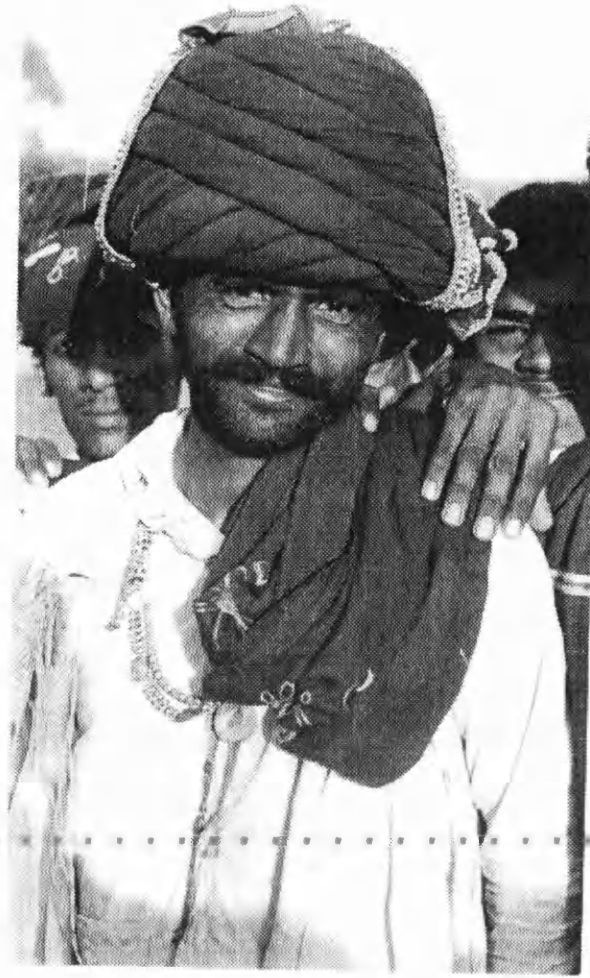
Bharwads at a fair, showing the variety of ways in which they wrap their turbans.

Fig. 8:9
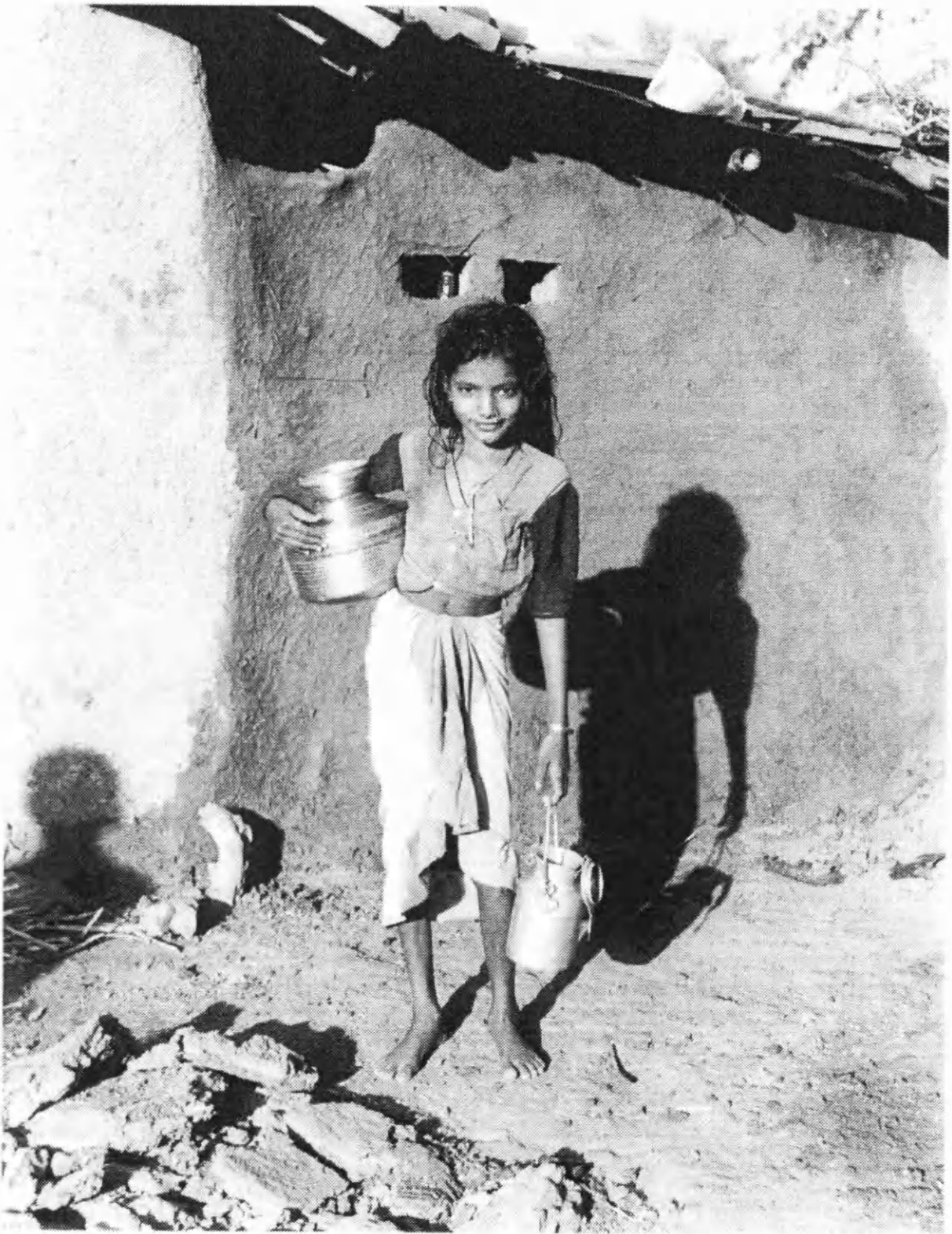
A young *Bharwad* girl in a cotton petticoat and blouse. In a couple of years she will wear a veil and begin the proccess of careful covering.

Fig. 8:10

through wearing trousers, should express their continued allegiance to the group at least during their own marriages; marriage being a time when the potential future of the community was forged through new alliances.

The sense of solidarity promoted by a shared sartorial image was not merely psychologically important, but also had practical importance to the *Bharwads*. Travelling in search of pasture, they often passed through "foren" villages where they required hospitality from strangers. The *Bharwad* had a unique custom of providing food or hospitality to any other *Bharwad*, without first enquiring as to the stranger's village or name. Here it was the clothes and tattoos of the stranger that provided the key to recognition and subsequent welcome. Earlier this century all *Bharwad* men had a tattooed image of Lord Hanuman (the monkey god) on their upper arm and Lord Krishna on their lower arm. These tattoos could be inspected by other *Bharwads* if there was any doubt as to a person's identity. Examining the groom's tattoos even used to be an integral part of the marriage ceremony, for people reasoned that while anyone could dress as a *Bharwad* for the day and so abscond with the bride, no one but a *Bharwad* would ever bear these markings on his arms. The tattoos acted literally as a guarantee of *Bharwadness*.

While to shepherd groups the fact of caste distinctiveness and the ability to be recognised were probably the most important aspects of their appearance, there were other groups in Jalia whose concern was to underplay differences and to escape the burden of recognition. I turn finally[9] to the *Harijans* of Jalia whose progressive attitude to dress provided a stark contrast to *Bharwad* conservatism.

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9 The term "finally" is appropriate for the *Harijans* were, as I have mentioned earlier, the last group with whom I worked in the village. I was in fact unable to visit the *Harijan* settlement until late in my stay owing to objections from other people in the village with whom I was working. Although all castes considered the *Harijans* as potentially polluting, their precise attitudes varied considerably. No one in the village seemed prepared to accept water from a *Harijan* or to allow them to share the village well and enter the main Temple, but for some people (usually high caste people), their overt prejudice ended there. It was largely amongst the middle ranking and low caste people that discrimination against, and fear of *Harijans* was strongest. A *Kharak* woman, for example, with whom I was very friendly, told me that if I ever entered the *Harijan* area I could never visit her house again. The *Brahman* family with whom I lived were more tolerant about my speaking with *Harijans*, although they would never do so themselves. As the eldest son put it, "On paper they are equal to us, but every one knows there is a difference between what we say and what we do. You know what I mean? As Brahmans we are higher. How can we mix with the lower? We would not be performing our duty to our own caste."

Harijans, the Modernists

Bharwads, like other "caste Hindus" in Jalia, never entered the *Harijan vas* (settlement) for fear of being polluted. If they had, however, they might have been surprised, as I was, by the neat *pakka* houses, freshly painted in blue and white, decorated with posters and ornaments and altogether more prosperous looking than the small and simple mud houses of the *Bharwad*. Surrounded by a mud wall and down a twisting alleyway, the *Harijan vas* was well secluded so that once inside it one felt as if one might have been in a different village altogether. But despite its seclusion, it was clear that some "caste Hindus" had an idea of its appearance for they made comments like: "*Harijans* live like kings" or "The *Harijans* are the only people who can live well these days" or "Nowadays unless you are a *Harijan* you don't stand a chance of getting a good job.[10]

When I had from time to time asked people how it was possible to recognise a *Harijan* if you saw one in the street, they would usually reply with some derogatory but vague comment like, "Oh, you can tell from the way they walk, slouching and lolopping" or "they are dirty" or "they are always drunk and swaying about". But sometimes I got other replies such as: "they have a branch (*jaklu*) tied around their waists" or "they wear a spitoon (*thukani*) around their necks" or "they have a whole role of cloth tied about their heads so you can see that they are untouchable and avoid them". When I suggested that these customs must surely have been in the distant past, and that one never saw such sights today, I was told, "No, not today, but when I was young it was like that" or "No, but in my mother's time these customs were still there. And she told them to me". Only one of the people whom I spoke to on this subject actually claimed to have *seen* such practices herself. She gave a lenghthy description of the spitoons worn by the *Harijans* in her natal village, saying they were made from earthenware if the people were poor and brass if they were wealthier. Her description sounded convincing.

When I entered the *Harijan vas* what I actually saw was an array of very modern and fashionable looking people. There were young women dressed in

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10 I had left India by the time that the ex Prime Minister, V. P. Singh proposed increasing the quota system for *Harijans* and Backward classes. This proposal, which has encouraged rioting and suicides throughout Northern India will no doubt have increased the resentment that high castes feel for low castes in Jalia, as everywhere else.

salwar kamizes, and even adolescent girls wearing skirts and blouses, with their calves exposed, such as I had rarely seen before in the village. Married women were dressed mainly in neat saris, tied in the Gujarati style, and men were almost without exception wearing trousers and shirts. Some of the older generation, however, had a more *deshi* appearance. Two old women were wearing black *jimis*, black and red veils and *boloya* on their wrists. They looked as if they might have been *Bharwads* apart from the fact that they had rejected the *kapdu* in favour of a blouse which they claimed was more modern. One woman explained her *Bharwad*-like appearance:

> "You see, sister, in the past we had nothing, I mean nothing. We wore what we could get. My father was a weaver and used to weave veils for the *Bharwads*, and in exchange they would give us something to wear, like a *jimi*, a *kapdu* or veil. So after that we looked like them. And now I am old. People would laugh if I started to wear a sari now. They would say, look at her with her white hair and fancying herself young."

Another woman looked more like a *Kanbi* or *Kharak* and was wearing the plain red waist cloth worn by the older women of those castes. She explained that years ago she had worked for a *Kanbi* family, doing small jobs. She had been very poor and used to beg for clothes. The *Kanbi* family sometimes gave her a *ghaghro* or a *kapdu;* sometimes both. And for a while she went about in embroidery like them. She had no time to embroider herself and accepted whatever she could get. She claimed that nowadays *Harijan* women had large trousseaux with saris and fine clothes, but in her day, she had not received a single item of clothing for her family was too poor.

Asked if they ever had any caste-specific clothing of their own, these women laughed and said that they were too poor to care what they wore. They just wore whatever they could get, whatever that might be.

The men, too, seemed to have worn a hotch potch of clothing in the past. Some wore *kediyun* and *chorni* with a small untwisted turban if they could afford it. Others wore a *dhoti* or *langoti* (loincloth). They agreed, "We had no real clothing of our own."

So I put it to them: "If you go into the village and you see some *Bharwads*, you know that they are *Bharwads* from their clothes. But how do people know when they see a *Harijan*?"

One man gave the following reply:

> "Nowadays, they don't know. We look like anyone else. We are developed people. Our sons can read and write and even our daughters. We are more educated than any *Kharak* or *Bharwad* of this village. But people used to know us because we had to wear special signs to show them who we were. This we did by tying a whole roll of cotton cloth around our heads like a huge untwisted turban. We called it *talfad*. When they saw *talfad* from a distance, then they knew a *Harijan* was approaching and would avoid us if we did not first step out of the way. Otherwise, if we wore *kediyun* and *chorni* with silver bracelets (*kudla*), people could not tell us apart from other castes. Then there were other things. We wore spitoons of earthenware round our necks so that our spit never touched the ground and polluted the path. Then we tied a branch round our waists so that it hung behind sweeping the ground after us to purify the place where we had trodden. So when people saw these things, they knew that we were *Harijans*. But all this is past now."

He went on to tell me how these symbols of stigmatisation had come to an end:

> "There was a king, a great king who wanted to build a lake in Patan. He constructed a huge ditch but it was empty and he did not know how to find water. He was told that he must sacrifice a boy who was virtuous in thirty-two different ways, and only then would water come. But it was difficult to find a virtuous boy and no father wished to sacrifice his own son. Finally one *Harijan* man came forward and sold his son to the king. The boy, who was named Mayo, agreed to be sacrificed only on condition that the symbols worn by the *dhed*[11] (*thukhanu, jalku, tulphad*) should be ended. The king agreed and the worship (*puja*) began. But at the last moment Mayo changed his mind, telling the king that it was wrong to sacrifice someone from his own kingdom. He tried to run away but he slipped and fell into the empty lake, cutting his foot. From the blood, water sprung and filled the lake. So we worship this boy. We call him Malapal. He was so truthful, that no one swears falsely on his name."

When asked when these events were thought to have taken place, he said that it was before Independence (1947), in his grandfather's day. His grandfather, who was a weaver, had, he claimed, worn all these signs. But when I discussed the story with some *Brahmans*, they agreed upon all the details except for the date. They argued that the King in the story was Sidh Raj who had reigned some six hundred years earlier. And it was therefore impossible for anyone in the village to have seen any of the signs of untouchability. They simply *claimed* to have seen them.

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11 *Dhed*, as I have already mentioned, was the original name of the weaving caste, some of whom later called themselves *Vankars*. They are the modern day *Harijans*.

Fig. 8:11 A *Harijan* couple, dressed in comparatively annonymous styles. The wife wears her sari in the Gujarati style and the husband wears trousers and a shirt.

Fig. 8:12 *Harijan* children. Unlike *Bharwad* girls, they wear Western style "frocks" and attend school.

The *Brahman* interpretation of the story as a legend from the distant past seemed more valid than the popular perceptions of other villagers, for surely if such customs had persisted into the present century they would have gained more exposure from politicians like Ambedkar and Gandhi who took up the *Harijan* cause. Yet, to my knowledge, neither had publicised these humiliating customs. The story of Maya is, however, recorded (in slightly different versions) in the district Gazetteer (1884 vol 8:157) and in Enthoven (1920 vol 1:322-3) where it is again attributed to the reign of Sidh Raj (1094-1143). And certainly by the beginning of the 19th century these stigmatising articles of apparel had entirely disappeared, for Rev. A. Taylor, writing in the late 18th century, recalls:

> "*Dhedas* used to drag thorns after them, and till lately dhedas were not allowed to tuck up the *dhoti* but had to trail their dress along the ground. Though traces of this practice have disappeared, an abusive term *kuladi* or *kodivala* or spittoon-men, shows that at one time the Dhedas had to hang spittoons round their necks." (Enthoven 1920 vol 1:322).

Leaving aside the absence of education and the concurrent lack of historical accuracy amongst most elder generation villagers, the time-lag between the Brahmans' interpretation and other more popular interpretations of the *Harijan's* plight could not be ignored. Had villagers claimed that these symbols of untouchability were simply the habits of "years gone by" (*pela na varus*), then there would have been no discrepancy, since this multipurpose category of time stretched back from anything between a few years to infinity. But the fact was that almost everyone I spoke to on the subject (mainly *Harijans, Bharwads, Kanbis, Kharaks*) claimed that either their parents, or grandparents had witnessed these things "with their own eyes". The result of this collapsing of history, this recounting of a story as though it pertained always to the immediate past, was that the idea of the untouchability of the *Harijan* remained ever present in the minds of the new generation. And what remained present for all, it seemed, except the *Harijans*, was not the tale of how these symbols came to be abolished, but rather the details of what these symbols were and why they existed in the first place. For many uneducated women in the village, the story provided a means of convincing their children of the polluting nature of *Harijans*. It was a means of saying that, although *Harijans* no longer look different today, they *are* different and must be avoided accordingly. Indeed they are *so* different and *so* polluting that they even used to have to wear special items of clothing to warn people of their coming and to purify the ground on which they trod. It might be imagined that, while many villagers attribute these symbols to the immediate past, the *Harijans* themselves might attribute them to

the distant past, since they must surely find the association with these traditions humiliating. But, on the contrary, *Harijan* men and women of the older generation did themselves attribute the symbols of untouchability to their recent past, recalling how their parents and grandparents used to have to wear these visible statements of their own impurity.

In order to comprehend this attitude, it is necessary to recall briefly some popular ideas about the *Harijan's* impurity that were shared not merely by other groups in the village, but by the *Harijans* themselves. Untouchability, as it was practised in Gujarat, encompassed the belief that *Harijans* were so impure that the mere sight of them was potentially polluting. They were therefore forced to live on the outskirts of villages, were barred entry to the village centre, to shops, temples, wells and the houses of other villagers. They were denied the services of the barber (where contact with a *Harijan's* skin and hair would have been particularly polluting), and were even denied access at times to local transport facilities for fear that they would pollute other passengers. The polluting qualities of the *Harijan* could be transmitted not merely through touching him or her, but also through contact with objects which the *Harijan* had touched.[12] For this reason, most people refused to take money that was in a *Harijan's* hand without purifying it with water. Acceptance of these restrictions by *Harijans* themselves rested not merely on fear of reprisals (usually beatings) from other castes, but also on their own belief that through polluting other castes they were committing a sin which affected their own chances of rebirth at a higher, more desirable level of society in the next life. According to this internalised ideology, it was in the interests of the *Harijans* themselves to avoid polluting other castes.[13]

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12 Amongst those objects which could be polluted by the touch of a *Harijan* was, of course, cloth. But the question remains as to whether cloth was any more permeable to pollution than other objects. It is difficult to gain any clear historical · insight into this question owing to lack of concise data, but I.P. Desai's study of untouchability in rural Gujarat (1976), provides detailed statistics of contemporary attitudes and practice. By the 1970's cloth ranked fairly lowly in its permeability to pollution as compared to other substances such as food and water. In two thirds of the villages studied, tailors were willing to mend a *Harijan's* clothes (P 132), and tailoring itself was an occupation that was becoming increasingly popular amongst *Harijans* who had clients from various castes (Desai 1970:155).

13 The *Harijan* practice of stepping aside in the road to avoid meeting a person from another caste was still widely practised in the 1970s (Desai 1976: 205-206).

It is difficult to assess whether or not the outer symbols of untouchability mentioned by villagers actually existed in concrete terms. Yet, perhaps more significant than the question of their existence, is the fact that they have been retained in modern memory as if they did exist, and as if their demise were only recent. For *Harijans*, as much as for members of other castes, the story of the symbols of untouchability, has acted as a reminder of their lowly position and their need to distance themselves from other groups. At the same time the story of Maya, the untouchable boy who was virtuous in thirty-two different ways and who became a god, acted as a hope for the future, suggesting that good deeds were worthy of reward.

But the implications of these stories are changing over time. For young, and even middle aged *Harijans*, the outward symbols of untouchability seem to be retreating into history and myth. As discrimination lessens[14] and Harijan education increases, the story becomes important as an indicator of just how badly treated their ancestors were in the past and of how they themselves must strive for a better future. Knowledge of their humiliation in the past is supplemented by school and college education and the knowledge that Gandhiji himself declared himself a *Harijan* and was not ashamed to live and eat amongst them. Furthermore, their access to Government backed education and jobs in Government institutions has made *Harijans* less dependent on the village for their livelihood and reputation. Many *Harijans* have either left the village altogether or commute to other cities or towns for their work. They are more concerned with education and earning a decent living than they are with the attitudes of less educated villagers whose prejudices they cannot radically change.

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14 It is important to distinguish here between village *Harijans* (who belong to what was known as the *Vankar* section of the *Dhed* caste) and the *Bhungi* (who in theoretical terms are also *Harijans* but who in village terms are regarded as a separate caste altogether). The *Bhungi* live in comparatively poor conditions and remain the recipients of taunts and prejudice from other castes, including the *Harijan*. Of the two families of *Bhungi* in Jalia, the children had stopped attending school owing to the bullying they received from other pupils who refused to sit near them. The *Bhungi* continue to pursue their traditional occupation of sweeping and preparing cadavers for the funeral pyre, which reinforces people's fear of their polluting presence. In general, it can be said that the *Vankar* have benefited greatly from Government assistance in education and employment, but the *Bhungi* have been unable to step outside of their traditional village role and the stigma that goes with it. It is surprising however that it was the *Dhed* and not the *Bhungi* who, in the past, were required to wear visible indications of their own untouchability. Perhaps the *Bhungi* were too ill clad and poor to require further distinguishing features?

From the point of view of dress the *Harijans* present an interesting case. They never had any caste-specific clothing of their own and it was precisely because of this lack of an immediately recognisable identity, that they were forced to wear signs which marked out their status to other castes. These marks should not be regarded as "*Harijan* dress" for by all accounts, if they existed at all they were never worn within the *Harijan* settlement, but only when *Harijans* went into the public domain where they needed to be recognised and avoided.

The absence of a coherent caste dress in the past, combined with the high levels of education and urban employment amongst *Harijans* today, gives them more freedom in their choice of dress than many other villagers, for they have neither a caste tradition to preserve, nor a good reputation to maintain in the eyes of others who do not respect them anyway. The future of the *Harijans* lies, not in the preservation of tradition, but in breaking with tradition and trying to forge a new more acceptable identity which is independent of the hierarchical foundations of caste. They are therefore free to adopt synthetic saris and *salwar kamizes* which enable them to participate in progressive, mainstream fashion, and they have no desire to compete in the caste-bound hierarchy of dress within the village itself where prejudice against *Harijans* continues to abound.

Conclusion

The *Bharwads* and the *Harijans* provide two examples of contrasting attitudes to dress. While *Bharwad* identity is based on looking back to the past and preserving old traditions, *Harijan* identity is built on the principle of looking forward to the future and merging with new traditions. It is worth comparing their situations in more detail. The *Bharwads*, though poor, never had the stigma of untouchability attached to them. Rather, they were defined by other groups as outsiders, as "jungle people" (*jungli na manus*) who spent too much time in the forests and were rough and uncouth. This outsider status did in fact contribute to the strength of the *Bharwad* community which had its own rules and traditions, and deliberately reinforced its own distinctiveness in relation to other groups. Clothes were an important means both of preserving social distance and reinforcing the group's own sense of solidarity. Dressing in a *Bharwad* way, (however defined), has not only helped modern *Bharwads* to resist change, but has acted as a device to prevent change, for dressed in the *deshi* style, a person's environment is immediately restricted. Lacking the geographical boundaries which keep individuals in the village from stepping

above their station, the *Bharwads* have created their own sartorial boundaries which play a similarly restricting role in preventing individuals from stepping out of line.

There are certain parallels between Gandhi's choice of a *deshi* image and the *Bharwads'* veneration of the *deshi*. In both cases, the fact of choosing a *deshi* mode of expression was also linked with the fact of distance from the *desh* (locality). It was through spending years in England and South Africa that Gandhi came to appreciate the Indian way (defined in terms of an idealised past). And similarly, it is through leading a semi-itinerant existence and seeing a variety of alternatives, that the *Bharwad* have come to appreciate the benefits of the local Kathiawadi style and to venerate the *deshi* above the new. There is a certain irony in the fact that the only group in Jalia which actively praises *deshi* dress and chooses to preserve it, is the only group without any fixed *desh* (place) in which to live. Those whose lifestyles are fixed within the boundaries of the village itself are more inclined to favour "foren" clothes which carry the appeal of exoticism and imply sophistication.

While the *Bharwads* needed to create boundaries in order to survive, the *Harijans* have had the opposite problem. They needed to change their image and to reformulate their social identity in order to escape the closely knit and oppressive social and spatial boundaries that limited their actions in the past. They have, not surprisingly, rejected the *deshi* idiom which to them represents poverty and oppression.[15] This makes them more free in their choice of dress than *Brahman, Kanbi* and *Kharak* women who rely on "what the village thinks" and "what the village says". In fact the *Harijans* (at the bottom of the hierarchy) and the *Vaniya* (at the top of the hierarchy) are the two groups least concerned with village attitudes and least constrained in their choice of what to wear. While confronted with financial and aesthetic considerations like anyone else, they are the least hampered by the pressures of local opinion.

Viewed from a broad perspective Jalia is but one village participating amongst thousands in what is undoubtedly a national trend: the dissolving of narrowly

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15 It is no coincidence that whilst Gandhi, who came from the *Vaniya* caste, chose to represent the *Harijans* by dressing as a poor man in the *deshi* style, Ambedkar, who was himself a *Harijan*, chose to represent them by wearing a full set of European clothes. Coming from a *Harijan* background himself, aware of the full weight of social prejudice, he felt the need to break with tradition and had no nostalgia for the *deshi* past which summed up centuries of poverty and degradation.

defined regional and sartorial boundaries in favour of broader more encompassing definitions. Yet, as I have shown, villagers are by no means swept up blindly or unwillingly by industrialisation. They feel constrained by the limitations of their own regional traditions, and they actively *seek* variety and change. Even the *Bharwad*, despite their veneration of the *deshi*, have introduced an increasing range of styles within their definition of *Bharwad* dress. And who would deny them the choice?

As an outsider, equally bound by the perceptions and limitations of my own consumer-orientated society, I inevitably liked many of the hand-made clothes that villagers were rejecting. And whilst I was trying to comprehend their changing tastes, they too were trying to comprehend mine. When I finally left the village the family with whom I was staying gave me a gift of clothing which, this time, I received without hesitation. And I was touched by their choice. No longer were they trying to dress me in shiny synthetic rayons, but instead, presented me with a *salwar kamiz* of pure cotton. In the front they had inserted a large panel of local embroidery which, they said, "they will like in Foren!" I shared their sense of irony at the fact that I, the foreigner, could wear the fabrics from which local peasants were trying to escape. But there was more irony to come. And much more Gujarati embroidery. I found them both in Delhi.

Chapter 9

FASHION FABLES OF AN URBAN VILLAGE

Prologue: Through "Ethnic Chic" Eyes

As *Vaniya* and *Harijan* women lead the women of Jalia to the delights of foreign synthetic saris and the *salwar kamiz*, as *Kanbi* and *Kharak* women throw aside their hand embroidered *ghaghra* and bodices in favour of button down polyester blouses, as Hansaben, a wilful *Brahman* woman, struggles for the right to wear a cardigan and a bra, I enter another village, a village where "traditional" arts are respected and admired, where villagers are proud of a *deshi* look and where even some young men seem to enjoy wearing Indian styles of dress. I see before me a young man clad in white *khadi* and wearing delicately embroidered Rajasthani shoes. On his forehead, a mark of henna paste. Beside him, his friend tosses a shimmering silk-embroidered shawl over his shoulders so that it hangs, half obscuring his loose cotton *kurta pyjama*. Women, glowing with embroidery and mirror work, dressed in the very *ghaghra* and *kapdu* that Jalia women spurn, flit before my eyes. Clad in hand dyed fabrics and bulky silver jewellery, these are clearly women proud of their "traditional" clothes and proud of their village.

As I walk from house to house amongst the buffaloes and the mud (it is November but there has been a freak rain storm and the earth is sodden), I see none of the plastic beaded sofa sets, stainless steel vessels, metal cupboards and crude calendar pin-ups that are common sights in the houses of Jalia today. Instead I see "An Indian Story", for amongst the "Cane and Wicker" are embroidered wall hangings of "ethnic splendour", delicately hand carved wooden furniture and pillars, carefully patterned mud covered walls, hand painted scenes from Hindu mythology, brightly decorated puppets and masks, earthen ware jars, old brass oil lamps, in short, a feast of "beautiful designs from a rich past."[1] I thought of Coomaraswamy and his disillusionment with the modern India he knew, how he had implored people to recognise "the luxurious simplicity of Indian culture" (Coomaraswamy 1908:33), how he had told his readers:

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1 These are quotations from shop hoardings and publicity cards.

> "Look about you at the vulgarisation of modern India.....our use of
> kerosene tins for water jars and galvanised zinc for tiles - our caricature
> of European dress - our homes furnished and ornamented in the style
> proverbial of old seaside lodging houses" (Coomaraswamy 1911:3).

Surely Coomaraswamy would have been content to stand where I was
standing, in the heart of a "genuine" village "where art is tradition" (publicity
card)? Or would he have felt confused?. After all, where is this village? Those
embroidered wall hangings that adorn the walls suggest I am still in Gujarat.
Yes, it must be Gujarat, for the carved wooden doors and pillars make it
obvious, although I have rarely seen such ancient craftsmanship in such good
condition. Had I chosen the wrong village when I went to Jalia? Were there
really still villages where craftsmanship was so highly valued and preserved?
But wait, those hand painted murals, beautiful though they are, are not in the
Gujarati style. They remind me strangely of Bihar. But then that "Cane and
Wicker" has a distinctly Southern flavour, whilst those woollen hats look
positively Himalayan. I could think myself in a National Crafts Emporium if it
were not for the buffaloes and the mud and the small winding streets with a tea
(*chai*) stall at the corner.

I follow the distant sound of music. I am back at the entrance to the village
where musicians are sitting cross legged on the ground with their colourful tie
dyed turbans gleaming under the spot lights (it must be Rajasthan! But spot
lights?). The crowd has thickened since I first arrived and my eyes feast on the
brightest and most lavish village belles I have ever seen. They are moving
around the Gujarati pillars which stand strangely aloof, without any houses to
support. But there seems to be a division in the crowd. All around the pillars are
women dressed in "genuine" Indian clothes. But, just across the road, out of
the glare of the spot lights, stand a bunch of people, miserably clad in greys and
browns: women in rayon *salwar kamizes* with plain shawls flung around their
heads and shoulders; men in jeans and tight fitting Western trousers and shirts.
Who are these people infiltrating this beautiful "traditional village scene"? How
dare they spoil the aesthetic bliss with their fake, Western look? No wonder
there are two security guards to protect the *real* villagers from this urban
onslaught, lurking like a shadow on the dark side of the street. Who are these
intruders?

Then the show begins. A young villager gets up on stage. She is dressed in a
beautiful raw silk *khadi lehnga* (full gathered skirt), her hair loose about her
shoulders. She offers flowers to a woman in the crowd and there is clapping

and cheering. Who is that woman wearing a red and black tie-dyed scarf over her shoulders, the very scarf that *Bharwad* women wear as a veil? "The film star, Jaya Bachan", I hear people mumble as they strain their necks to see. The dark intruders on the outskirts of the village are pushing forward, excitedly. The security guard is holding them back. The Rajasthani music gets louder, the lights get brighter and on the stage......

Not "luscious *lehngas*" and "ethnic splendours" but, for a moment, models clad in the stark, sleek tailored clothes of an Indian fashion designer, trained in New York (see fig. 9:1). More models appear dressed mainly in black and white, in pin striped jackets and pleated trousers, tailored skirts above the knee. They prance self-consciously between the Gujarati pillars to the incongruous beat of the *tabla* (drum). They are soon followed, however, by a stream of models in *lehnga, ghaghra*, and even *kapda,* made from a variety of village cottons, expensive silks and mirrored embroidery. Many have bare feet or simple embroidered shoes. Some wear veils over their heads, which they toss and swirl, peering seductively from underneath, flashing their painted eye-lids and pouting their shining lips. Others wear more modern styles such as skin tight *salwar kamizes* or mini skirts containing patches of Gujarati or Sindhi mirrorwork (fig. 9:2).

The village is Hauz Khas, tucked away in a corner of South Delhi, but fast becoming the trendiest and most expensive shopping centre for designer clothes in the capital. The event is Delhi's first fashion show ever to be staged outdoors in a village setting. It is the celebration of the opening of a new designer store. The crowd around the stage is composed of film stars, fashion designers, boutique owners and industrialists from some of India's leading families. Most of the women in the crowd are wearing so-called "ethnic" clothes and jewellery. Some are dressed convincingly like Gujarati or Rajasthani peasants, though their make up and hair styles betray their urban roots. Their menfolk are mainly in Western dress though a few have donned *khadi kurtas,* silk pyjamas and embroidered shawls. And as for the other crowd held back by the security guard, they are the people who actually live in Hauz Khas village. They have come to watch the Indian glitterati, dressed as glamorised villagers in styles of clothing that no inhabitant of Hauz Khas would consider fashionable enough to wear. As the village headman put it:

> "Previously people were looking down on us because we were wearing *dhotis* and looking like farmers. But now they actually come to the village and dress in our old clothes."

His assessment of the situation was all too true. For Sita, a top fashion designer and one of the key inspirations behind this village revival, had told me earlier that evening as she was preparing to attend the show: "I think I shall go as a village peasant tonight." Selecting a flared cotton *lehnga* from the rails of her own boutique, she added:

> "You see, this is a *real* peasant skirt. The village women come to me and sell their stuff. Village women wear such fabulous clothes. Really, I think they know how to dress like nobody else....Villages are beautiful. They are the *real India.*"

HAUZ KHAS: The Village and its Environment[2]

Hauz Khas village is situated in the midst of a green buffer area which in recent years has become incorporated into the rapidly expanding southern part of the city of Delhi. It takes its name from the great water reservoir, built by Ala-Uddin Khilji at the end of the 13th century. By the mid 14th century, Emperor Firoz Shah Tughlaq sealed the tank and filled it with water. He also built a mosque and a series of buildings commonly identified as a school (*madrasa*) on the south side of the reservoir. These were inhabited by Muslims. During the invasion of Maharaja Suraj mal Bharatpur, many of the Muslim settlers fled and were replaced by *Jat* farmers. In 1910, the archeological survey of India declared the area a protected zone under the approval of Lord Curzon. Villagers were shifted outside the monument walls and settled alongside the monument and tank where they live today. During Partition yet more Muslims left the site and the village became clearly dominated by *Jats* who own most of the *pakka* houses in the village.

Hauz Khas is classified as one of the 111 "urban villages" of the Union Territory of Delhi. Most of the land surrounding these villages was bought up by the Delhi Development Authority in the early 1960's to cater to the needs of a

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2 Much of the historical detail about the development of Hauz Khas village is taken from an architectural study by Rachna Narendra (1989), a student from the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi. I am also grateful to Rachna for returning to Hauz Khas with me six months after her study was completed, enabling us to compare notes about the development of the village over the past twelve months.

CROPPED TAILORED JACKET WITH
CREST, ORGANZA COLLAR AND CUFFS
WORN WITH A HIGH-WAISTED
PLEATED SKIRT (PRINCE OF WALES
PLAID) ALL IN SILK.

Fig. 9:1 An outfit designed by Shahab Durazi (**Glad Rags** vol.2, no.2, 1989). His clothes were the first to be modelled in the Hauz Khas fashion show.

(a)

Fig. 9:2 Scenes from the fashion show (by professional photographer).
(a) Model wearing an embroidered *kapdu* from Kutch with a printed skirt and tie-dyed Gujarati shawl. In the background is a Rajasthani musician in "traditional" turban and outfit. Behind him is a fashion designer dressed in a black *kurta pyjama*, wearing a *phulkari* (silk-embroidered cloth from the Punjab) over his shoulders.
(b) Male model in a white silk *kurta pyjama* and embroidered shoes.
(c) Female model in a black mini dress, decorated with inserts of mirror.
(d) Woman in a silk "Punjabi" with a panel of Sindhi embroidery stitched on the front.

(b)

(c)

(d)

Fig 9:3 Publicity cards from Hauz Khas Village.

rapidly expanding city. The remaining land was classified as free land (*lal dora zameen*) over which the municipal corporation had no claim. Villagers gained compensation for their loss of farmland but retained exclusive rights over the territory within the villages themselves. Unlike other urban villages which became sites for rapid industrialisation and chaotic building activities, Hauz Khas remained largely undeveloped. This was owing to its unique situation, sandwiched between a deer park, a rose garden and the ancient but empty reservoir, all of which were protected properties which formed a buffer area around the village. The fact that there is still no through road and only one approach down a narrow lane has kept Hauz Khas protected from the eyes of property dealers and subject instead to the occasional glance of tourists (mainly foreign) who visit the monuments. Despite being situated between the congested outer and inner ring roads of the city, Hauz Khas has thus remained to some extent aloof from the architectural and economic development of the city around it (see map, fig 9:4). The surrounding wooded deer park and rose garden, combined with the *kachcha* streets within the village itself have enabled it to retain its essentially village-like appearance.

Even by rural standards, this urban village has remained small, with a population of approximately 1500 inhabitants, spread among 160 properties. Prior to 1987 commercial activities were largely restricted to supplying local needs. There were only two small general stores, a tailor's shop, a washerman's stand, a flour mill, tea stalls and betel nut vendors. Only five buildings in the village had been taken over for non- residential commercial activities. One was used for printing and storing books, another for creating washing machine parts, two were used for the garment industry, and one for storing marble (Narendra 1989). Such low level economic development distinguished Hauz Khas from other urban villages in the capital.

Population and Residence

The village is divided mainly into two residential sections. The *pakka* half which branches off to the right as you enter the village and the semi-*pakka* and *kachcha* half which branches off to the left. The former area consists of large but narrow houses built around courtyards. These are usually approached through brick archways. The buildings themselves are constructed with brick, stone and lime, supported by wooden beams and wooden roof tops. Prior to 1987 they were usually two storeys high. Floors were normally plastered with
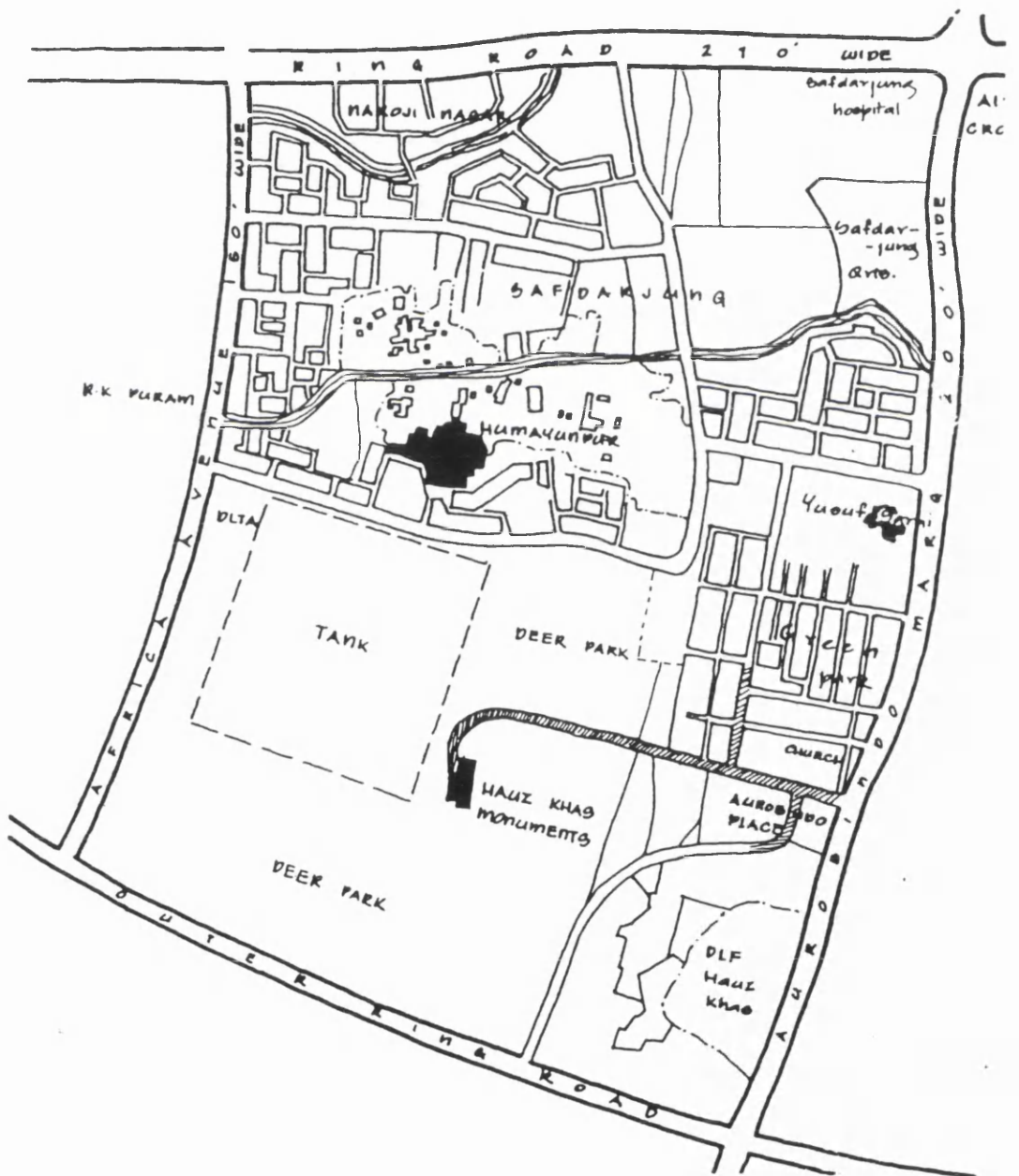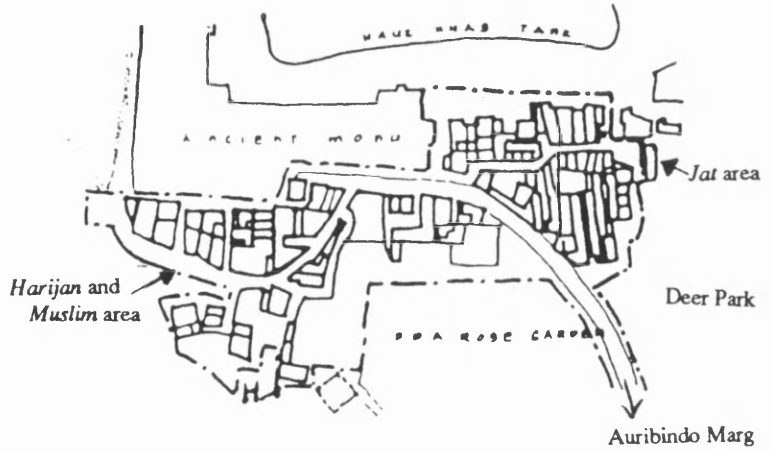
Fig. 9:4 Maps showing the location and layout of Hauz Khas Village. From Narendra R., **Hauz Khas Village** (1989).

mud/dung paste as were some of the interior walls. For ventilation there were elaborate decorated metal *jalis* (filigree ventilation holes) between each room. Interiors also had a number of small niches for storage and wooden pegs for hanging clothes and oil lamps. Buffaloes and cows would be kept within the house compound and at either side of the open courtyards. This section of the village is inhabited by Jats. Since losing their land in 1960, they have found alternative employment in a variety of occupations outside the village. Many are employed in Government service. Most young men are educated in Hindi. Some members of the village headman's family have professional jobs and speak English. Until recently, women from these families were doing stitching work for the garment export industry based in the village. They liked the work as they could do it within the walls of their own homes and in their own time.

In the poorer half of the village, housing conditions are shabby and varied. Some people have built concrete constructions. Others live in mud or brick constructions or entirely makeshift patch-work houses, made from scraps of whatever material is available. The inhabitants are a mixture of poor Muslims and *Harijans*. They earn their livelihood mainly from casual labour such as building, carpentry, plumbing and vending. Women of these families are often employed as home helps or sometimes as sweepers in Delhi.

Apart from *Jats*, *Harijans* and Muslims, a few Punjabi families have settled in the village in recent years. These are scattered individuals with professional jobs who found that Hauz Khas offered proximity to Delhi at an affordable price. They were also attracted to the quietude of this village within a city. But their choice to live there was considered extraordinary by most professional Delhiites who felt the village was far too "primitive" and ill-equipped for modern living.

The New Villagers

Since 1987 a new category of villagers has emerged at an extraordinarily rapid rate. These are fashion designers and boutique owners from some of Delhi's wealthiest and most fashionable families. Unable to persuade residents to sell their properties, these new villagers have been forced to rent rooms in the *Jat* quarter, where they have set up exclusive boutiques selling expensive designer clothes, art and furnishings, most of which are sold under the classification of "ethnic" or "antique" goods. In February 1989, there were 12 such boutiques open in the village. By December, the number had more than tripled to 38, with over half of these specialising in ethnic clothes. Unlike the Punjabi tenants, the

Boutique owners form a cohesive group to the extent that they share similar aims and objectives. They have recently formed a Creative Arts Association through which they hope to articulate their plans and work towards the general "improvement" of the village as an ethnic shopping centre with an "exclusive village flavour". The Creative Arts Association meets jointly with the village *panchayat* (council) in order to seek resolutions to the differing desires and expectations of the resident landlords and their new tenants. Despite these attempts at diplomacy, there are mounting tensions between the two groups concerning ideas of progress in the village. These tensions stem from the differing values of the village landlords and their glamorous tenants, both of whom harbour idealised perceptions of each other's life styles. So far, tensions have been temporarily resolved by the mutual satisfaction gained from financial profit, but there is a growing feeling on both sides that conflict may break out at any moment for the village is rocking precariously on the brink of a highly unstable paradox.

I have described the composition of Hauz Khas village in some detail because it helps to explain and support the nature of the fashion that is developing there. When a woman purchases a garment from Hauz Khas, she is buying not only an outfit, but a slab of carefully marketed village life. It is through exploiting the appeal of this "village life" that boutique owners are able to sell their clothes at inordinate prices. This is not to say that "ethnic" fashions are exclusive to Hauz Khas. On the contrary, "ethnic" clothes are selling in every major city of India, whether in street markets, State emporiums or exclusive boutiques. But Hauz Khas provides an ideal environment in which to explore the meaning of this "ethnic fashion revival", for, being both a village and a shopping centre at once, it contains the various elements that make up this new sartorial ethnicity.[3] It also presents an opportunity for the study of the relationship between village fashion and elite urban fashion, because here the two coexist in a state of uneasy

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3 The idea of an ethnic shopping village is not entirely unique. The village of Suraj Kund was constructed near Delhi in 1987 with the express purpose of housing an annual craft fair. But, unlike Hauz Khas, Suraj Kund was purpose-built. It therefore did not contain any resident villagers who might interfere with authorities' attempts to construct an idealised portrait of Indian village life. Similarly the village houses constructed in the grounds of the Crafts Museum (Delhi) and at Vishala ethnic restaurant (Ahmedabad) are village houses without any villagers inside them. They therefore fulfil the aesthetic expectations of visitors more easily than Hauz Khas where real villagers hamper the elite's appreciation of the aesthetics of "village-life".

Fig 9:5 Views of the village. Above: the *pakka* area, strewn with bill
boards advertising the new shops. A Rajasthani musician has been brought
in for the day to lend an authentic village flavour. Below: the other side of
the village where the bill boards advertise "Cola" and "Thumbs Up".
Salwar kamizes hang on the washing line.

Fig. 9;6 An old *Harijan* woman sitting in the doorway to her home. She still dresses in a flared skirt. Conscious of what constitutes a "genuine village scene", she insisted on bringing out her hookah for the photograph.

harmony as old villagers and new villagers observe each other's clothing with mutual amazement, amusement and disgust.

Village Fashion

The fashions favoured by the inhabitants of Hauz Khas village express their social and aesthetic choices within the framework of recent cultural and historical changes in the area. Before Independence, Muslim women wore the *salwar kamiz,* commonly worn by Muslims throughout North India, while *Jat* and *Harijan* women wore full flared, gathered skirts *(lehnga),* brassiere type blouses *(aangi)* and veils *(odhani).* Their dress was similar in style to that worn by many Rajasthani peasant and tribal women today. Poor *Harijans* usually wore cotton but some *Jat* women had *lehngas* of rich silk which they wore for special occasions. The greater the quantity of cloth, the greater the swirl of the skirt when a woman walked and the more luxurious and beautiful her outfit was considered. With these clothes they wore heavy silver jewellery around their ankles, wrists and in their ears. If they could afford it gold earrings were preferred. Their menfolk dressed largely in white *dhotis,* turbans and optional shirts while Muslim men generally favoured the *kurta pyjama* combination. The clothes of *Harijan* and *Jat* men and women were similar to those worn by a variety of different Hindu groups throughout Northwest India.

After Independence the rapid expansion of the city of Delhi brought Hauz Khas within easy access to urban goods and finally incorporated the village within the framework of the urban structure itself. Although the village maintained its geographic and architectural particularity, this was not through any concerted effort of the villagers themselves. On the contrary, most villagers were interested in the opportunities for change and both men and women began to alter their dress accordingly. The men took to trousers and shirts, keeping their *dhotis* only for relaxation and home use. The women, impressed by shiny synthetic materials which resembled silk, first had their skirts made from synthetic rayons, and finally rejected their skirts altogether, following the increasingly popular urban fashion of wearing the *salwar kamiz.* At first they were reluctant to adopt this style owing to its association with Muslims. But since fashionable Hindus throughout the city of Delhi were adopting such clothes, they felt that there was no reason why they should not do likewise. For, like *Kanbi* and *Kharak* women in Jalia, they felt their skirts marked them out as village peasants. Unlike the most fashionable women of the city, however, the village *Jats* and *Harijans* retained the idea that their heads should

always be kept covered out of *sharm*. They resolved the problem of how to look both modern and modest by purchasing particularly large *dupattas* (scarves worn with the *salwar kamiz*) which they wore like their old veils. This enabled them to continue with the practice of veiling (*ghunghut*).

Today, then, most village women wear shiny synthetic *salwar kamizes* in baggy styles with large veil cloths which they wrap around their heads and with which they cover their faces in front of senior men. Many women have adopted accessories such as bras, socks and high heeled shoes. Many also wear woollen pullovers or cardigans in winter under their more "traditional" shawls. A few older women have retained their cotton skirts and silver anklets but they are a diminishing minority. Most women have sold their skirts or used them for stuffing quilts or as household rags. With the exception of a few old men, the men of the village dress almost exclusively in Western styles.

The only group (apart from some of the boutique owners) where all women are clothed in what might be perceived as "traditional village dress", is a group of semi-migrant Rajasthani labourers who are currently camping within the dry basin of the reservoir. The women of this group, who work as bricklayers, employed by *Jat* villagers, wear their local Rajasthani flared skirts, bodices and veils with elaborate bangles up their arms. Although they are the group least settled in the village, to outsiders they represent the very "romance of village life" that gives Hauz Khas its charm. And although impoverished, over worked and homeless, they find themselves unconsciously at the height of a new fashion trend. The irony of the situation is expressed in fig. 9:7.

This new trend of wealthy urban people dressing up as villagers has been spreading rapidly in India since the mid 1980's. Journalists have christened the phenomenon "ethnic chic", but they are largely puzzled by its origin and development. What is it, they wonder, that has led the sophisticates of Delhi, Bombay and Ahmedabad back to the village in search of suitable clothing? Through discussing this question with the villagers, boutique owners and customers of Hauz Khas shopping centre, I hope to throw some light on the matter.

Cartoon by Crowquill (1989).

Fig 9:7

Hauz Khas: An Ethnic Transformation

The transformation of Hauz Khas village into an exclusive fashion centre was engineered primarily by a woman named Sita.[4] Although Indian born, she had spent the past twenty-five years of her life in London, San Francisco and New York, where she worked with top designers including Christion Dior and Givency, latterly supplying major department stores such as Harvey Nichols and Liberty with her "classic designs". Through examining Sita's own account of the development of Hauz Khas as a designer shopping centre, it is possible to gain some insight into the ideas behind "ethnic chic".

In the earlier days of her career Sita was both designing and wearing Western style clothes. But, during her periodic visits to India, she became interested in Indian dress. She recalls:

> "Coming back to India I realised the richness of India's traditional heritage. I travelled around a bit and saw the whole place with foreign eyes. Foreigners have always appreciated our wonderful fabrics and our village traditions, but Indians always neglected them. I saw for the first time those rural women in their fabulous colourful garments. I thought, why not combine these wonderful rural costumes to suit our city women? So I developed my own style, quite unique, of using old saris, embroideries, brocades, whatever, and incorporating them into my own designs. The Newspapers here call it "ethnic chic". In the States they tend to call it "the Raja Look".... Most of my early customers were foreign women. I introduced them to a new fashionable and exclusive Indian look. I have always felt it important to market the Indian image abroad. Now women come from Bombay specially to visit my Boutique and the fashion is taking off in India too. But I am not concerned to capture the ordinary Indian woman who is mediocre and conventional in her sari. She is not interested in my stuff and, quite frankly, I have no interest in her. The clothes I sell are for people like me, people who lead international lives."

Sita opened her first boutique in Delhi in 1986, before her discovery of Hauz Khas. She called it "Once Upon a Time" because she saw her clothes as a story. This story, which contained a number of fairy tale ingredients, was composed of various chapters, beginning with her personal discovery of the beautifully clad rural women of India. Describing them to India Worldwide Magazine, she commented:

> "They are the only ones who I find still dress *authentically*. The rest of us wear saris or Western clothes. The costumes of centuries ago were

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4 The boutique owners quoted in this chapter have been given pseudonyms.

so varied and so glorious. It is such a joy to see these women wearing them on a daily basis."(India Worldwide, August 1989:60, my italics).

Chapter two of her story was her realisation that old abandoned cloth could be resuscitated:

> "It's the old sari that was put away in a trunk and discarded which I took out and gave new life to....creating new wearable garments"(ibid)

Following Sita's metaphor, World Wide Magazine continues:

> "And then there were other stories, unfinished stories which began in places as far away as Iran and Afghanistan and as close as nearby villages. These were the stories of refugees who had fled to India, of battered women who had fled their homes.It all suddenly came together for Sita: these numerous stories could be interrelated. She opened her first Boutique, "Once Upon a Time", using the talents of these refugee tailors, craftspeople and destitute women, utilizing the discarded saris which seemed to have been written off. She says, "Its just an experiment which is a very happy one""(ibid).

It was indeed a happy experiment for Sita, particularly when she hit upon the idea of selling her clothes in Hauz Khas village. When she first visited the village, she had no intention of setting up another shop. She was simply looking for a cheap place in which to have a workshop to supply her boutique, but she recalls:

> "I instantly fell in love with the place. There was the beautiful old monument, the countryside and of course the wonderful people. I adore peasants, villagers, ethnic and rustic things. Peasants and tribals are really the best people. In fact they are the only *real authentic* people of India."

In an interview with Society magazine, she recalls:

> "When I first walked in here (the village) in 1986, I knew instantly that there was going to be a wonderful romance between the villagers and me. The people came running out to see me, touching and pulling my clothes as if I was some creature from outer space." (Society, October 1989:90).

But Sita, despite her enthusiasm, never thought of opening a boutique in the village:

> "The idea was unthinkable. Many of my friends thought me totally mad even having my workshop there."

However, defying such conventions, she rented two rooms for a minimal rent in the house of one of the *Jat* families and set up her workshop of Afghani refugee tailors. That was in 1986.

One year later, however, she took the plunge and opened a boutique in the village itself, calling it "Twice Upon a Time". When I asked her what finally made her decide that she could actually sell her clothes in the village itself, she explained:

> "You see, most of my original customers came from abroad, either visiting India as tourists, or businessmen's wives or embassy people, that kind of thing. They just loved my use of rich Indian fabrics. Sometimes I invited them to the village to visit my workshop or to have some alterations done, and they simply went berserk about the place. You see, they had spent their time in Five Star hotels or in comfortable parts of South Delhi and they had never seen an Indian village. They loved everything: the people, the buffaloes, the winding streets and of course the monument and the countryside around. They found it so picturesque. So I thought, why not open my second boutique here in the village itself. Of course, the idea caused quite a stir. My Indian friends thought I was completely mad. They had a horror of villages and talked of the dirt and the backward people. One told me "Oh Sita, you and your mud and flies and peasants! You are crazy!" But I managed to persuade a few other designers and art collectors to join me here. They were sceptical at first, but they decided to give it a try and rented out rooms from the villagers. And from then on the whole idea took shape and people just love it. At first it was mainly diplomats and foreigners who came, international people.... Delhi women have never been creators. They simply follow the ideas of the international elite. Now it is Indian film-star, celebrities, the high society people from Delhi and Bombay who come. For it has become the fashionable place to go. In fact, it's a wonderful opportunity to see a *real Indian village* and to buy at the same time. Everyone enjoys the novelty, and each shop has its own unique atmosphere of village life."

To create her own unique atmosphere of village life, Sita has furnished her boutique in a simple style with wicker woven panels on the walls, wooden carvings from Gujarat, and an Indian rug on the floor. Her clothes which cost an average of 5000 rupees (250 pounds sterling) an outfit, are hung on railings, with a few choice garments displayed on wooden frames with heads made from hand painted Orissan masks of horse and buffalo heads.

So far Sita's story continues to be a happy one. In May 1989 she opened a boutique in New York, staging a charity fashion show in Washington one month later, where her clothes were modelled by the wives of American Congress politicians. The event was widely covered by the Indian press which delighted in images of U.S. Congressmen's wives parading around the Indian

Embassy in Washington, dressed in Indian costume and sporting *bindis* (vermilion marks) on their foreheads. Sita herself wore a "genuine peasant skirt" for the occasion which she sported with one of her elaborate silk tops and elegant shoes.

What is striking about Sita's return to an Indian identity is that it was stimulated at all stages by her sense of foreignness. First, there was her perception of her own foreignness when she returned to India and saw it "with foreign eyes". Secondly, there was her awareness of those aspects of India that appeal to foreigners - not the modern streamlined boutiques of South Delhi, but the "rustic" village with its "peasants and buffaloes" and "authentic Indian people". And finally, there was her realisation of how to market this appeal of "village India" in such a way that foreigners would buy it, exclusively gift wrapped in a new aesthetic form.

The question arises as to whether the path to Indian ethnicity commonly takes such a convoluted route[5], or whether Sita's story with its "international people" and "foreign" perceptions is unusual in the village. Certainly she mingles in the wealthiest and most jetsetting circle of new villagers. But further interviews with other boutique owners and fashion designers (often one and the same) reveal that such an outsider perception of "Village India" has been central to the development of this "ethnic" enclave. A large proportion of the designers have trained abroad, others have visited foreign countries, and even those who have not travelled are well aware of the exotic appeal that India has abroad and its backlash effect in India. One designer who specialises in selling Gujarati peasant embroidered *ghaghra*, *kapdu* and adaptations of both, concluded:

> "I think ethic stuff really took off in India because of the Festival of India abroad. It got so much publicity, and suddenly we began to think - "if foreigners are buying and wearing our stuff, why can't we begin to like it." Then when one person starts to wear ethnic clothes and be noticed, others start following suit and the fashion takes off."

This theory of the spread of ethnic chic was a common one, amongst both sellers and buyers of ethnic clothing and furniture. The magazine and television coverage of the Festival of India in England, Japan, the United States and Russia dwelt much on the foreign appreciation of Indian things and clearly had

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5 Certainly, many important historical figures such as Gandhi, Nehru and Coomaraswamy all discovered India through leaving it.

a profound effect on encouraging Indians to buy Indian. But the festival was not the only source of foreign appreciation. One boutique owner explained how she personally came to be selling ethnic clothes:

> "The idea came through travelling. My husband is in the merchant navy and I worked in the airlines for twelve years so we travelled a lot. I sometimes used to wear something Indian, just a small thing like a ring or a scarf and I got so many compliments from foreigners that after a while I began to dress in deliberately ethnic things - flared *ghaghra* or *lehnga* or *salwar* type trousers.... I got the idea of opening a shop from my experience of giving gifts to foreigners. Because we travelled so much, we were always having to give presents to people. I started off giving Western things as presents because I thought that was what people would want. But soon I realised that what they wanted was the traditional hand made Indian stuff. So I began offering skirts, scarves, *khadi* shirts etc. and people loved it. That was when I got the idea of trying to sell Indian stuff in Delhi."

A man, who occupies one of the prime spots of the village, setting up his Indian antique stall in the front of the headman's house, commented:

> "About ten years ago, only foreigners were interested in traditional textiles and antiques. Now my Indian customers get upset because they realise that they threw out this type of thing years back (he points to a paisley shawl). Now these, for example, are worth a lot of money and people have started to appreciate them and are wanting their old things back again."

The attitude of the boutique owners in general is perhaps best summarised by a young woman who not only runs a shop in the village, but who is secretary of the Creative Arts Association. Fully aware of the paradox, she commented:

> "Basically, in India people are reluctant to acknowledge anything that has not been appreciated by foreigners first. They still seek validation from the West in every thing. I started off selling to foreigners and now sell mainly to Indians, but I still get a few Indians walking into the shop and saying: "Oh, this is just for foreigners" and marching out without even taking a look."

But although the inspiration behind the establishment of boutiques in Hauz Khas village has a distinctly Western flavour, the boutique owners are attracted towards the village precisely because of its non-Western feel. And this attraction is not simply a case of urban Indians following foreign trends but also a case of their experiencing the village *as* foreigners themselves. Many of the shop owners had never visited an Indian village before and enjoyed the exoticism and sense of adventure in much the same way as a tourist does. They also experienced the same type of weeding out process that tourists do when they point their cameras at the most exotic and strange looking Indian sights,

Fig. 9:8 A publicity leaflet for the Festival of India in Japan, illustrating the presentation of "traditional India" to foreigners.

Fig 9:9 Some ethnic interiors of Hauz Khas shops, showing the popular
features of Bihari wall paintings, Gujarati embroidery and woodwork and
South Indian brass and wickerware.

ignoring the average man on a Delhi street with his tight fitting trousers and nylon shirt. To many of the boutique owners, the village does genuinely represent some kind of "authentic" India which they have just discovered. And although they use this "authenticity" to sell their products, this does not altogether detract from their own belief in it.[6] Many of the boutique owners, like their customers, came to the village with a very romantic view of both the people and the place.[7] Just as Sita told me that "villages are the real India", and "villagers are really the only authentic people in India", so others told me that "villagers are so innocent" or that they are "the most genuine people of India." The woman whose fashion show I had attended explained:

> "I had never visited a village before, but I knew most of the people with boutiques and they are all from very good families. So I visited the village and I loved it and decided to have my boutique here. It has a very special atmosphere. The people are so friendly though very slow to understand. You have to explain things to them over and over again. But they are kind. They always bring me tea. Actually, they are the closest people to nature, the closest you can get and that is really quite something. It says a lot for them."

Another woman, explaining the appeal that Hauz Khas holds for Indian and foreign customers, said:

> "....People love the adventure of coming here. They are curious to know what a village is like. And they enjoy the experience and novelty of buying traditional dress in a real village setting. Its more authentic than the boutiques of South Delhi somehow."

But the "authentic" village atmosphere that the shopkeepers and customers enjoy is not so much an enjoyment of the village itself as an enjoyment of their idea of what they think a village should be like. They are not content to accept

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6 Although a number of boutique owners buy Gujarati embroidered textiles and clothes, most are entirely unaware that Gujarati villagers are themselves rejecting such clothes. This ignorance stems from the fact that boutique owners tend to buy directly from itinerant traders and have never actually visited Gujarat themselves. Like Sita, many harbour an entirely romantic picture of Gujarati village life, based on representations in the cinema.

7 There were, of course, a few exceptions. In particular one man who was both designing and selling clothes in the village, despised the romanticisation of village life. He had recently refused to have his photograph taken in a "typical village setting" and told journalists that he had moved to Hauz Khas for purely financial reasons. He was sceptical about the ethnic revival in general and felt that it was largely a good excuse for any old person to set themselves up as a designer without experience or knowledge of fashion.

the villagers' taste in furnishings or interiors, but instead import their own hand crafted items from all over India to decorate the walls and give the "authentic village look" (see fig. 9:9). In short, they are striving to create some kind of super-village, in which various aspects of "village India", taken from different ages and regions are brought together in one place under the banner of "ethnic tradition". But, as Brian Durrans pointed out in his critique of the Festival of India, "tradition is the unifying factor only as an abstraction; in detail, most traditions are particular and regional or local" (Durrans 1982:16). Although the explicit aim of the Hauz Khas Creative Arts Council is to "preserve" the village atmosphere, what this actually entails is "creating" the village atmosphere. For as far as the boutique owners are concerned, the village is not nearly "villagey" enough.

During my research at Hauz Khas village, the main preoccupations of the Association were: to "preserve" the village atmosphere, to keep each shop as unique as possible, to choose where possible harmonious architecture and ethnic interiors, to keep the village small and exclusive, to keep the rents low, to build a large parking lot, to cobble the streets to prevent people getting their high heeled shoes stuck in the mud, and to stop the villagers leading their buffaloes down the main shopping street whilst customers are still in the village. This latter request was initiated after an irate and almost tearful customer complained that a dirty buffalo had flicked its tail over her best coat. In other words, what they desired was some kind of sterilized village which they could fill with the most aesthetically appealing features of village life, a village which displayed only the decorative aspect of "tradition" without any of its hardship or discomfort. A village that is beautiful and encourages sales.

In some contexts, villagers are prepared to go along with this idealised presentation of the village. The village headman, in particular, who is making a lot of money from renting part of his house, is more than delighted to appear as the "authentic Indian villager" when required. If a customer wants to take his photograph, he immediately brings out a hookah, puts a turban on his head and sits on a string bed, creating a classical Indian village scene.[8] Similarly, when a

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8 In Jalia, too, there were a few individuals who deliberately cultivated a *deshi* look to satisfy their audience. There was, for example, an old *Koli* man who, instead of wearing western clothes for visiting his son in Bombay, deliberately retained his *kediyun* and *chorni,* resulting in numerous tourists taking his photograph and giving him free cigarettes. But he was unusual. Most men were too anxious to be rid of the *deshi* look to recognise its marketability.

coach load of foreign tourists arrived in the village at Sita's arrangement, I saw him presenting each new arrival with a garland of flowers (also at Sita's arrangement) and explaining in broken English about his love of village life. On this particular occasion, other genuine village features were brought in such as a horse and cart and a Rajasthani musician in "traditional dress" (see fig 9:5a). But at other times, villagers are not so prepared to go along with the boutique owners' perceptions of their life and are not entirely happy to see "village life" enacted by outsiders within their own village. As a result, a number of misunderstandings have occurred resulting in considerable disillusionment on both sides.

Village Fashion versus Village as Fashion.

When Sita first walked into the village and decided to open a workshop, the family from whom she rented the space were delighted. They immediately turfed out their tenants and rented out two rooms to Sita. Soon she was renting part of the ground floor, the whole of the first floor and two rooms in the house next door. Her landlord was delighted for he was receiving good money, and Sita was equally delighted for her rents were minuscule compared to normal Delhi rates. When she encouraged her friends to join her in the village, they too found properties to rent with considerable ease although the prices started escalating fast. By this stage the landlords' wives, who brought tea at regular intervals to their auspicious new tenants, had noticed the price tags on Sita's clothes. If just one outfit could sell for RS. 5000, surely they could charge more rent? The early phase of these rent increases did not worry the boutique owners too much as rents were still very reasonable, but they began to cause considerable resentment amongst the villagers themselves. Those who had rented out their properties first became jealous of their neighbours, who realising what they could charge, increased their demands.

The new money that came flowing into the wealthier section of the village created in general a favourable response from the *Jat* villagers to the arrival of the boutiques. This was further highlighted by the novelty they experienced when they saw customers, especially the Hindi film stars who suddenly became frequent visitors to this previously ignored village. This provided great entertainment for all the villagers. But the economic and architectural development of the village became rapidly unstable. Many of the *Jat* landlords decided that, if they increased the size of their property and divided it up, then they could rent out each section and live off the proceeds, without even having

to go to work. Since they owned their own land they were legally entitled to build what they liked. Some therefore raised the height of their buildings from two floors to four floors, thereby renting out the first three floors and settling themselves on the fourth one. Pleased with the opportunity to build themselves new modern apartments, they chose to construct concrete blocks on top of their original brick houses. This of course horrified the boutique owners as it ruined the village atmosphere of the street. But more was to come. A typical case is that of Tara and her boutique.

Tara is the woman who worked for an airlines company and decided to sell ethnic clothes when she realised how much they were appreciated by foreigners. Unlike the first few boutique owners who are exceptionally wealthy and well connected, she represents some of the newest boutique owners who come from moderately wealthy upper middle class families but who are not part of the Delhi elite. She sells mainly cotton ethnic clothes from Rajasthan at fairly affordable prices, hoping to attract those clients who cannot afford top designer labels.

Tara claims that she needs her shop to be a financial success but, when I met her, it had been open for only two weeks and she was already extremely anxious. Firstly there was the problem of the building. Tara described its appearance when she first came to the village:

> "I loved it instantly. It had real village atmosphere. It was small and intimate with little windows looking out towards the lake (empty reservoir).It had lots of sun light and was full of nooks and crannies. I was going to do the whole thing up in bamboo and make it really ethnic."

The building she was describing was a small two storey house, situated in a side street in which all the houses were owned by five Jat brothers. She was going to rent the ground floor (two rooms) for 4000 rupees per month and would establish the only boutique in the street. Her landlord agreed and threw out his previous tenant from whom he had received only 100 rupees a month. But he then decided that he could get even more rent if he demolished the building altogether and built himself a new four storey structure, whereupon his brothers decided that they too could do the same and the whole street was razed to the ground and rebuilt as a series of uniform concrete blocks, each four

stories high and without any windows facing the reservoir. Tara suddenly found herself shelved in a concrete precinct, surrounded by new shops selling similar things to herself, and without any of the "village atmosphere" that had attracted her to the situation in the first place. Not only this, but her landlord decided to increase her rent to 8000 rupees for he claimed that she was now renting high quality accommodation and that he had had numerous higher offers. Faced with the option of agreeing or leaving, Tara agreed to pay the increased rate for she knew that rents were soaring throughout the village and it would be impossible to find another space. But she was disillusioned and disappointed.

In an attempt to re-impose some of the lost "village atmosphere" on the place, she turned to her landlady and appealed to her to plaster the inside walls with mud and cow dung paste to give them a more ethnic look. Her landlady was amazed, and remarked with humour (in Hindi):

> "Well, I thought that with all these changes in the village, at least I would never have to plaster a wall or a floor again. I thought that was the end of the custom. And then you turn to me and ask me to plaster your walls!"

But mud looks strange on a flat concrete surface and the village effect is wearing thin. Furthermore, changes in the village are not merely aesthetic but pervade every aspect of village life. Tara, who has been watching these changes in the six months that have passed since she first signed her contract, feels genuinely anxious:

> "To be honest, I am really disappointed. I thought villagers were such innocent people. But they are very shrewd, real business people. In fact they have completely lost their innocence and become very commercial..... The effects of the sudden changes on the village are terrible. My landlord has become a drunkard. He gave up his job as a car mechanic and just sits and drinks and plays cards all day. He earns nothing and he is spending all his money on videos. All the villagers have TVs and videos now...... My landlord does not actually live in this building. His house is the one on the corner of the street, the only old house left, but even that is going to be pulled down. Already he has forced all his family to live in the cramped upstairs so he can rent out the ground floor. He used to keep two cows and sell their milk, but now he has got rid of them because he can rent his cow shed for 8000 rupees a month. He has also sold his *charki* for grinding wheat. Last week he was so drunk that he beat up his wife with an iron rod and I had to take her to the hospital for stitches. The situation is getting out of hand. The villagers just want more and more money.

The experience of contact with the villagers has undoubtedly led the boutique owners to reconsider their somewhat unrealistic image of the innocent villager who bows down in respect and awe at the social elite. As one astute boutique owner, put it:

"Basically, we are all used to having servants and being able to boss them about. But here we are the tenants. We cannot treat our landlords as servants. Such an attitude creates hostility. In our (the Association's) last meeting with the *panchayat* we were trying to stress that any more development should stop now and that newcomers seeking a space should be turned away before the whole village becomes a building site and loses all its charm. But one of the villagers turned to Sita and said: "You just want to fill your own stomach . You don't care about anybody else's." Sita was quite taken aback. Probably no one has ever spoken to her like that in her life. But she deals with the villagers well considering. She is a great spokeswoman and in general people are scared to contradict her....There has been one case of hostility. That was in the *Harijan* quarter. A woman decided to open a boutique there but the other *Harijans* resented the money that one family was getting. They tried to attack the woman and break into her shop. But the situation is unclear and we don't know exactly what happened. There was one more incident when a salesman, employed to work in one of the shops, was beaten up for staring too much at the village girls. These developments are worrying. The villagers are very good people on the whole but they don't understand anything about the artistic side of the village. They just want money and they believe in muscle power."

Just as the villagers cannot understand the townspeople's nostalgia for those features of the village which they themselves seek to eliminate, so, too, they find it difficult to comprehend the new fashions that are being marketed in the village. Part of this confusion revolves around the fact that some of the clothes on sale in the village are actually the cast-offs of the villagers themselves. Tara, for example, purchased some of the old cotton *lehngas* (skirts) and sequined veils of her landlady, much to the latter's surprise. She, being a modern *Jat* woman, had not worn a *lehnga* for the past twenty years and could not believe that anyone would want to buy the old trousseau things she had stashed away in her trunk:

"I never even thought of trying to sell them", she admitted. "Who would want such things? But now I cannot help but laugh and laugh, that what we have cast away, these smart people begin to wear. To us, these *lehngas* are nothing but waste. You know, before these fashion shops came, I was using such cloth to wipe the floor or to clean a baby's bottom or for stuffing a quilt. But I was happy to sell them and get some money." [9]

9 The fact that one person's rubbish can become another person's valuable has been brilliantly argued by Michael Thompson. He demonstrates how people assign goods

As for the Rajasthani labourers, who now charge people ten rupees for taking their photograph, they are quite incredulous at the prices of *lehngas* in the boutiques. As yet they have not sold any of their own clothes, perhaps because, like the semi-itinerant *Bharwads*, they rely on dress for their sense of group identity. But the women do peer inside shop windows and laugh at the fact that wealthy people will pay up to ten times the usual price for a simple cotton skirt.

Just as the village houses are not quite ethnic enough for the boutique owners' purposes, so, too, village clothes often require a few ethnic alterations. Plastic buttons, for example, are often replaced by colourful string fastenings that look more authentic. Figs 9:10(a) and (b) highlight the differences between ethnic chic fashion and the village fashion it seeks to emulate. Fig (a) shows a *Kharak* woman in Jalia. She is hard at work churning buttermilk. She wears a *ghaghro*, embroidered in the mango design and a plain *kapdu*. She has retained her *boloya* (ivory bangles), but has adopted a synthetic half-sari and no longer wears heavy bands of silver round her ankles. Fig (b) shows, by contrast, an ethnic chic cover girl. She too sports a *ghaghro* from the Bhavnagar district, this time embroidered in the parrot and fish design. But the similarities belie the fact that in the second photograph many of the functional aspects of Saurashtran dress have been replaced by merely decorative equivalents: the cover girl's feet are adorned in pretty embroidered slippers while the village woman uses her bare feet for her work; the cover girl's scarf is decorative while the village woman's scarf is a head covering and veil. Even the earthenware pot used for churning buttermilk has become a mere prop in the creation of the village look. And if one examines the cover girl's *ghaghro* itself, it becomes clear that even this has been subtly transformed. The machine-made border has been totally removed, thereby preserving the garment's ethnic quality, but at the same time the open flap has been stitched up, thereby preventing the garment from looking "too ethnic" and indecent. By the same token the *kapdu* on sale in Hauz Khas village are often given cloth backs to make them more decent and presentable in an urban setting. Designing ethnic clothes, then, involves processing elements of village dress into a new acceptable form before selling them as "traditional

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to the categories of "durable" and "transient". Durable goods increase in value over time while transient goods decrease in value and eventually become rubbish. This rubbish can, however, be reconverted into a durable after lying redundant in the rubbish category for some time. Hauz Khas village is a perfect example of the urban elite converting the rubbish of the village peasant into exclusive durables.
Thompson's description of the transformation of a working class Georgian slum in Islington into a paradise for the rising "frontier middle-class" bears uncanny resemblance to the architectural battles in Hauz Khas (see Thompson 1979).

(a) A *Kharak* woman from Jalia, churning curd.

Fig. 9:10

(b) An ethnic chic covergirl (Teen Talk, Nov, 1988).

dress" to the urban elite. While some Hauz Khas stylists design radically new collections in which they reveal their personal creativity, many simply rearrange elements of existing village dress into new acceptable forms.

While the older generation of Hauz Khas villagers stare in bewilderment at these developments, some of the younger generation are more influenced by them. Although young village women do not consider wearing cotton fabric (owing to its backward connotations) or *deshi* styles, they do enter some of the cheaper shops and there have been cases of village girls bringing their own shiny material to a boutique owner and ordering replicas of *salwar kamizes* on sale in the shop. Conversely, there are some boutique owners who now have direct contracts with village tailors in Rajasthan who make up special tribal clothes expressly for the Delhi market. Just as boutique owners select the most "traditional" looking elements of village design, so villagers select the least "traditional" looking styles when they emulate the Delhi elite. There have also been a few cases of young girls in the village cutting their long hair in imitation of boutique owners, tourists and film-star. Young men meanwhile are beginning to take to designer jeans and sun glasses in a big way and are apparently much more self conscious about their appearance than they were in the past.

But although villagers are willing to sell their old clothes to the boutique owners, and the village headman is prepared to dress up and act the part of "traditional village leader", this does not mean that villagers are willing to sell every aspect of their cultural environment. As Martinez has shown in the context of a Japanese tourist village, residents are selective about which aspects of their culture they choose to present to tourists and foreigners. Certain traditions may be carefully preserved and kept away from the tourist eye (Martinez 1990:110). When the village headman came to the fashion show, described at the beginning of this chapter, he left after the first ten minutes. When asked why, he replied:

> "I was shocked and disgusted. Our women in this village have been doing *ghunghut* for generations and generations as a sign of respect and tradition. And then I see these women on the stage, playing with *ghunghut*, and then removing their veils, revealing their bodies and dressing and moving like prostitutes. It is a disgrace. I could not stay to see it here in my village. So I came home."

Like the super village that the boutique owners try to create, ethnic chic fashion takes only the glamour of tradition with little consideration of the social and

cultural context that goes with it. Although most villagers enjoyed the spectacular aspect of the fashion show which they said was "like a movie", there was a general consensus that the way the models used their veils and showed their bodies was shameful and dirty. This raises once more questions about the nature of the relationship between ethnic chic fashion and the fashion it seeks to imitate.

What is Ethnic chic?

I have proceeded this far without analysing exactly what is meant by the phrase "ethnic chic" and by the frequently used phrase "going ethnic". This is because these phrases are so widely and so loosely used that it seems that nobody quite knows what they mean. The term "ethnic" in its original sense, refers to the racial identity of a group, (literally, their ethnic identity). But the word has developed a new meaning in the West where it has been used to refer to any mode of behaviour or a material artefact that seems "exotic" or "primitive" or simply non-Western. It was a popular term during the hippy period in the 1970's when a number of Westerners "went ethnic" and wore "ethnic clothes". Its resurgence in India is curious at a time when at least some self conscious Westerners are beginning to recognise that non- Western countries do not form a conglomerate mass that can be bracketed together by the term "ethnic". But the choice of the word "ethnic" to describe India's new fashion is highly significant as it highlights the gap between the wearers of ethnic clothes and the ethnic groups whom they claim to emulate. If ethnically clad modern women felt a close bond with peasant and tribal women, they would perhaps have chosen to describe the fashion as *deshi*, *swadeshi*, or quite simply "Indian" in the way that nationalists described *khadi*. But by designating it as "ethnic", the wearers of ethnic chic have already defined themselves as outsiders, fascinated by the "exoticism" of "village India" just like foreigners. As for the "chic", this too indicates that the ethnicity of clothing is more a question of glamour than identification with India's many ethnic groups.

To clarify the matter, let us examine the case of Liveleen Sharma, a Delhi socialite, married to a wealthy executive in a multinational company, and see what she means by "going ethnic". She gave a long interview with the Sunday Mail in December 1989 concerning her dress and ideas. A photograph of her, ethnically adorned, graced the front cover under the headline, "The original ethnic chic" (fig 9:11). Inside we are told that Liveleen Sharma "is a picture of the urban Indian woman trying to get back to her ethnic roots."

But what are these ethnic roots and how did she return to them? Logically, Liveleen's ethnic roots should be traced through her background and her return to these roots should be her personal biography. So what are we told of her life history?

Little is mentioned of the early stages except that she was born in Lahore into a wealthy family, and has "Sikh, Hindu and a tinge of Muslim blood". As a young woman she modelled in Paris, got married and raised a family. "Then", we are told, "she visited Rajasthan." She recalls:

> "I saw dark complexioned Rajasthani men in big turbans with rock hard bodies. I saw them oozing with sex. In comparison, the conventionally handsome guys I used to meet in London and Paris paled into insignificance. Even in Delhi, I would park my car near a construction sight and watch wide eyed the village women with slush-filled baskets on their heads, more often than not a baby in an arm, walking down more gracefully than a model can ever imagine to do on a ramp."

The result of this revelation, which could perhaps be more accurately described as visual seduction, was that Liveleen, who previously sported "a very Western look", now "turned ethnic with a vengeance." Nowadays she:

> "dresses up like a low caste *Bungri* woman, *natnis* (rope walker:acrobat) - either in a sari or a *lehnga*, with a long backless blouse and no bra....her jewellery is always silver and chunky. Heavy earrings, a choker, a ring for every finger of her hennaed hands and an *arsi* (ring with a big mirror), bracelets and anklets. The arms from the wrists to the shoulders are studded with lac and silver bangles. A heavy make up with an Om inscribed in the middle of her eyebrows completes the look."

Liveleen's personal transformation was not, according to the Sunday Mail "a put-on job". This they illustrate by the fact that she not only altered her dress, but also her entire house and garden which are now filled with "bric-a-brac from villages in different parts of the country." This, it is claimed, is proof of the sincerity of her conversion. And the second proof lies in the fact that she purports to hold traditional values concerning a woman's role and her natural inferiority to men, (although it is not clear whether this is one of her new "ethnic" ideas, or an idea she has always held). Certainly, at some level, Liveleen feels she has returned to tradition and announces prophetically:

> "There is a wave around that will turn into a tornado. We will start taking pride in ourselves and our traditional values."

SUNDAY MAIL

DECEMBER 17-23, 1989

Rupa Ganguli:
No fear
of rape

The original
ethnic chic

Rashid Khan:
The teenage
singing sensation

Wendy Perriam:
Novels about love
on sizzling beds

Fig 9:11 Portrait of "the urban woman trying to get back to her ethnic roots."
(Sunday Mail Magazine, Dec. 1989)

But the question remains: why, coming from a wealthy Lahore family of mixed origin, did she choose to dress as a low caste *Bungri* woman? Is this really a return to her "ethnic roots"? Secondly, although she has adopted an "ethnic" appearance (high heeled shoes, make-up and plucked eye brows excluded), her actual life style seems very far from "ethnic". Whilst the beautiful Rajasthani bricklayers were labouring in building sites, she was watching them from the comfort of her car. And at one stage in the interview, she professes: "Almost every working day in our married life, I've lunched with my husband Sunny in a classy restaurant." Hardly an "ethnic" lifestyle! Furthermore, for Liveleen, an important part of looking "ethnic" is the fact that she gets noticed wherever she goes. Unlike the Rajasthani labourers who express their group identity through their dress, she expresses her individuality through emulating them. The idea that ethnic chic clothes allow a woman to look unique and glamorous, without *necessarily* being as expensive as they might look, has played an important part in the development of the fashion. Liveleen, herself, clearly enjoys this sensationalist aspect:

> "I am the most popular unpaid model around. The way tourists click me! There was this photo-journalist from Japan, shooting our village belles. When he noticed me in a five star hotel, he freaked out.....Other rich women shell out anything between 2000-8000 rupees on an outfit bought at a boutique. But they all look like sheep - indistinguishable from each other....the women of the filthy rich will always have a diamond bigger than mine. So why compete?."

The Sunday Mail is understandably confused about how to interpret Liveleen Sharma and her "ethnic" ways. In a series of rhetorical questions, it asks:

> "Is she a model? Is she an actress? Is she one of the Shobha Dé socialites? Is she a visual jingle for ethnic chic? Is she a danger to the emancipation of women? Is she just the frisky wife of Sunny Sharma, an executive with a multinational? Or is she all that is tender and nice about Indian womanhood?"

Finally, it asks simply: "Isn't she India, taking pride in its culture?"

It is a question that is curiously difficult to answer.
For whilst, on the one hand, "ethnic chic" is a return to Indianness, on the other hand, this return has been facilitated through a sense of foreignness in which foreign values and perceptions have played an essential part. Furthermore the Indianness which ethnic chic venerates is so constructed that it is doubtful

whether many Indians would even recognise it, never mind identify with it. As Hauz Khas controversies well demonstrate, an ethnic chic lifestyle and aesthetic rests uneasily with the realities of an Indian villager's life. Yet ethnic chic is, at another level, a cultural revival even if its appreciation of India's heritage depends on breaking many of the traditions of which that heritage is composed. Liveleen Sharma is not so much "India, taking pride in its culture" as India presenting an idealised image of its culture to a wealthy cosmopolitan elite. At an international level, then, ethnic chic masquerades as *real* Indian dress from an "authentic Indian village" even though, at a local level, it bears little relationship to the village aesthetic on which it is founded.

Conclusion

There are many outlets for ethnic clothes in India, but few embody as acutely as Hauz Khas the paradoxes on which ethnic chic fashion is founded. For Hauz Khas is both a village and a super-village, with evolving, dissolving and invented traditions competing for space (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). It contains villagers building concrete apartments and urbanites replastering the walls with mud; villagers clad in nylon and rayon and boutique owners in hand spun cotton and silk; villagers struggling to distance themselves from the natural environment, and urbanites putting "nature" back into the village where they think it belongs. Such battles of cultural and aesthetic values are not unusual in themselves, but the particular feature of Hauz Khas village is that these battles are all being waged in a single geographic and temporal space.

In the museum, the very "temple of authenticity" (Handler 1986:4), images of India are controllable and contained. In the Craft Emporium, that mecca of "traditional arts", tokens of India are selected and arranged expressly for sale. At international festivals, "Indian tradition" is staged and marketed to suit a chosen international consumer (cf. Durrans 1982). But in Hauz Khas, despite concerted efforts, not a single person or group is capable of controlling the image of "traditional Indian village life", for this image is being negated as fast as it is being created. At Hauz Khas, both village and city, past and present, "modernisation" and "tradition" juggle for expression in a single arena where history is remade as fast as it is rejected, and new developments are rapidly repainted with a traditional village gloss. Hauz Khas acts simultaneously as both the proof and refutation of the romance of the Indian village. It is a suitable

environment for selling ethnic clothes for ethnic chic embodies precisely the same set of paradoxical relations.

The romanticisation of the village and its products is not, of course, unique to Hauz Khas, nor indeed to India. It is a phenomenon that typically arises in rapidly industrialising societies in situations where people are sufficiently removed from "village life" to mourn its loss (cf.Dewey 1972). "Village life" comes to represent some sort of ideal existence, which is closer to nature and beauty than its urban equivalent. But, as Moeran points out, "people idealize nature only when they are not directly involved with it in a struggle for survival" (Moeran 1990:223). Furthermore, "the aesthetic ideal which associates the quality of traditional arts and crafts with closeness to nature derives primarily from urbanisation, which itself usually - though not necessarily - depends on industrialisation" (ibid). It is perhaps no coincidence that the boutique owner who told me that villagers "are the closest people to nature, the closest you can get", was the daughter of one of India's wealthiest and most successful industrialists. Just as the romance of the village is venerated by those outside it, so "traditional village dress" and hand woven fabrics are appreciated by those who do not have to (but can choose to) wear them.

The question remains: what is "traditional dress"? It is of course, impossible to answer for the term "traditional" does not refer to any particular features of a garment but only to the fact that that garment is perceived as something that was worn and accepted by people in the past. And just as "the past" refers as much to last year as it does to last millenium, so the term "traditional" may be used to describe the dress of any epoch. Hence the pink scarf of *Bharwad* men in Jalia is regarded as an important part of "traditional *Bharwad* dress", even though it has only been adopted in the past ten years. Traditions do not have to pass an age-test in order to be valid although age does lend them credibility and often encourages us to accept things as "traditional".

While it is entirely unconstructive to search for the physical components of "traditional Indian dress", it is helpful to examine how a garment is designated as "traditional" and what this designation actually means. In Hauz Khas, the *lehnga*, bodice and veil combination was the most common outfit worn by the Hindu women of the village before Independence. Urbanites refer to it as "traditional" or "ethnic", while villagers refer to it literally as "stuff of the past".

Both groups agree to identify the same outfit as the dress of a past era. But while to the boutique owners, the age of the dress lends it charm and authenticity, to the villagers the age of the dress makes it old-fashioned and unappealing. And while the veil is the one aspect of the outfit which city-folk discard as superfluous, it is the only aspect of the outfit that villagers have retained as important. In other words, each group has selected which aspects of the outfit they regard as important in the process of preserving traditions. While the boutique owners kept the aesthetic aspect but dismissed veiling as an old fashioned custom, the villagers dismissed the *lehnga* and bodice as old fashioned but maintained the custom of veiling.

The process by which we categorise things as "traditional" and "old-fashioned" is, then, the process by which we divide the "stuff of the past" into the categories of relevant and irrelevant. The "traditional" is, then, nothing more than that stuff of the past (real or imagined) that we consider relevant to our present and our future, while the "old-fashioned" is but that stuff of the past which we dismiss as irrelevant to our contemporary life. Thus while the term "old-fashioned" is used to invalidate the relevance of things of the past to the present, the term "traditional" is frequently employed to legitimise things of the present by reference to the past. Designating things as "traditional" is therefore a means of implying their authenticity and justifying their continued existence (cf. Picton 1990).

The boutique owners and followers of ethnic chic often accuse villagers of failing to appreciate their own artistic tradition. But what these city-folk fail to recognise is that when they wear ethnic clothes they are not only looking "traditional", but they are also looking "modern", since the idea of dressing like villagers is, for the urban elite, a novel one. It is part of a contemporary urban fashion trend. But if villagers, either in Hauz Khas or Jalia, don the same ethnic clothes, they do not participate in urban fashion in the same way for, living in the village as they do, they feel immediately excluded from the processes of change. They find themselves classified as backward and uneducated within their own community. They become trapped in a time warp from which they wish to escape. By designating Hauz Khas as "traditional" and trying to preserve the "village atmosphere", boutique owners are, in effect, denying villagers a right to the future. Meanwhile, by replacing mud and brick houses with concrete apartments, villagers are denying the boutique owners access to

the village's past. The irony of the situation is, of course, that it is the boutique owners themselves who have given the villagers the means with which to rebuild their village and hence "destroy" its "village atmosphere". Similarly, ethnic chic is at once the "revival" and "destruction" of India's clothing traditions.

Chapter 10

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis I have concentrated on how individuals and groups have defined their own identities through their clothes. I have placed emphasis on the two elements of choice and constraint which form the conceptual framework in which the problem of what to wear is situated. I have argued that, however great the constraints on action, some element of choice is always possible. Furthermore, even in situations where the very idea of individual action appears submerged by social convention, there is always the possibility of defying convention and breaking the rules.[1] When Gandhi wore his *dhoti* to Buckingham Palace and when Hansaben wore her cardigan in the kitchen in Jalia, both were using clothes to challenge the foundations of the hierarchical relations which oppressed them, even though they could not reverse those hierarchical norms in a single gesture (the King was *still* in authority, as was Hansaben's father-in-law).

If material culture, and in particular dress, is the primary object of this study, then human agency is the subject, for people manipulate objects such as clothes in defining themselves (cf. Hodder 1982). But material culture is not merely the object of this study for, despite being produced and consumed by human beings, it has a habit of taking on a subjectivity of its own. For, in the same way that we define ourselves through the objects we consume, so consumption defines us and we become the objects of a categorisation process in which the world of material culture is the subject (cf. Miller 1985, Bourdieu 1984, Douglas and Isherwood 1980). So our clothes define us as much as we define ourselves through our clothes. And differences in dress not merely suggest that "we" are different from "them", but also naturalise these differences (cf. Barthes 1973) and thereby become the very basis and proof of difference itself (cf.Hodder 1982).

An understanding of the dual processes of differentiation and identification is central to the comprehension of the development of any clothing tradition, for clothes are literally a means of classification, whether at the level of individuals,

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1 Corfield provides a detailed discussion of this point using the example of a British outmeal maker who, called before the High Commission in 1630, refused to doff his cap to the Bishops (cf. Corfield 1989).

castes, classes, regions or nations. And in the same way that clothes draw boundaries which *exclude* those who are dressed differently, so they encompass and *include* those who are dressed in the same way. This is the process of identification. While individuals and groups are not necessarily motivated by the desire to differentiate themselves from others, differentiation none the less results from their actions. And similarly, while individuals are not necessarily seeking to identify with others when they share the same dress, they are none the less interpreted as identifying with them. Differentiation and identifiction are, then, the unavoidable, though sometimes intended, consequences of the choices we make. What Bourdieu argues for "taste" is, of course, true for dress:

> "Taste classifies, and it classifies the clasifier. Social subjects, classified by their classification, distinquish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifictions is expressed or betrayed" (Bourdieu 1984:6).

Many scholars, from the 19th century to the present day, have highlighted the importance of clothes as a means of identification and differentiation in India (cf. Johnson 1863-1866, Watson 1868-75, Dongerkery 1960, Elson 1979, Jain 1980, Chishti and Sanyal 1989). But their models are often static and so obscure the existence of the problem of what to wear. But if differentiation and identification are defined as *processes*, then the problem of what to wear emerges from the closet. For, if too many diverse groups begin to identify with the same type of dress, then one group (often composed of those who first wore the dress) will eventually differentiate themselves by wearing something else. Viewed within this framework, the recent history of Indian dress may be interpreted as a series of "strategies of distinction" (cf. Bourdieu 1984) which form patterns of differentiation both between India and the West and between different groups within Indian society. The dominant strategies, which I summarise below, have been led largely by the Indian elite, but have in turn become the strategies of middle and lower sections of society as they struggle to catch up. In each phase there are, of course, individuals and groups who do not fit the pattern, but this does not alter the structure of the historical proccesses themselves.

Dressing for Distinction: A Historical Review

Phase 1: The Appeal of British Dress

During the colonial period, European dress gradually gained popularity amongst the Indian upper classes. This was not a simple case of Indians blindly following the West. On the contrary Indian people were fairly resistant to Western clothes, often refusing to allow them entry into their houses even when they allowed their use in the workplace. But with the spread of the British education system and, of course, the value system that went with it, European dress gradually came to be regarded by the educated few as a sign of the wearer's progress and success.

Through wearing European styles, upper class Indians dissociated themselves from the uneducated Indian masses while, at the same time, trying to integrate themselves with the ruling British elite. This quest for integration was not so much motivated by admiration for the British as by acceptance of the idea that India's development could be brought about through cooperation with European values and ideas of progress. This cooperation was almost entirely male. Indian women remained largely shielded both from the British and their clothes. Elite women did, however, adopt selected features of European dress, such as voluminous petticoats and lacy blouses, which distinguished them from other Indian women.

The response of British men to Indian men's strategy of identification, was to further the process of differentiation, both by trying to prevent Indians from wearing European styles, and by tightening their own sartorial codes, thereby making them less accessible to Indians. Motivated by anything from feelings of racial superiority to a more humble desire to respect Indian traditions, British men wanted to keep differences apparent. Differences between Indian and European dress were used not only to mark out racial difference, but also to justify racial discrimination.

During the early 20th century, a large proportion of Indian villagers remained in Indian styles, but took to wearing machine-manufactured cloth, imported from the West. Not only was this cheaper than most Indian manufactures, but it was also finer, and was therefore associated with higher levels of refinement (cf.Bayly 1986). By the mid 20th century a considerable proportion of village men were turning first to Western style shirts and then to shirts and trousers.

They were not so much following the British (with whom they had little or no contact), as following the Indian elite who were following the British. Women were, as I have shown, more conservative in their dress owing largely to ideas of female modesty which served to constrain their choice.

Phase 2: Responding with *Khadi*

The spread of *khadi*, which was most successfully propagated by Gandhi, was a deliberate step away from the increasing Westernisation of Indian dress. Gandhi, recognising that dress was a concrete symbol to which everybody could relate, portrayed his disillusionment with the British through his gradual shedding of Western garments. This was not merely a rejection of Western values, but also a reassertion of Indian values as morally superior, as well as being socially, politically and economically more appropriate to India.

Not content with merely breaking the link between the dress of the Indian and Western elite, Gandhi chose as his image for India, the clothing and life style which was most antithetical to the British and to their ideas of progress. He tried to encourage all Indians to identify with the plight of the poorest villager, not merely through wearing the latter's clothes but also through sharing the villager's labour. All men and women were to spin their own thread and so participate in the production of their own garments. In short, Gandhi invited Indians, whatever their background, caste or religion, to be like villagers. By doing this, he not only provided an alternative model of society to the prevalent British model, but also sought to wipe out social and religious differentiation within his own society, masking all distinctions under a *khadi* blanket which united Indians against the West.

The response to Gandhi's efforts was mixed. But throughout the Freedom Struggle, a number of educated Indians, particularly politicians, did take to wearing *khadi*, often motivated by their recognition of its effectiveness as a strategic move against the British. Yet, as I have shown in Chapter 4, those who adopted *khadi*, simultaneously developed their own means of self differentiation beneath this seemingly equalising sartorial mask. Differences of design, texture, colour and style were developed both to express and reveal social, religious, economic and cultural differences.

The overall effect of the *khadi* movement on the clothes of the uneducated majority is more difficult to gauge. Although principally an upper class

movement, it did incorporate within it various groups who felt that *khadi* represented their interests. This included both wealthy peasant landlords and *Harijan* weavers. While some villagers wore *khadi* for political reasons, others wore it because it was their habitual dress, even before the *khadi* revival. A large proportion of the village population remained, however, in the cheaper, finer, mill-cloth they had recently adopted.

Like the Westernisation of dress, the re-Indianisation of dress through *khadi* was essentially male dominated. It did, however, incorporate a number of women from elite upper class families who began, for the first time, to participate in Indian politics.

Phase 3. Post Independence Modernisation

After Independence Indian politicians were placed in a difficult position politically and sartorially. Having defined Indian identity in terms of *khadi*, they could not simply reject *khadi* dress the moment the British turned their backs. The problem was that Gandhi had woven into *khadi* an entire notion of an ideal craft-based society, which although it was convenient as an alternative to British society, did not at all conform to the vision of the majority of Indian politicians. Politicians resolved this conflict by pursuing their own policy of modernisation, (including industrialisation), but at the same time continuing to dress in hand woven clothes and Indian styles. By wearing the *sherwani-pyjama*, Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, managed to avoid looking Western while simultaneously avoiding looking like the Hindu peasant in his *dhoti*. From the 1950's onwards, *khadi dhotis* and Gandhi caps became increasingly confined to important political occasions and increasingly removed from Gandhian ideas (see fig. 10:1).

But Independent India, despite its industrial policy, was not to neglect the pre-Independence veneration for village life. Nor were politicians to forget the need to show their affiliation with Indian villagers. The Nehru family, as I have shown, decided to express their personal affiliation by adopting temporary tokens of the dress of the diverse peoples of India when on political tour. They also encouraged the establishment of an institutional framework through which Indian handicrafts could be "supported" and "revived." In 1952 the All India Handicraft Board was established with the idea that urban Indians had a moral duty to support Indian handicrafts, although they no longer needed to become craftspersons themselves. Many of the people involved in this movement were

Gandhiji, Sir....

Fig. 10:1 Cartoon by Laxman, from **You Said It**

highly educated Indian women with a genuine interest in appreciating and preserving the "richness and diversity" of Indian craft. They took to wearing hand loom saris, as did Indira Gandhi herself (later followed by Sonia, the Italian wife of Rajiv Gandhi). They were no longer advocating a minimalist Gandhian approach to Indian dress, but they did reiterate the need for India to differentiate herself from the West. Women in particular were encouraged to become the patrons and keepers of Indian clothing traditions which were now opposed to Western dress in aesthetic, rather than political, terms. Kamala Dongerkery, one of the women involved in this revival, wrote:

> "It is for the Indian woman to think out and utilise every item of artistic excellence whether it be the fisherman's cap, the decorated Lucknow kurtha, silver or ivory ornaments of Kashmir or Saurashtra....The point to be remembered is the attractiveness of the article and the artistic value rather than the finery and grandeur and the cost of the article......An adaptation of Indian designs and colours, incorporated in the fashions of teenagers, would be in harmony with the general costume of the people and would, perhaps, transform India into an oriental fairyland. Western clothes, however beautiful, comfortable and useful, do not as a rule, fit into the picturesque pattern of Indian life......We must be able to utilise simple and common materials to aesthetic advantage in order that we may feel at one with the multitude" (Dongerkery 1960:77).

Dongerkery's appeal was, of course, directed towards educated urban women who had lost touch with their local sartorial traditions. But such women, some of whom had only recently differentiated themselves from "the multitude", did not necessarily wish to identify with the common people. Neither did they share the same vision of India as an "oriental fairyland" with a "picturesque" pattern of life. Furthermore this romanticisation of the village through craft rested uneasily with the Government's attempts to "develop" and "modernise" the technology and living standards of villagers. This was an era in which India's primary political and economic aim was to "develop".

Most urbanites (politicians and artists excluded) switched their affiliations quickly to mill-cloth (fig. 10:2). Men returned to trousers and women were attracted to enticing new varieties of synthetics both from India and abroad. Some young women even adopted European styles, such as skirts, blouses and later trousers and denim jeans. Well-to-do families contented themselves with buying the odd hand-made Indian table cloth from a cottage emporium and feeling they had fulfilled their duty to India. The result was that most Government backed handloom projects ran at a loss and the enthusiastic production of handloom textiles was rarely met with the same enthusiastic levels of consumption (see fig. 10:3).

'Where's the party, *Daddy-O?'*

Fig. 10:2 Cartoon by Mario/Sapre. From Abraham (1988).

In spite of all our efforts there's still a large
stock of unsold cloth with us!

Fig. 10:3 (Laxman).

In general then, post Independent India showed a return to the modernisation of
dress in the form of machine-made fabrics and foreign styles. In the cities, the
development of the film industry served to popularise certain images, in
particular the hero in jeans and sun-glasses and the heroine in a variety of
shapes and guises (fig. 10:4). So powerful was the appeal of the movie image,
that, according to Chaudhuri, some girls would even take their tailors to the
cinema in order that they could copy dress designs from films (Chaudhuri 1976:
139). Disgusted by what he sees as an ever increasing tendency towards
eroticism and cheapness, Chaudhuri calls this era, "the age of Ugliness" and
accuses Indian women of falling prey to it:

> "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." (ibid:109).

Rupi Palace. Princess Kiran on the first day of the *Dussehra* festival, 1965, wearing a mauve taffeta dress copied from a photograph of *Gone with the Wind*, in a film magazine

Fig. 10:4 Photograph taken by Lady Penelope Chetwode.

Since most Indian women do not share Chaudhuri's perception of what constitutes an "aesthetic hell", they are indeed following the "nylon path". As my research in Jalia shows, for many women, the adoption of the synthetic sari is part of the process by which they can distance themselves from the backward associations of local dress and join the ranks of the "progressive". It is one of the many strategies through which a caste is able to upgrade itself. Thus *Brahman* and *Vaniya* women, at the top of the Jalia hierarchy, were the first to adopt the synthetic sari. This differentiated them from the women of other castes who still wore backless bodices and hand embroidered clothes. Yet today, *Kanbi* women are themselves seeking to differentiate themselves from the category of village farmer, and are leaving *ghaghrao*-wearing to *Kharak* women who adopted the dress from the *Kanbis* in the first place. *Bharwad* men, on the other hand, now regard the *kediyun* and *chorni* as "traditional *Bharwad* dress", even though they were almost the only group not to wear this dress at the turn of the century. If cinema, television and videos continue to spread through the country at their current rate, there will no doubt soon be village women, joining their urban sisters in their attempts to emulate Hindi film stars.[2] Yet, just at the time when the Indian population is beginning to adopt Western clothes and synthetic fabrics at a mass level, the Indian upper classes, followed quickly by the upper middle bracket, have branched away from the "nylon path" and returned down a muddy side street back to the village.

Phase 4 Ethnic chic - Return to roots?

Ethnic chic, the fourth phase in this historical progression, is one of the means by which the elite educated minority has redefined its position and taste in relation to the Indian masses and in relation to the West. It is a circular step for the elite are literally stepping into village dress at the very moment that the villagers are stepping out of it. By doing this they can differentiate themselves from the increasing mass of the sari-wearing, denim jean-wearing population, who are still following the earlier example of the Indian elite.

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2 I am not aware of this occurring yet in Jalia where televisions were still in very limited supply and where going to the cinema was predominantly a male activity. During my stay in the village I only encountered one occasion where women's clothes were referred to in terms of films. This was when a vendor arrived in the village and tried to sell a selection of synthetic saris. He explained to a *Kanbi* woman that these were the same as the saris worn by Sita in the television version of the *Ramayana*. But the woman was not convinced and did not buy a sari.

Ethnic chic is a means of asserting one's membership of a high social sphere by dressing in peasant and tribal fabrics and/or styles that come usually from a low social sphere. Its exclusivity is safeguarded by the fact that the tribals and peasants are themselves rejecting these clothes while the provincial middle classes, who recently rejected them, are far too close to their real implications to return to them. If a young woman in a provincial city like Bhavnagar were to dress herself in an embroidered *ghaghro* and *kapdu*, she might be confused with the *real* village peasant, and that would harm her reputation. To her, village clothes are associated with backwardness, illiteracy, a tough farming life, restrictive rules for women and a general lack of taste and refinement. It is only through being sufficiently distanced (socially and geographically) from these implications that the Indian elite can choose to dress themselves in peasant and tribal clothes.

This return to ethnic dress is very different from the return to *khadi* during the nationalist period, although ethnic fashion relies to some extent on *khadi* philosophy to lend it credibility.[3] Gandhi's romanticisation of the village involved the idea of the simplicity and morality of village life and it involved identification and participation with the villager. But ethnic chic relies neither on identification nor participation but rather on the hollow *idea* of identification without any participation. And even that *idea* of identification is possible only when the people being identified with have changed sufficiently for the point of contact to be almost non-existent. It focuses purely on the spectacular aspects of village life which are so far divorced from their cultural context as to be almost unrecognisable. This extraction of the aesthetic and marketable elements of peasant and tribal India has played an essential part in the Festival of India, *Apna Utsav* (Our Festival) and the numerous stagings of folk dances which are now so popular in India's major cities. Fig. 10:5 shows a politician watching a folk dance in a village and assuming that villagers have taken the idea from the city. It reveals the actual distance between the urban elite and the tribal performers. It is that same distance which, in the field of fashion, has enabled the "ethnic" to become the "chic".

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3 An example of this would be Sita and her workshop of refugee tailors in Hauz Khas village. Sita gives her fashions a moral overtone by advertising the fact that she is helping the homeless by giving them work. She thereby uses the Gandhian association of morality with craft. But, unlike Gandhi, she does not participate in the menial work herself. Rather she designs clothes which are made by the poor and sold to the rich, keeping in line with the fashion industry's characteristically capitalist organisation.

This village must be pretty advanced—they have folk dances here for entertainment just as we have in the city! Fig. 10:5 (Laxman).

Yet ethnic chic, despite its distance from the people it imitates, poses as, and to some extent *is*, a cultural revival in that it venerates an Indian aesthetic above a Western one. It is not only a means by which the Indian elite distinguishes itself from the Indian masses, but it is also a means by which it distinguishes itself from the West. Many people describe their personal choice of ethnic clothes as part of a sudden realisation that the West does not hold all the answers to progress. It is a sort of anti-modern, anti-Western approach to dress. But, on the other hand, the fashion of ethnic chic and the new appreciation of Indian culture that accompanies it, is, as I have shown, very much linked to the West and to the West's appreciation of India's art and craft heritage (see figs. 10:6 and 7). It is also stimulated by Indian people's sense of foreignness in relation to India, and this sense of foreignness is owing precisely to their sense of identification with the West.[4] Furthermore, in criticising Western ideas of

4 Many of the identity dilemmas discussed in this and the preceding chapter have their parallels in Mexico (Waterbury 1989) and Japan (Moeran 1984). Moeran

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I developed an interest in these
things in America when I went there
recently for the festival.

Fig. 10:6 (Laxman)

Look, if you think there was bettern appreciation of
your performance in Paris and Washington, you are
welcome to go to those places right now!

Fig. 10:7 (Laxman)

progress, ethnic chic at the same time participates in the anti-modernist ideas
which are themselves part of Western culture. Fashions "went ethnic" in the
West long before they "went ethnic" in India. Few years pass without some
mention of a new "ethnic" wave in the fashion houses of Paris, New York and
London. Can ethnic chic separate itself from the more international trend of
ethnic fashion? And is it even intended to? Returning to the fashion show at
Hauz Khas, it was noticeable that the only definitively Western clothes in the

writes: "outsiders, living in urban complexes...look to the country for "tradition"
in an attempt to define their "Japaneseness" vis-a-vis the western world
(1990:216).

show were modelled first. This seemed to imply that India needed to show that it was capable of producing Western chic before it could reveal its ethnic splendours. It also indicated how the ethnic clothes that followed should be viewed. They should be seen as designer fashion garments, not as traditional handicraft nor even simply as genuine peasant clothes. Ethnic chic is, therefore, not only a means of differentiation from other Indians and from the West, but also a means of identification with an increasingly cosmopolitan "global elite" who share common tastes (cf. Breckenridge 1989). As Sita put it, her designs were for "international people", and such an international elite, bound together through shared tastes, does to some extent transcend mere cultural boundaries (cf. Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988).

Ethnic chic is, then, a "fashion" as much as it is a cultural revival. And this concept of fashion, incorporating as it does the constant need for changing clothes, is essentially a Western concept. This is not to say that Indian clothes remained unchanged for generations. This entire thesis proves quite the opposite. But the point is that people can only change their clothes within the accepted limits of their social situation, and as we have seen from the many examples in Jalia, the constraints in an Indian village are many and the opportunities for change comparatively few, especially for women. Constrained by both caste and veiling restrictions, few village women have more than one style of clothing to choose from at any given time. Fashion, on the other hand, relies on people's ability to play with image, to select one image one day and abandon it the next. It relies more on the concept of game[5] than on the notion of straightforward identification. You can dress like a garage mechanic one day and like a college student the next, and no one will fix you to these images unless you choose to fix yourself to them by wearing the same style constantly. And then, sooner or later, you will be "out of fashion". Fashion is the veneration of the ephemeral (cf. Wilson 1987). It also goes hand in hand with the Western concept of individualism. We are constantly told by magazines that it is through fashion that we can express "ourselves". Ethnic chic has taken all of these notions on board. Through rearranging elements of village dress,

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5 Barthes carries this aspect of fashion to its ultimate conclusion by suggesting that the entire fashion system exists only as a system of arbitrarily defined differences (Barthes 1985). Whilst I agree with his emphasis on difference, I cannot agree that this difference is arbitrary, for the history of Indian fashion is, as I have shown, an inextricable part of the history of India itself (cf. Chaudhuri 1976).

મુલાકાત થઈ અને વિદ્ન મેં પહેલી જ વાર
જોયો.
ઈન્ડસ્ટ્રીમાં સ્થાન મેળવવા ફારાહને હવે
જરૂર છે એક હીટની. 'આજની તારીખમાં
ફાસલે કે ઈમાનદાર, પાલેખાન કે
દિલજલામાં સારો અભિનય કરવા છતાં
ફિલ્મો ફ્લોપ ગઈ તેથી કોઈ અભિનેત્રી
તરીકે હું પાછી પડી છું એવું હરગીઝ નથી.
ફિલ્મ ઈન્ડસ્ટ્રીની કરુણતા એ છે કે ફિલ્મ
ફ્લોપ જતા નમારી શક્તિ દેખાતી નથી. જે
ફિલ્મ હીટ જાય તો શ્રય હીરોને મળે છે.
એટલે બાપડી હીરોઈનને તો પડછાયો બનીને
જ રહેવું પડે.'
ફારાહ ઈન્ડસ્ટ્રીમાં હલચલ મચાવવા ફરીથી
આવી રહી છે. અનામાં મક્કમ મનોબળ છે
કારકિર્દી ઘડવાનું. કારકિર્દીના આ તબક્કે
ફારાહને બીજું શું જોઈએ ?
ફારાહ : ફ્લેટ નં. ૨, અનુકૂળ, વર્સોવા,
મુંબઈ-૫૬.
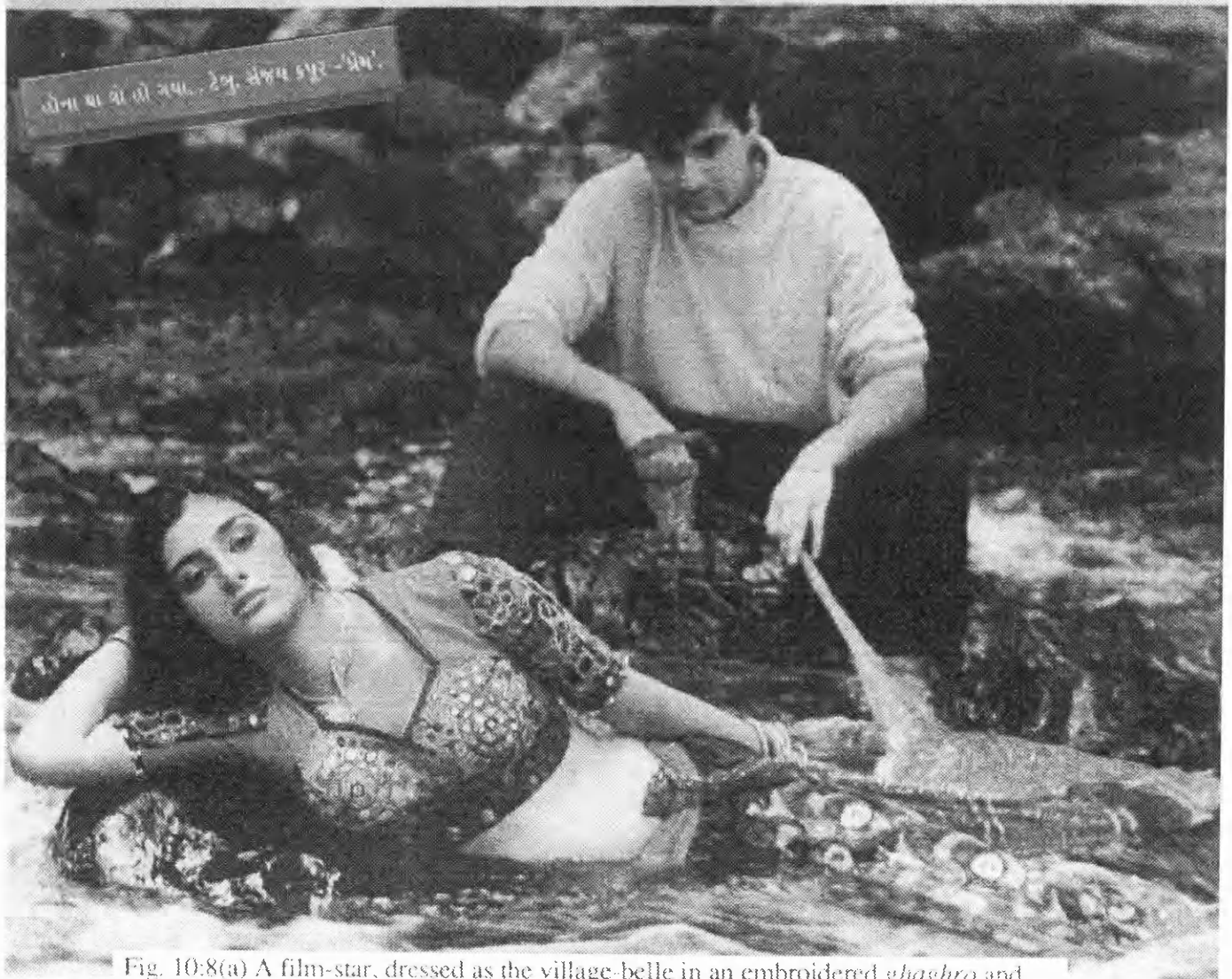
Fig. 10:8(a) A film-star, dressed as the village-belle in an embroidered *ghaghro* and *kapdu*. The film industry has played an important role in popularising the romantic and erotic village look. Wet, body-hugging clothes are a particular favourite.

And whoever said a *ghazal* singer should be soberly attired?

Go mad, go mod with Penaaz Masani

Who Says Ethnic=Traditional?

Pink splendour

Khadi work on the jacket goes ideally with the gold *tikils* on the pink, long skirt

Ethnic

jacket over a work choli and long hakoba skirt

Reflecting originality

Fig. 10:8(b) As ethnic chic filters down the hierarchy, it becomes popular and diluted. The originators of the fashion shun such hybrid combinations as those portrayed in this magazine feature from **Star and Style** (October 1989).

women of the urban elite, like Liveleen Sharma, can express their individuality and their exclusivity.[6]

Yet ethnic chic as an exclusive fashion faces two main problems. Firstly, it is alienating those who wore hand-made Indian clothes before the "ethnic revival". These are the women, and to a lesser extent the men, who have been advocating the appreciation of Indian handicrafts consistently since the 1950's. They have long been wearing textiles, woven, dyed and embroidered by hand. Having selected these on a mixture of aesthetic and moral grounds, they baulk at the new ethnic fashion:

> "Those who have always dressed traditional look at this fashion wave suspiciously - they don't know whether to love it or hate it.....As the fashion spreads it becomes vulgar and defies its own ends. Or as Martand Singh[7] put it: "Ultimately a god becomes an ashtray.""(India Today 30.4.1988:78)

Textile specialists and arts lovers spurn the revival partly because they feel that it is born out of ignorance rather than appreciation of Indian handiwork. They complain that status conscious people with little aesthetic sense, but keen to keep up with the fashion, end up mixing and matching garments and textiles from different parts of India without any understanding of how these textiles should be worn and without any idea of how they should be combined. Furthermore, there is they feel, a vulgar surfeit of ethnic exoticism with people trying to out do each other with their degrees of ethnicness.[8]

The very popularity of ethnic chic is debasing its reputation, not only amongst the arts and crafts lovers, but also amongst those who took to ethnic chic as a

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6 The emergence of fashion in India in the past five to ten years has been enabled by increasing social mobility, the rapid expansion of a new middle class category of consumers, the development of an industry dedicated to the production of fashion, and the new but increasing separation of the roles of designer and producer. These factors have been boosted by the spread of the film industry and television which market a number of images to people all over India, including romantic portraits of Indian villagers in local costumes. The development of the Indian fashion industry is too large a subject to be covered in this thesis.

7 Martand Singh is the secretary of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). He was also involved in the organisation of the Festival of India.

8 One fashion designer in Ahmedabad, a woman who has long appreciated Indian crafts, explained that in 1988, tired of the glare of too much Gujarati mirror work and embroidery, she tried to market a collection of more subtle and simple clothes. But her customers complained. They wanted the really exotic tribal look, and she ultimately conformed to their demand in order to preserve her sales.

symbol of exclusivity and uniqueness. For so rapidly is the fashion spreading down the social hierarchy, with machine-made replicas of ethnic clothes readily available for the more popular consumer, that it can no longer be termed truly "exclusive". New methods need to be found by which the fashionable elite can separate itself from the burgeoning middle class consumer (see fig. 10: 9).

Like snakes, Bombay's nouveau riche is shedding old wardrobes in search of the exclusive identity.

Fig. 10:9 From **India Today** (30.6.1989).

Such methods are beginning to emerge with the development of a new cult of exclusivity, best exhibited in the so called "Artwear" fashion. This is a fashion so exclusive and so expensive that, like all haute couture, it is worn only by a minute wealthy minority. But since these are precisely the people who lead the fashion scene, it is worth a brief mention.

Phase 5: Beyond Ethnic Chic to Artwear Exclusivity

Art wear is the very latest "strategy of distinction" in Indian fashion. Ethnic chic was exclusive through combining tribal and peasant dress with the Western concept of fashion. Artwear is like ethnic chic without the ethnic. It is really a new form of Indian chic. It consists of garments composed, not merely by designers, but by a two person team consisting of a designer and an artist. The result is "not-to-be-repeated, once-only outfits" (Indian Today 30.6.1989). The man who organised the get together of artist/designer teams[9] in Bombay, described what it means to wear an Artwear garment:

> "When you wear artwear you become part of a painting - not everyone has the courage to be so bold. You are making a statement, isn't it? You wear it because you know that nobody else is also wearing it" (ibid).

The assurance that no one else is wearing it is probably true since the forty or so outfits resulting from the artist-designer liaison, cost up to 20,000 rupees (1000 pounds) per dress.

With this new development of clothes as an art form has come the reworking of the sari as new high fashion. In recent years the sari had become increasingly threatened in fashionable circles by the emergence of alternative clothes for women (Western dress, ethnic chic, and the *salwar kamiz*). Furthermore, as we have seen from events in Jalia, the synthetic sari is now becoming so popular as to have entirely lost its exclusivity for the urban elite. To many, it is still associated with "tradition" and sometimes with wealth (if made from extravagant materials) but rarely with fashion, glamour and exclusivity. As India Today puts it, the sari is considered by many as "staid, standard and almost sacred" (India Today 15.12.1990). Now, however, the sari is reemerging as an erotic wrap which can expose as much as it conceals. The blouse is being discarded and the sari itself is changing its size, altering its form and being tied in a variety of new ways - with a ruffle in the front, a bustle behind, and even as a woman's turban (figs. 10:10-12). Experimentation with the sari is the latest means by which a woman can be elegant, exclusive, Indian, unconventional, sexy and expensive all in one.

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9 Sita, of Hauz Khas fame, was amongst the designers selected to work with artists to produce artwear garments. Some of the other designers selected also sell their work in Hauz Khas.

PRAKASH
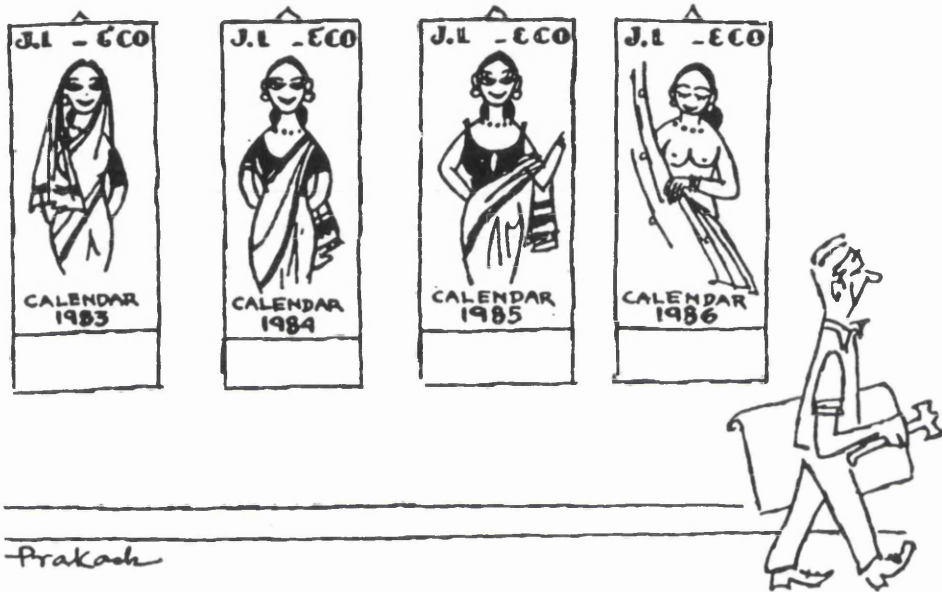
Fig. 10:10 The Progressive eroticisation of the sari. From (ed.)Abraham (1988).

It is yet to be seen how much this latest sari fashion will develop. Needless to say, it is encountering considerable opposition from traditionalists who see any tampering with the sari form as an act of sacrilege (ibid). But if it is well marketed through advertising and more importantly, through films, it may be the look of the future in India. Whether it succeeds or not, is for the moment irrelevant. I have included it simply to illustrate the latest development in the long and arduous search for an Indian dress which is both non-Western and fashionable, a search which began with Gandhi, although, as we have seen, it has taken many a diverse path since the old *swadeshi* days of the 1920's.

Wrapturous ways to cover your body, reveal your best assets and show off the simplest of scarves.

Fig. 10.11   Erotic saris. From **Glad Rags** (1989)

Masters of the female form —

turbaned and draped

to bring out the woman in you.

Fig. 10:12   Erotic Saris continued.

The Problem of What to Wear Remains

Bourdieu's concept of "strategies of distinction" has provided a useful tool for comprehending the emergence and resurgence of various clothing trends in India. But it is not sufficient in itself for helping us to comprehend the full magnitude or indeed the full triviality of the problem of what to wear. For this is a personal problem which is integral to the particular lived experience of individuals, castes, and nations. It is not enough simply to locate a person's position within a historical trend without attempting to comprehend how that person arrived at that position and how that person feels about the trends around him or her. For, despite participating in "strategies of distinction", people are not necessarily conscious of the implications of their choice of clothes (Lurie 1984), neither are they necessarily motivated by a desire to be exclusive (although some clearly are). In fact, some people, like the *Harijans* of Jalia, actually seek to escape classification rather than reveal their identity through their dress, while yet others are concerned less with identity than with the practical problems of price and availability. Despite the varying degrees of seriousness and consciousness with which the problem is treated, and despite the fact that fashion magazines define the problem in largely aesthetic and economic terms, I would argue that the problem of what to wear is not merely a mundane problem but also a social, cultural and political dilemma.

At its broadest level, the problem of what to wear is formulated within the framework of the specific historical development of a culture. In India the problem is inextricably linked to the colonial encounter. One of the greatest sartorial problems faced by the Indian elite today is how to look "Indian" without looking too self-consciously so. Part of the problem lies perhaps in the formulation of the question since the very idea of "looking Indian" seems to have emerged only through the Indian's encounter with the non-Indian. In his book, **We Indians** (1982), writer and political editor, Khushwant Singh, has described the evolution of his own personal awareness of "being Indian". As a small child he lived in a village in Western Punjab (now Pakistan). When people asked him who he was, he replied by giving the name of his subcaste and family. When his family moved to live in a neighbouring town, however, he left his subcaste out of the description and defined himself as a Sikh, mentioning his caste only to those of his own religious persuasion. By the time he was twelve, his family had moved to Delhi, and the young Kushwant Singh,

meeting people from other linguistic regions of India, described himself to his new school mates as a "Sikh from Punjab". Finally, on reaching England, he began to describe himself as Indian. He records:

> "The first time I became conscious of being Indian was when I went to university in England. This was not very surprising since only Englishmen who had been to India could recognise me as a Sikh or a Punjabi. For others I was just an Indian. Like other foreigners living in England, we Indians tended to herd together. We preferred to live in the same boarding houses; joined Indian clubs and forgathered at Indian religious festivals. By then we also started taking an interest in our freedom movement. To present a united front against the English, we suppressed our religious and linguistic separateness and insisted that we were Indians" (Singh 1982:11-12).

But by conforming to this notion of "the Indian", partly out of necessity (because he was defined as such by Englishmen) and partly out of desire (because he chose to embrace a category through which Indians could present a united image against the British), Khushwant Singh was not only helping to validate the category of Indian but he was also expressing his relationship to the West. Probably the single most penetrating analyses of how this identity dilemma has manifested itself in India is by Ashish Nandy, who points out that there can be no such thing as "the Indian", since "the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds" (Nandy 1983, preface xi). To him, any attempt to get outside the West is itself inextricably bound to the West since it sets itself up in opposition to the West. He writes:

> "The pressure to be the obverse of the West distorts the traditional priorities in the Indian's total view of man and universe and destroys his culture's unique gestalt. In fact it binds him even more irrevocably to the West" (Nandy 1983:73).

Nandy's point, no doubt influenced by Said's **Orientalism** (1978), is that people born within the historical construction of colonialism, are all co-victims of colonialism whether they are born of the West or the non-West. If one applies his arguments to the clothing of both the British and Indian elite during the Colonial period, it is clear that whilst the British were obliged to intensify their Britishness in the face of the alien Indian, Indians were obliged to intensify their Indianness in the face of the alien British. In both cases a national and sartorial identity was created and reinforced through the colonial encounter.

One of Gandhi's greatest achievements was, as we have seen, his establishment of a new Indian dress. But the problem was that for those Indian men who had been born and educated directly under the British system, a *khadi dhoti* felt

more foreign than a tailored suit. Furthermore, after Independence, were these men to remain ossified in some apparently timeless "traditional" Indian outfit whilst Indian peasants, less concerned with the implications of colonialism, put aside their rustic *dhotis* in favour of synthetic trousers? The answer was clearly, "no". But the question remained. How could the Indian elite, conscious of its relationship to the West, look modern, without appearing Western, and look Indian without appearing "traditional"? In a sense it was a search for an Indian modernism, but since modernism had been defined in India in Western terms, any attempt to dress in modern dress risked and still risks being interpreted as an attempt to imitate Western dress.

This is a problem, specific to a certain educated milieu of Indian society. As Nandy points out, there is only a small group of Indians who try to define Indianness whilst "large groups live their lives as if such definitions were irrelevant" (Nandy 1983:102). This is not to say that the vast majority of Indians, who continue to inhabit India's villages, are any less self-conscious about their presentation of self. As my research in Jalia shows, there is just as much controversy in a village concerning the question of what to wear as there is in a town or city. But the question is framed differently. Nobody in Jalia discusses their dress in terms of national identity or Indianness. Nor do people tend to think in these terms. Thus, even when a person dresses in styles that are clearly of Western origin, that person is perceived as dressing in city styles, not Western ones. Thus Hansaben's cardigan was controversial, not because it crossed the boundaries of national Indian styles, but because it crossed the sartorial limits of the village and was considered unacceptable dress for a married Jalia woman.

In Jalia, then, identity dilemmas tended to be framed within the geographical limits of the local area. To people of the village the terms *deshi* and "foren" did not refer to the Indian and the Western, but rather to the Kathiawadi and the non-Kathiawadi. Even Ahmedabad, despite being situated in Gujarat, was often referred to as a "foren" place. One of the major concerns of most groups in the village was how to modernise their dress without stepping outside the social hierarchy in which caste relations in the village were defined. It was a question of how to bring in "foren" elements without their seeming *too* "foren" to other members of the caste and village. While for *Brahmans, Vaniyas, Harijans* and *Kanbis*, this meant owning saris from as far afield as possible, for *Kharaks* it meant incorporating new designs and motifs of desirable modern objects within

the framework of their existing embroidered clothes. Constrained by the fact that they were uneducated and considered too unrefined to dress in saris, their particular form of modernisation was confined to the *deshi* medium of hand embroidery which these women were becoming increasingly reluctant to wear. *Bharwad*s were the exception to the dominant village trend for they sought actively to maintain a *deshi* look and to wield off "foren" influences on the grounds that these were a threat to the caste. Within each different strata of village society there was a concern to express, retain or change caste identity through dress. But the idea of an "Indian dress" was never even contemplated.

The fact that most of the population does not perceive the problem of what to wear as a national dilemma, does not, of course, alleviate the problem for those who do. The Indian elite still have to wear something, even when they are highly aware of the symbolism of the various sartorial alternatives available to them. Politicians, have, as I have shown, remained faithful to the handspun look, in public if not in private, for most realise their political obligation to look Indian and to appear humble (see fig. 10:13). But for those less directly concerned with their public image, the choice of what to wear is at once more personal, more free, and as a result, more difficult.

As a minister your indulging in a little luxury and extravagance is O.K. But giving up the old simple style of dress is really going too far!

Fig. 10:13 (Laxman).

The Indian intelligentsia is highly aware of the sensitivity of this problem which is much debated in the media, along with other sensitive issues such as whether people should speak in Hindi or English or a regional language. Political cartoonists, like Ravi Laxman, provide a constant critical commentary on the appearance of Indian public figures and on the complexity of the relationship between India and the West (see figs. 10:14 to 17). And Indian journalists have reached a level of self critical sarcasm concerning their own culture that is probably unmatched anywhere in the world. But this does not make it any easier when it comes to deciding what to wear.

Cartoon by Bagga. From Abraham (1988).

Fig. 10:14

You will be pleased to know, Sir, that we have renamed them all after the heroes and heroines of our Nation!

Fig. 10:15 (Laxman)

Why am I going abroad? To study the conditions in our country, of course!

Fig. 10:16 (Laxman)

...And he has the welfare and prosperity of our nation at heart. He is truly a patriot. He is no ordinary Indian. He is a non-resident Indian!

Fig. 10:17 (Laxman)

An advertisement for **Vimal** fabrics highlights the problem when it reads:

"NO TWO PERSONS CAN QUITE AGREE TO WHAT INDIAN CULTURE IS. BUT ALL AGREE ITS UNFATHOMABLY RICH.

VIMAL HAS ALWAYS BEEN REFLECTING THE RICHNESS OF INDIAN CULTURE."

By making "richness" its referent, the **Vimal** advertisement carefully avoids trying to define what Indian culture is whilst at the same time claiming to reflect it. And it is perhaps in the recognition of the need for multifaceted interpretations of Indian culture that the problem of what to wear finds its resolution. For many educated Indians, the answer lies, not in settling for *khadi*, nor Western dress, nor ethnic chic, but in combining all of these elements, which, at the risk of being associated with all of them, at least avoids being too much associated with any single one of them. Few people want to present a definitively Western image as this can be too easily interpreted as aping the West. But on the other hand, few people want to spend their lives wearing only *khadi*[10], since *khadi* has become as much associated with hypocrisy as with morality or Indianness.[11] Ethnic chic, on the other hand, being a modern reworking of traditional elements, appeals to people for its Indianness but is criticised for being an expensive glamorisation of poverty through exploitation and ignorance. Few people settle for it in any permanent sense. Liveleen Sharma proves an exception. For most women, including the boutique owners of Hauz Khas, dressing in ethnic clothes is something that you do from time to time, perhaps in the evenings or when you want to look glamorous or are attending a wedding. It is not something you do every day, for as daily wear, ethnic dress has a marginalising effect, masking (although it also secretly reveals) a person's internationality.

Being international and dressing in an international way, is, in fact, the most popular method of defining identity amongst the the Indian elite today. Nationalism, as Jawaharlal Nehru argued, is enriching but it is also held to be limiting if it prevents progress and participation in world affairs. Fashionable

10 What *khadi* actually is and how it is defined is becoming increasingly difficult to surmise. So keen have *khadi* organisations been to make this fabric appeal to different groups of people, that they are even marketing a product called "polyester *khadi*"!

11 Rather than politicians, it is today artists and, to a lesser extent, journalists who maintain a *khadi*-clad imageon a daily basis. They usually combine *khadi* shirts with denim jeans or trousers.

Indian men and women reveal through their dress that they are proud to be Indian but that they also participate in the international fashion world around them. Many advertisements play on this idea, such as the **Dinesh** "Take the world in your stride" series, which shows an Indian man in **Dinesh** clothes, appearing in a variety of different countries throughout the world. Similarly the **Globe trotter** series and the **Benzer** series play on the same idea of international travel and encounter (fig. 10:18-19).

The development of a new mixed Indian wardrobe may be compared to the development of other new cultural formations such as a national cuisine. Appadurai has shown how Indian cookery books include different regional dishes from all over India as "cosmopolitan and parochial expressions enrich and sharpen each other by dialectical interaction" (Appadurai 1988:22). And just as the new Indian diet consists of regional Indian dishes combined with occasional Western ones, so a balanced Indian wardrobe consists of a variety of regional styles, combined with a few Western ones. A woman's wardrobe might contain some clothes which are considered classically Indian like the sari, some clothes that are both modern and Indian like the *salwar kamiz*, some clothes that are glamorously ethnic like Gujarati embroidery, some clothes that are chic in Western terms, some leisure wear and at least one pair of denim jeans. Jeans are perhaps more popular than skirts amongst this sector of the population since they are associated with America and therefore escape colonial implications. Skirts and dresses, which have a deeper association with the colonial past, seem to be more popular in provincial towns and cities than in cosmopolitan ones. A fashionable man's wardrobe generally contains some suits, casual trousers and shirts, jeans and at least something Indian, usually a *kurta pyjama* and some *khadi* shirts, sometimes even a smart silk *dhoti* for special occasions or a cotton *lungi* for relaxing at home. Through mixing and matching these combinations for appropriate occasions, the educated, modern, fashionable Indian can find a solution to and some enjoyment of the problem of what to wear. And even if the end result is somewhat eclectic, what does it matter? Perhaps Raj Kapoor had the answer when he sung:

Fig. 10:18 An advertisement from the Dinesh "Take the world in your stride" series. The safari suit, relic of colonial shooting parties, is an example of men's dress that has passed from the British to the Indian elite, and now to the Indian middle classes. From **Debonair** (May 1989).

I was on my way to the Louvre when he stopped me. "Ninety francs for two pictures, a hundred-and-fifty for four. But for you mademoiselle... no charges." I smiled. He clicked. —Sept. 15, 4 pm Palais Royale, Paris

The sari?
A glittering *Benarasi*. Exclusively at Benzer.

BENZER *of course!*
Only at Bhulabhai Desai Road, Bombay.

Fig. 10:19 An advertisement for a Benarasi sari from Benzer's recent series in which an elegant Indian woman is portrayed as the exotic visitor, mixing with the "natives" (but clearly above them) throughout the globe. From **The India Magazine**, (1990).

mera jute hai japani
yeh patlun englishtani
saphe lal, topi russi
phir bhi dil hai hindusthani

My shoes are Japanese,
These trousers are English,
Red turban, Russian hat,
But still my heart is Indian.
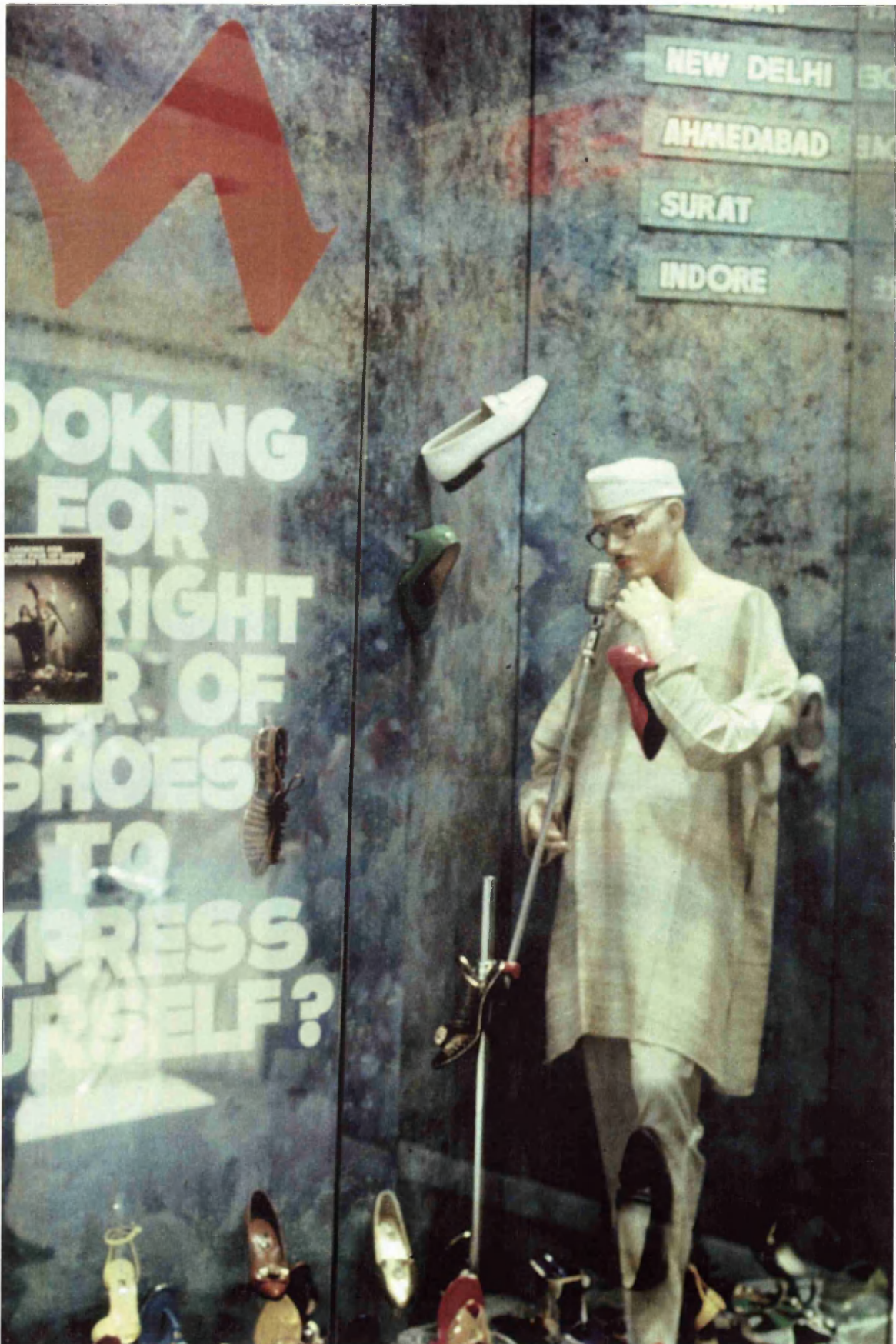

(From the film, **Sri Charsaubis**, 1955).

Fig. 10:20 Post-modern Indian fashion has no boundaries. The *khadi*-clad politician advertises "the right colour of shoes to express yourself". A shop window in Bombay, photographed by Chris Pinney).

Post Script

The Relevance of the Problem of What to Wear

Despite the fact that clothes have rarely been treated seriously by anthropologists, they have none the less played an essential role in the lives and experiences of the people whom anthropologists write about. They have been central both to the history and development of colonialism and to the struggle of various nations as they emerged from colonial rule (cf. Cohn 1989, Bean 1989, Kuper 1973, Weiner and Schneider 1989). They continue today to play a vital role in the creation and reestablishment of new identities and traditions all over the world. And, despite the fact that anthropologists rarely write about them, I would argue that they have been central to the development of anthropology itself. It is time for anthropologists to look in the mirror and to treat the problem of what to wear with a little more seriousness.

Clothes, or more accurately, lack of clothes, formed one of the original corner stones on which both colonialism and anthropology were built. To colonisers, with their specific criteria of civilisation, nakedness was seen as proof of the inferiority of the other and as justification for the imperialist presence. To anthropologists, it meant the rediscovery of the original "primitive man", "man", stripped of all his paraphernalia, "man" who was little more developed than monkey. Today the wheel has turned full circle. Naked (wo)man is more likely to be found on a beach in Saint Tropez than in the African Jungle. And in India a Western tourist, clad in only a skimpy vest and pair of shorts, is probably the nearest one would get to finding a "naked tribal". These extreme examples are but proof of the fact that people are constantly developing new self images and that clothes have played a vital role in this development. Embedded within these changes is, of course, the problem of what to wear which every individual or group faces. This problem cannot be ignored by anthropologists who claim to be interested in the identities of peoples and nations.

Today, then, the "isolated community" or "tribe", cut off from all outside contacts, is fading increasingly into myth where, no doubt, it always belonged. I only have to walk down a London street to catch a glipse of a Kathiawadi *ghaghro* in the form of a hat or a mini skirt or bag. Perhaps in only a few years time it will be easier to find such Gujarati embroidery here than in a Kathiawadi village. This is a world of mass communications, of tourism, international

development projects, world trade, and an expanding international fashion industry. It is a world where individuals, cultures and nations are interacting more than ever before (cf. Graburn 1976, Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988) and where they are often forced to rethink their identity and restructure their traditions in the face of an increasingly wide range of political and cultural alternatives.

Unlike anthropologists, political leaders have not ignored the problem of what to wear. Gandhi found his solution in simple white *khadi*; Chairman Mao found it in the blue workman's uniform he encouraged all Chinese communists to wear; and Chief Buthelezi is currently leading the South African Inkatha Movement dressed in animal skins, feathers and spears which he calls "cultural weapons". Gone are the days when all these things can be treated blandly as "traditional dress". They are invented and refurbished traditions (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). They are part of a whole series of cultural responses to a changing environment in which we all participate.

While some leaders lead revolutions through resurrecting traditions, others have self consciously wiped out existing clothing types. The Turkish leader, Kemal, legally abolished the popular fez in favour of the European hat in the 1930's (cf. Baker 1985). Yet the leaders of many Muslim countries who were wearing European dress immediately after Independence, have reverted back to a more "Islamic look" in recent years (cf. Ahmed 1990). King Hussan of Morocco, "once noted for his natty European suit" (ibid) is now dressed in robes while Benezir Bhutto quickly donned a head scarf and changed her image when she came to power in Pakisthan (ibid). Perhaps the greatest exploiter of the range of sartorial possibilities open today is Saddam Hussein, whose publicity posters picture him in anything from a European suit, to Arab robes, Kurdish headscarves and military uniforms (Parsons 1990). Through his highly astute "impression management" (cf. Goffman 1969, Berreman 1972), he has been able to market his own image to as wide a range of people as possible both in his own country and abroad. As world politics becomes increasingly a game of global encounters, and international festivals a game of global display, we would do wisely to pay close attention, like Saddam Hussein, to some of the finer points of the problem of what to wear.
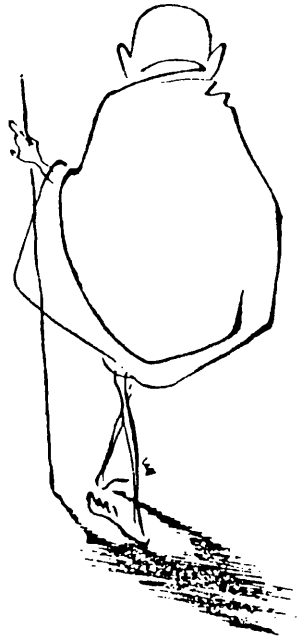
Glossary of Foreign Terms

It is difficult to write about the subject of Indian dress without including large numbers of specialist foreign words; a difficulty which has been compounded in this thesis by the fact that my fieldwork was situated in both Hindi-speaking Delhi and Gujarati-speaking Saurashtra. Furthermore, the type of Gujarati spoken in Saurashtra is regarded by many as another language in itself, known as Kathiawadi. And Kathiawadi people frequently reiterate the saying that in Kathiawad, "you only have to travel twelve villages to find they speak another language". Added to this, many of the historical examples I discuss enter other linguistic territories such as Bengali and Sinhalese. In anticipation of the confusion that leaping from language to language might cause, I have tried to keep foreign words to a minimum and have not included regional Kathiawadi pronunciation of Gujarati words.

Listed below are the foreign words which appear frequently in the text. Those words which are accompanied by English translations throughout have not been included. The initials "G" and "H" have been used to indicate whether a word is spoken in Gujarati or Hindi. These initials indicate the linguistic *usage* of the term and *not* its origin which may take its root from Sanskrit or Persian.

Clothing Terms

angarkha (H): type of stitched tunic.

boloya: (G): thick ivory bangles, worn by married women.

cadar (H): shawl or wrap.

chaniyo (G): skirt or petticoat.

chapkan (H): type of long stitched tunic, particularly popular amongst Muslims.

chorni (G): pantaloon type trousers, loose at the top and tight from the knee down.

chundadi (G): veil cloth, usually tie-dyed

dhoti (H): men's waistcloth, worn by draping, folding and tucking.

dupatta: (H): scarf, often worn with the *salwar kamiz*

ghaghro (G): skirt. The term is used here to refer to the wrapped embroidered skirts of Kathiawadi women.

gharcholu: (G): special veil cloth worn by the bride in marriage

jimi (G): waistcloth worn by *Bharwad* women.

kamiz (H from Urdu): tunic, often worn in conjunction with *salwar*-type trousers.

kapdu (G): open-backed bodice.

kediyun (G): smock top worn by farming men in Saurashtra.

kurta (H): men's collarless tunic

langoti (H): loincloth

lungi (H): waistcloth, often stitched to form a large tube of cloth.

lengha (H): flared skirt.

mangalsutra: (H): necklace worn only by married Hindu women.

odhani: (H): veil cloth.

paneter (G): special wedding sari, usually red and white.

sadlo: (G): a half-sari.

pagri (H): turban worn by men.

pyjama (H): type of Indian trouser, often worn with a *kurta*.

salwar (H): loose trousers worn by women, usually with a *kamiz*.

sherwani (H): men's long coat, usually collarless.

sola topi (H): pith helmet, worn primarily by the British and Eurasians.

Other Words

anu (G): ceremonial departure of a daughter to her conjugal home.

ben: (G): sister. It is used either on its own or as a suffix attached to women's names.

bhai: (G): brother. Is frequently used as a suffix attached to men's names.

bharat: (H): India

bhuvo (G): attendant of the goddess and exorcist

bindi (G): forehead spangle, previously worn only by married Hindu women, but nowadays worn by many unmarried girls, including some non-Hindus.

chandlo:: (G) auspicious mark on the forehead, usually made with vermilion powder or paste

choliyo (G): cloth used for making *ghaghra*

chotli (G): tuft of uncut hair worn by Hindu men in the centre of the head

diwali: (H): business new year, often known as the Festival of Light

dharma: (H): religious duty

deshi: (H and G): indigenous, of the country or place.

ghunghut (G): veiling

jada: (G): thick, coarse, rough

jan: (G and H): the groom's party at a wedding

jianu: (G): ceremonial departure of a daughter to her conjugal home after giving birth to her first child in her
natal home

kachcha (G and H): raw. The term is used to refer to foods cooked in water as opposed to oil, and may be used for anything that is in a raw state, such as a mud track as opposed to a concrete road.

kaka: (H), uncle. It is used as a suffix attached to the names of senior respected men.

khadi (G): hand woven cloth. The term was used by Gandhi to refer to cloth that had been hand-woven using hand-spun yarn. In North India the word *Khaddar* is more common.

laj (G): shame and the practice of veiling associated with it.

mahatma: (H): honorific title, meaning Great Soul

najar (G from A) the "evil eye", an envious or malevolent look capable of causing harm.

pakka: (H): ripe, well cooked, durable.

sarawalla: (G): well to do people.

satyagraha: (H): literally "truth force"; a form of passive resistance used by Gandhi.

saubhagya: (G): the auspicious state of a woman whose husband is living (commonly known as *sohag* (H)).

sharm: (H and G): modesty, shyness, respect.

shika: (H): tuft of uncut hair worn by Hindu men.

sikel: (G): circle.

sudharo:: progressive, developed, advanced, reformed.

swadeshi: (H): home produce, literally "of own country".

swaraj (H): self rule.

toran: (G): auspicious hanging above a doorway.

vau: (G): wife

videshi (G): foreign, referring to all that is not *deshi*. The equivalent Hindi term is *pardeshi*.

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NEWSPAPERS, JOURNALS and MAGAZINES

In keeping with the idea that clothes are part of the social and political world, and not merely the frivolous aspect of culture, I have classified newspapers, magazines and journals together. I see the distinction between them difficult, if not impossible, to define.

Anthropology Today (London)
*Bombay (Bombay)
Comparative Studies in Society and History (London)
Costume (Journal of the Costume Society)
*Debonair (Bombay)
Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay)
L'Ethnographie (Paris)
Flair (Bombay)
Frontline (Madras)
*Glad Rags (Bombay)
Man (London)

MARG (Bombay)

Media Development (Journal of the World Association for Christian Communication), (London)

Modern Asian Studies (Cambridge)

Movie (Bombay)

Harijan (Ahmedabad)

*Hindi Punch (Bombay)

*Hindustan Times (Delhi)

*Illustrated Weekly (Bombay)

*India Today (Delhi)

India Worldwide (New York)

Public Culture (Philadelphia)

Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter (London)

Show Time (Bombay)

Society (Bombay)

South Asia (Australia)

South Asia Research (London)

*Star and Style (Bombay)

Statesman (Calcutta)

*Sunday Mail (Delhi)

*Sweet Sixteen: Fashion Catalogue (Bombay)

*Teen Talk (Ahmedabad)

*Times of India (Bombay)

The Guardian newspaper (London)

The Hindu (Madras)

The Independent Magazine (London)

*The India Magazine (Delhi)

*The Indian Charivari (Delhi)

The Indian Ladies Magazine (Madras)

*Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co. Ltd. Catalgue (Bombay)

Indian Office, Library and Records Archives

L: P&J/7/27.

L:1/2/14.