

CLOTH, CLOTHES, AND COLONIALISM: INDIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

IN 1959, Mr. G. S. Sagar, a Sikh, applied for a position as a bus conductor with Manchester Transport. His application was rejected because he insisted that he wanted to wear his turban rather than the uniform cap prescribed by the municipality for all its transport workers. Sagar argued that the wearing of the turban was an essential part of his religious beliefs. He didn't understand why, if thousands of Sikhs who had fought and died for the empire in the two World Wars could wear their turbans, he couldn't do so. The transport authorities argued that "if an exception to the rules of wearing the proper uniform were allowed there was no telling where the process would end. The uniform could only be maintained if there were no exceptions."¹

At its most obvious level, this was a dispute about an employer's power to impose rules concerning employee's dress and appearance, and the employee's right to follow the injunctions of his religion. Early in the dispute, which was to last seven years, a distinction was made between such items of attire as the kilt of a Scotsman, which were expressions of national identities—a "national costume" that could be legally prescribed for workers—and those items of dress that were worn as the result of a religious injunction. The advocates of allowing the Sikhs to wear their turbans on the job said that to prevent them from doing so was an act of religious discrimination. The transport worker's union supported management in the dispute, on the grounds that an individual worker could not set the terms of his own employment, which they saw as a matter of union-management negotiation.

At another level the dispute was about working-class whites' resentment of dark-skinned, exotically dressed strangers, whom they saw as "cheap" labor allowed into their country, to drive down wages and take pay packets out of the hands of honest English workingmen. The fact that many of these British workers preferred easier, cleaner, or higher-paying jobs did not lessen their xenophobic reactions. Similarly, some of the middle class saw the immigrants from the "new" commonwealth as a threat to an assumed homogeneity of British culture. The turban, the dark skin, and the sari of Indian and Pakistani women were simply outward manifestations of this threat.

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In short, the dispute over the Sikh's turban can be seen as a symbolic displacement of economic, political, and cultural issues, rooted in two hundred years of tangled relationships between Indians and their British conquerors. In order to understand this conflict, I will explore the meaning of clothes for Indians and British in the nineteenth century; the establishment of the categorical separation between dark subjects and fair-skinned rulers; the search for representations of the inherent and necessary differences between rulers and ruled as constructed by the British; and the creation of a uniform of rebellion by the Indians in the twentieth century.

Turbans of Identity

The dispute over Mr. Sagar's turban also echoed the growing sense of loss of power being felt by the British as they rapidly divested themselves of the empire in Asia and Africa, and heard their former subjects demanding their independence and some form of equity with their former rulers. The whole social order at home also appeared to the middle and upper classes to be changing, with the revolution being acted out in terms of clothes. The youth of the under class was setting the styles for their elders and betters, and mocking many former emblems of high status by turning them into kitsch and fads for an increasingly assertive new generation.

There is an irony that a Sikh's turban should be involved in the final act of a long-playing drama in which the costumes of the British rulers and their Indian subjects played a crucial role. For the British in nineteenth-century India had played a major part in making the turban into a salient feature of Sikh self-identity.

Sikhism was a religious movement that grew out of syncretic tendencies in theology and worship among Hindus and Muslims in north India in the fifteenth century. Guru Nanak, its founder, whose writings and sayings were codified in a holy book called the *Granth Sahib*, established a line of successors as leaders and interpreters of his creed. Through much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Sikhs faced increasing persecution from their political overlords, the Mughals, as much for their strategic location across the traditional invasion route of India in the Punjab as for their growing religious militancy.

This militancy was codified and restructured by the tenth and last in succession of the Gurus, Gobind Singh. He created a series of distinctive emblems for those Sikhs who rallied into a reformed community of the pure, the Khalsa, from among the wider population, which continued to follow many Hindu and Muslim customs. In a dramatic series of

events in 1699, "Guru Gobind Singh chose five of his followers as founding members of this new brotherhood. Those selected had shown their willingness to have their heads cut off as an act of devotion to their guru.

Guru Gobind Singh issued a call for large-scale participation in the celebration of the New Year in 1699. Those Sikh males attending were enjoined' to appear with their hair and beards uncut. As the festivities developed, there was no sign of the Guru, who was waiting in a tent, until he suddenly appeared brandishing a sword, and called upon the assembled Sikhs to volunteer to have their heads cut off as a sign of their devotion. One volunteered and accompanied his Guru back to the tent. A thud was heard and the Guru reappeared with a bloody sword. The apparent sacrifice was repeated with four other volunteers, and then the side of the tent was folded back to reveal the five still alive and the severed heads of goats on the ground.

These five were declared the nucleus of the Khalsa. They went through an initiation ritual in which they all drank from the same bowl, symbolizing their equality, and then the chosen five initiated the Guru. Next, they promulgated rules: Sikh males would wear their hair unshorn; they would abstain from using alcohol and tobacco, eating meat butchered in the Muslim fashion, and having sexual intercourse with Muslim women. Henceforth they would all bear the surname Singh. In addition to unshorn hair (*kes*), they would wear a comb in their hair (*kangha*), knee-length breeches (*kach*), and a steel bracelet on their right wrist (*kara*), and they would carry a sword (*kirpan*).²

J. P. Oberoi has analyzed these symbols as well as an unexpressed sixth one, the injunction against circumcision, as establishing the total separation of the Sikhs from Hindus and Muslims. In addition he sees them as two opposed triple sets: the unshorn hair, sword, and uncircum-cised penis representing "amoral," even dangerous power; the comb, breeches, and bracelet expressing constraint. In the totality of the two sets, he sees an affirmation of the power and constraint inherent in humanness.³

Note that this excursus on the formation of the Sikhs and their symbology does not mention the turban as part of their distinctive costume and appearance. Most scholars who have written about the history of the Sikhs and their religion are silent on the question of when and how the turban became part of the representational canon of the community. M. A. Macauliffe, translator of and commentator on the sacred writings of the Gurus, noted in a footnote, "Although the Guru [Gobind Singh] allowed his Sikhs to adopt the dress of every country they inhabited, yet they must not wear hats but turbans to confine their long hair which they are strictly enjoined to preserve."⁴ W. H. MacLeod notes that the turban is the one post-eighteenth-century symbol added to the "Khalsa

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code of discipline." The wearing of turbans, though lacking "formal sanction . . . during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been accorded increasing importance in the endless quest for self identification."⁵

Early nineteenth-century representations by European and Indian artists of the "distinctive" headdress of the Sikhs showed two different types. One was a tightly wrapped turban of plain cloth, which was either thin enough or loose enough on the crown to accommodate the topknot of the Sikh's hair. The second type of turban worn by the Sikhs in the early nineteenth century was associated with rulership. This turban was elaborately wrapped and had *jigha*, a plume with a jewel attached, and a *sairpaich*, a cluster of jewels in a gold or silver setting. These ornamental devices were symbols of royalty, popularized in India by the Mughals.

In the eighteenth century, Mughal political and military power declined. The Punjab went through a period of invasions and the emergence of contending Sikh polities, which were combined under the leadership of Ranjit Singh by the early nineteenth century into a powerful state. With the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, the state came under increasing pressure from the East India Company, which in a series of wars finally conquered and annexed the former Sikh state in 1849.

Although the Sikh state was fragmenting, the Sikh armies proved formidable; despite their defeat by the East India Company, Sikhs were treated more as worthy adversaries than as a defeated nation. Those British who fought against the Sikhs were highly impressed by their martial qualities. Unlike many of their conquered subjects, who struck the British as superstitious and effeminate, the Sikhs were considered manly and brave. Their religion prohibited "idolatry, hypocrisy, caste exclusiveness . . . the immurement of women" and immolation of widows, and infanticide.⁶ Captain R. W. Falcon, author of a handbook for British officers in the Indian army, described the Sikh as "manly in his warlike creed, in his love of sports and in being a true son of the soil; a buffalo, not quick in understanding, but brave, strong and true."⁷ In short the Sikhs, like a few other groups in South Asia (the hill peoples of Nepal, the Gurkhas, and the Pathans of the Northwest Frontier) who came close to defeating the British, were to become perfect recruits for the Indian army.

Within a year of their defeat, Sikhs were being actively recruited for the East India Company's army, and the officers who had just fought the Sikhs "insisted on the Sikh recruits being *kesadhari*, from among the Khalsa Sikhs who were unshorn. Only those Sikhs who looked like Sikhs—wearing those badges of wildness, the beard and unshorn hair— were to be enrolled. It was also official policy to provide every means for

the Sikhs to keep their "freedom from the bigoted prejudices of caste . . . and to preserve intact the distinctive characteristics of their race and peculiar conventions and social customs."⁸

The effectiveness of the British decision made in 1850 to raise Sikh units for their army was borne out in 1857-1858. The bulk of their native army in north India rebelled. The Sikhs enthusiastically and effectively participated in the defeat of their hated enemies, the remnants of the Mughals and their despised Hindu neighbors of the Ganges valley. With the reorganization of the British Army in India after 1860, the British came to rely increasingly on the Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular to man their army. The Punjab, with 8 percent of the population of India, provided half of their army in 1911. The Sikhs, who were 1 percent of the Indian population, accounted for 20 percent of the total number of Indians in the military service.⁹

By the late nineteenth century a standardized Sikh turban, as distinct from the turban of the Punjabi Muslims and Hindu Dogras, had emerged and had become the hallmark of the Sikhs in the army. This turban, large and neatly wrapped to cover the whole head and ears, became the Visible badge of those the British had recruited. The Sikh turban and neatly trimmed beard were to stand until 1947 as the outward sign of those qualities for which they were recruited and trained: their wildness, controlled by the turban, and their fierceness, translated into dogged courage and stolid "buffalo"-like willingness to obey and follow their British officers.

During World War I, the British army replaced the great variety of headgear of both their own troops and their colonials with steel helmets, but by now "the Sikhs had come to associate their uniform *pagri* (turban) with their religion," and the argument that the turban as such was not prescribed by their religious code was to no avail.¹⁰

Thus, the current significance of the distinctive turban of the Sikhs was constructed out of the colonial context, in which British rulers sought to objectify qualities they thought appropriate to roles that various groups in India were to play. The British sought to maintain the conditions that, they believed, produced the warrior qualities of the Sikhs' religion. In any post-eighteenth-century European army a uniform, in which each individual is dressed like every other one of the same rank and unit, symbolizes the discipline and obedience required for that unit to act on Command. A distinctive style of turban, worn only by Sikhs and serving in companies made up of Sikhs, was the crucial item of their uniform, which represented and helped constitute the obedience that the British expected of their loyal Indian followers.

Over time the military-style turban became general, although far from universal, among the Sikhs. The Sikh has now come "home" to the Brit-

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ish Isles, but the turban no longer symbolizes loyalty to an old military code identified with their former rulers. Instead, the turban now plays a part in the Sikhs' effort to maintain their unique identity in the face of hostility and pressure to conform to "normal" or expected dress in mass society.

The struggle to maintain the very difference that had been encouraged by their past rulers now is seen as a form of obstinacy. The pressure to conform to the rules of dress for bus conductors has been followed by a long legal struggle over whether Sikhs could ignore the law in England that motorcycle drivers and passengers had to wear crash helmets. The battleground has more recently shifted to the question of whether a Sikh boy could be barred from a private school because he and his father "insisted on his wearing uncut hair and a turban above his blazer." This case was settled in 1983, when the House of Lords reversed a lower court, which had found that the headmaster had "unlawfully discriminated against the Sikh . . . by requiring him to remove his turban and cut his hair."¹¹

The British as They Wished to Be Seen

While the British established themselves as the new rulers of India, they constructed a system of codes of conduct which constantly distanced them—physically, socially, and culturally—from their Indian subjects. From the founding of their first trading station in Surat in the early seventeenth century, the employees of the East India Company lived a quasi-cloistered life. Although dependent on the Mughal and his local official for protection, on the knowledge and skills of Indian merchants for their profits, and on Indian servants for their health and well being, they lived as a society of sojourners. In their dress and demeanor they constantly symbolized their separateness from their Indian superiors, equals, and inferiors. Paintings by Indians of Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasized the differences in costume, which apparently made little concession to the Indian environment culturally or physically. At home, in the office, hunting in the field, or when representing the majesty and authority of power, the British dressed in their own fashion.

The one exception to the cultural imperative of wearing European dress was among those whose careers were spent up-country as British representatives in Muslim royal courts, where it was usual for some of them to live openly with Indian mistresses and to acknowledge their Indian children. These semi-Mughalized Europeans, although wearing European clothes in their public functions, affected Muslim dress in the

privacy of their homes. The wearing of Indian dress in public functions by employees of the Company was officially banned in 1830. The regulation was directed against Frederick John Shore, a judge in upper India who wore Indian clothes while sitting in his court. Shore was a persistent critic of the systematic degradation of Indians, particularly local notables, intelligentsia, and Indians employed in responsible jobs in the revenue and judicial services. He argued strenuously not just for better understanding of the natives, but also for their full employment in the governance of their own country.¹²

The practice of maintaining their Englishness in dealing with Indians goes back to the royal embassy sent by King James the First to negotiate a treaty to "procure commodities of saftie and profit" in the Mughal's realm in 1615. The English ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe, was instructed by his ruler "to be careful of the preservation of our honor and dignity, both as wee are sovereign prince, and a professed Christian, as well in your speeches and presentation of our letters as in all other circumstances as far as it standeth with the customs of these Countries."¹³ Roe was not comfortable in conforming to the proper behavior expected of an ambassador at an Indian court. The Mughal, Jahangir, despised merchants as inferior to warriors and rulers. Although amused by Roe, and personally polite and accommodating to his peculiarities, he was sceptical about an ambassador representing a powerful European who seemed so interested in trade. Roe's explicit concern with establishing the means to increase "the utility and profits" of the subjects of King James was not shared by Jahangir.

The English effort to obtain a trade treaty was based on their own ideas about trade, which involved defining certain cultural objects as commodities. Increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the commodities they sought in India were a wide variety of textiles, to be shipped to England or traded in Southeast Asia for spices and other valued objects to be sent to England. A major problem arose because the Indians were not much interested in the manufactured goods that the British had available—woolens, metal goods, and various "curiosities." What the Indians wanted was silver, copper, and gold. Another problem arose because the British persisted in viewing textiles as practical or utilitarian objects, suitable for providing profit for the shareholders and officials of the Company. The textiles and clothes, made by Indians did indeed have a market and a practical value, but there were many other significations involved in the production and use of these objects, which the British defined as commodities.

Roe and his small party, which included the Reverend Terry as his chaplain, began to realize that the clothes worn—and particularly the use of cloth and clothes as prestations in the Mughal's court—had meaning

far beyond any "practical use." Jahangir did allow Roe to follow his own customs of bowing and removing his hat, rather than using the various forms of prostration that were the usual means of offering respect to the Mughal. Through the three years that he traveled with Jahangir, Roe and his followers always wore English dress, "made light and cool as possibly we could have them; his waiters in Red Taffata cloakes." Terry, the chaplain, always wore "a long black cassock."¹⁴

Roe had brought with him to the Mughal court a considerable number of gifts, among which was a bolt of scarlet cloth that was perhaps more appropriate for the natives of North America than a sophisticated Indian ruler. Roe substituted for the cloth his own sword and sash. This gift was greatly appreciated by Jahangir, who asked Roe to send his servant to tie it on properly and then began to stride up and down, drawing the sword and waving it about. Roe reported that on a number of occasions Jahangir and some of his nobles, wishing to honor Roe, wanted to present him with clothes, jewels, and turbans. Although Roe, in his account, does not explain why he tried to avoid receiving these gifts, I can infer that he probably understood their significance. This kind of gift was the means by which authoritative relations were established and would, in the eyes of the Indians, make Roe into a subordinate or companion of the Mughals. In order to understand why Jahangir was pleased with Roe's sword and sash and why Roe was leery of accepting clothes and jewels, I will now explore the constitution of authority in Mughal India.

Clothes and the Constitution of Authority

By the fifteenth century, the idea that the king was the maintainer of a temporal as well as a sacred order was shared by Muslims and Hindus in India.¹⁵ Royal functions were centered on the idea of protection and the increase of the prosperity of the ruled. "If royalty did not exist," wrote Abu'l Fazl, the chronicler of Akbar's greatness, "the storm of strife would never subside, nor selfish ambition disappear. Mankind being under the burden of lawlessness and lust would sink into the pit of destruction, the world, this great market place would lose its prosperity .and the whole earth become a barren waste."¹⁶

The Mughals, who had established suzerainty over northern India in the early sixteenth century, were a Turkic-speaking people from Central Asia who traced their descent to Ghengiz Khan and Tammerlane. They based their authority on a divine relationship with God. The *padshah* (emperor), wrote Abu'l Fazl, was "a light emanating from God."¹⁷ In constituting their authority, the Mughals also drew upon their descent from Ghengiz Khan as a world conqueror. Under the Mongols, the Mughals

were a ruling family that was part of a particular clan (*ulus*), which produced the legitimate ruler, or khan. Therefore, the Mughals claimed authority on a historical basis as descendents of the Ghengiz Khan.¹⁸

Under Ghengiz Khan and his immediate successors, "the power of the tribe over its members . . . was apparently transferred bodily to the Khan."¹⁹ Some of this sense of the embodiment of authority in the person of the ruler, not just of the tribe but of the state, was built upon by Akbar and his successors. In this they were expressing a widespread and older theory of kingship, found in Central Asia, Persia, and India, in which "the king stands for a system of rule of which he is the incarnation, incorporating into his own body by means of symbolic acts, the person of those who share his rule. They are regarded as being parts of his body, and in their district or their sphere of activity they are the King himself."²⁰

This substantial nature of authority in the Indic world is crucial for any understanding of the widespread significance of cloth and clothes, as they are a medium through which substances can be transferred. Clothes are not just body coverings and matters of adornment, nor can they be understood only as metaphors of power and authority, nor as symbols; in many contexts, clothes literally *are* authority. The constitution of authoritative relationships, of rulership, of hierarchy in India cannot be reduced to the sociological construction of leaders and followers, patrons and clients, subordination and superordination alone. Authority is literally part of the body of those who possess it. It can be transferred from person to person through acts of incorporation, which not only create followers or subordinates, but a body of companions of the ruler who have shared some of his substance.

The most literal representation of the act of incorporation into the body of the Mughal padshah was through the offering of *nazr* (gold coins) by a subordinate of the ruler and the ruler's presentation of a *khilat* (clothes, weapons, horses, and elephants). Philologically, *khilat* can be traced in both Persian and Arabic to an Aramaic and Hebrew root *halaf*, "to be passed on," which is central to the Arabic idea of *khilafat*, the succession to the title of the head of the Muslim community. Narrowly, in Arabic, *khilat* derives from the word for "a garment cast off." By the sixteenth century in India, the term *khilat* came to involve the idea that a king, as a special honor, would take off his robe and put it on a subject. F. W. Buckler suggests that there is a special significance involved in this act, as robes worn by the king could transmit his authority.²¹ Buckler goes on to state: "Robes of Honour are symbols of some idea of continuity or succession," which "rests on a physical basis, depending on the contact of the body of the recipient with the body of the donor through the medium of the clothing. Or to put it rather differ-

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ently, the donor includes the recipient within his own person through the medium of the wardrobe."²²

The sets of clothes through which the substance of authority was transmitted became known as khilats, glossed in English as "robes of honor," in French *cap a pied*, "head to feet." In Mughal India the khilats were divided into classes consisting of three, five, or seven pieces. A seven-piece khilat might include, among other things, a turban, a long coat with full skirt (*jamah*), a long gown (*ka'bah*), a close-fitting coat (*alkhaliq*), one or more cummerbunds (*kamrband*), trousers, a shirt, and a scarf. Along with the actual clothes, other articles were included.

The most powerful khilat was a robe or garment that the Mughal himself had worn, and on occasion he would literally take off a robe and place it on one of his subjects, as a particular honor. Next to such a robe, the garment of most significance was a turban and its associated ornaments.

All forms of salutations in Indian society relate to the head, hands, and feet. In Akbar's court there were three major forms of salutation which entailed manifest acts of obeisance; these were termed the *kornish*, *tas-lim*, and *sijda*. Abu'l Fazl states: "Kings in their wisdom have made regulations for the manner in which people are to show their obedience . . . His Majesty [Akbar] has commanded the palm of the right hand to be placed on the forehead and the head to be bent downwards. . . . This is called the kornish, and signified that the saluter has placed his head [which is the seat of the senses and mind] into the hand of humility, giving it to the royal assembly as a present and has made himself in obedience ready for any service that may be required of him."²³

The *taslim* "consists in placing the back of the right hand on the ground, and then raising it gently till the person stands erect, when he puts the palm of his hand upon the crown of his head, which pleasing manner of saluting signifies that he is ready to give himself as an offering."²⁴

The *sijda*, or complete prostration, was objected to by the orthodox Muslims in Akbar's court as it is one of the positions of prayer. Akbar therefore ordered that it be done only in private, but it appears to have been used in subsequent rulers' courts.²⁵

Abu'l Fazl makes it clear that in the context of the court, the person offering the salute is offering himself as a sacrifice; his head is being offered to the Mughal. In warfare, this sacrifice was literal. In a famous painting, the Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) is shown receiving the heads of his enemies, some being held by his warriors or piled up at the feet of his elephant, His defeated foe wears neither a helmet nor a turban as, head lowered, he is brought before the victor.²⁶

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an Indian would place his

turban at the feet of his conqueror as a sign of complete surrender. This was also used in a metaphoric sense to ask a great favor of someone, indicating a willingness to become their slave. Nineteenth-century guide books written for Englishmen traveling to India warned their readers never to touch a Hindu's or a Muslim's turban, as this was considered a grave insult.

The Sind in western India, conquered by the British in the 1840s, was a region of Muslim chieftains among whom the turban meant sovereignty. E. B. Eastwick, a company official with an excellent knowledge of Persian and Sindhi, writes of the turban "descending," "succeeded to" and being "aimed at." The governor-general, Lord Ellenborough, in writing to General Napier, commented about the need to support a particular ruler and underlined the substantial nature of the turban: "I have little doubt, that once established in the possession of the turban . . . Ali Murad will be able to establish the more natural and reasonable line of succession to the turban, and clothe the measure with the firms of legality."²⁷

For the Mughal rulers of India, the turban and its associated ornaments had the powerful and mystical qualities that crowns had in medieval Europe. The jewels attached to the turban included the kalghi, an aigrette of peacock or heron feathers with a jewel attached to it. This was only conferred on the highest nobles. The jigha consisted of a cluster of jewels set in gold with a feather. The sarpech and sarband were strings of jewels or filigree work of gold or silver, stitched onto the turban. There was also a string or diadem of pearls worn as a garland around the turban, the sirha. Kings in the medieval Hindu tradition were the controllers of the earth and its products, and in cosmographic terms jewels were the essence of the earth, its most pure and concentrated substance. Thus the cloth turban with its associated jewels brought together all the powers of the earth.

Akbar, the Mughal emperor, delighted in innovative patterns or designs of clothes and created a new vocabulary for talking about them. Like all rulers of the period, he had special warehouses and treasuries for the maintenance and storage of clothes, arms, and jewels. He also decreed changes in the basic design of some articles of clothes. According to Abu'l Fazl, the author of the *Ain-i Akbari*, a general description of Mughal rule during the period of Akbar, the emperor took an inordinate interest in every aspect of the production of cloth. There were imperial workshops in major cities of the empire which could "turn out many master pieces of workmanship: and the figures and patterns, knots and variety of fashion which now prevail astonish experienced travelers."²⁸ Akbar collected cloth from other Asian countries and Europe, as well as India.

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Cloth and clothes received as presents, or commissioned or bought in the open market, were carefully kept and classified by the day of the week and the day in the month on which they arrived at court, as well as by price, color, and weight. There was a rank order of clothes and cloth: those received on the first day of the month of Farwardin "provided they be of good quality, have a higher rank assigned to them than pieces arriving on other days; and if pieces are equal in value, their precedence or otherwise, is determined by the character of the day of their entry; and if pieces are equal as far as the character of the day is concerned, they put the lighter stuff higher in rank; and if pieces have the same weight, they arrange them according to colour."²⁹ The author lists thirty-nine colors, most of which refer to the colors of fruits, flowers, and birds. Given the variety of colors and fabrics, the almost infinite variations of design motifs in the textiles, and the great variation possible by folding, cutting, and sewing into garments, one can imagine the possibilities for originality and uniqueness. Some sense of this creativity and great variation was demonstrated in the exhibition of Indian textiles organized by Mattiebelle Gittinger.³⁰

Akbar, like his successor, lived in a world of textiles, clothes, and jewels, and created elaborate rules restricting the wearing of some emblems, jewels, and types of clothes to certain ranks in Mughal society. As the British in the nineteenth century steadily extended their control over their subjects and their allied princes, they ordered and simplified those emblems of sovereignty and began to act as the sovereign in India.

From Robes of Honor to Mantles of Subordination

The significations entailed in the receipt of khilats were not lost on the British from the days of Sir Thomas Roe's visit. In the second half of the eighteenth century, as the Company's military power grew, the British transformed themselves from, merchants dependent on the good will and protection of Indian monarchs into rulers of a territorially based state. As part of this process, the British officials of the Company sought to be honored with Mughal titles and khilats. In Bengal, as the Company's leaders gradually began to act as Indian sovereigns, they in turn began to grant khilats to their Indian subordinates and to use their influence with the Mughal emperor to obtain titles for their allies and employees. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a visit to Delhi and the Mughal emperor and ennoblement at his hands had become a kind of tourist attraction for high-status Europeans. Captain Mundy, who accompanied Lord Combermere, the commander-in-chief of the army in India, on an inspection tour through north India from 1827 to 1829,

visited Delhi. The offering of *nazr* (gold coins) and receipt of *khilat* was on the itinerary. Mundy describes the enrobement, and his reaction to it:

On receiving Lord Combermere's offering, the King placed a turban, similar to his own, upon his head, and his lordship was conducted, retiring with his face sedulously turned towards the throne, to an outer apartment, to be invested with a *khillat*, or dress of honour. In about five minutes he returned to the presence, attired in a spangled muslin robe and tunic; salaamed, and presented another *nuzzar*. The staff were then led across the quadrangle by the "grooms of robes" to the "green room," where a quarter of an hour was sufficiently disagreeably employed by us in arraying ourselves, with the material tastily bound round our cocked-hats. Never did I behold a group so ludicrous as we presented when our toilette was accomplished; we wanted nothing but a "Jack i' the Green" to qualify us for a Mayday exhibition of the most exaggerated order. In my gravest moments, the recollection of the scene provokes an irresistible fit of laughter. As soon as we had been decked out in this satisfactory guise, we were marched back again through the LSI Purdar and crowds of spectators, and re-conducted to the Dewanee Khas, where we again separately approached His Majesty to receive from him a tiara of gold and false stones, which he placed with his own hands upon our hats.³¹

The officials of the East India Company exchanged what they defined as "presents" with Indian rulers and some of their subjects, but changed the nature and signification of this act. Company officials could not accept "gifts" and when protocol required officials to accept a *khilat*, weapons, or jewels, they had to deposit them in the Company's *toshakhana* (treasury). These gifts were recycled, given in turn to some Indian ruler at a *darbar* or other official meeting when it was deemed appropriate for the Company to exchange gifts with Indians. According to the rule that the Company followed, and which they imposed not only on their own subjects but on the allied princes when presents were exchanged, it was prearranged that the value offered by each party must be equal. In short, prestation and counter-prestation had become a contractual exchange. The British were aware of the contradiction inherent in the practice in terms of Indian theories of prestation. In India a superior always gives more than he receives, yet as an "economic man," the nineteenth-century Englishman was not about to enhance his honor by giving more than he received.

The basis of British authority in India in the first half of the nineteenth century was ambiguous. In their own eyes they ruled by right of conquest. Yet their own monarch was not the monarch of India; the agency of rule was a chartered Company, supervised by Parliament. In

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the wake of the Great Revolt of 1857-1858, the Company was abolished, their queen was declared ruler of India, and India became part of the empire in constitutional terms. The Crown of Great Britain became the ultimate source of authority for British and Indians. As part of the signaling of this new legal arrangement, an order of knighthood, "The Star of India," was established.³²

The intentions of the queen and her advisors in establishing this new order were spelled out in its "Letter Patent and Constitution" published July 6, 1861:

It hath been the custom of Princes to distinguish merit, virtue and loyalty by public marks of honour in order that eminent services may be acknowledged and to create in others a laudable emulation, and we being desirous of affording public and signal testimony of our regard by the institution of an order of knighthood, whereby our resolution to take upon ourselves the government of our territories in India.³³

Initially the order was restricted to twenty-five members, British and Indian, the highest British officials of government and the most important of the Indian princes being invested with the mantle and insignia of the order. Four years after its establishment, the order was reorganized into the three ranked classes of Knight Grand Commander (KGCSI), Knight Commander (KCSI), and Companion (CSI), and the numbers who would be awarded the honor were greatly increased.

The light blue mantle of the order was lined in white silk and fully covered the body. It fastened with a white silk cord decorated with blue and silver tassels. On the left side of the robe, over the heart, was embroidered in gold thread the rays of the sun, and superimposed in diamonds was the motto, "Heaven's light our guide" and a star. The collar was a large necklace made of a gold chain with palm fronds and lotuses; in its center was an emblem of the Crown of Great Britain, from which hung a pendant with a portrait of the queen of England.

The mantle, insignia, collar, and pendant were distinctly European in their form and content. The recipients of the knighthood had to sign a pledge that the mantle and its attachments would be returned at the death of the recipient, as the knighthood was not hereditary. This provision offended most Indian recipients, as Indians of all statuses stored gifts and emblems of honor that they received for their posterity. The *toshakhana* (treasure room) of a prince was an archive of objects whose origin and receipt embodied his status and honor. They could be taken out on occasion to be worn, used, or displayed, but they would be held from generation to generation to mark the constitutive events in the history of the family or the state. Shawls, robes, clothes, and pieces of cloth received in ritual contexts embodied those contexts. Even a peas-

ant family will have several trunks full of cloth, saris, dhotis, and piece goods that have been received at weddings or in other ritual contexts, which are seldom worn but are displayed and discussed on solemn occasions. In a very direct way, these objects constitute the relationships between individuals, families, and groups.

The nizam of Hyderabad, the most important allied prince of the British, objected strenuously, not to the honor the knighthood bestowed on him by the queen, but to the mantle and the jeweled insignia. The nizam through his prime minister, Salar Jang, pointed out to the viceroy that the "people of this country have a particular antipathy to wearing costumes different from their own." This, Salar Jang stated, was especially true of princes, "who have always been tenacious of the costume of their ancestors," and he pointed out that "the wearing of the robe of the new order, would probably be ridiculed by 'his people.'" If the robe were made out of velvet or silk, it would be in contravention of Muslim law. The nizam also raised an issue about the wearing of the pendant which had a portrait of the queen, as proper Muslims were "prohibited from wearing the likeness of any created being on their person."³⁴ The viceroy sternly informed the Resident at Hyderabad, who had forwarded the objections of the nizam and his prime minister, that the statutes and constitution of the Star of India were not to be questioned. The nizam had to accept the regalia as is, or refuse to accept the honor.

In 1861, the British in India had yet to develop a formal investiture ceremony for the induction of knights into the order. Hence when the patent and regalia reached the nizam, although he made proper reverence both to the patent and to the insignia, he did not put the mantle on, and the whole matter was quietly dropped. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the nizam s as well as all other recipients of knighthood seemed pleased enough to wear the robe and associated insignia. By 1869, at the time of the first visit of a member of the royal family, the Duke of Edinburgh, the pages wore a seventeenth-century cavalier costume. At the Imperial Assemblage of 1877, a full-dress version of Victorian "feudal" was utilized for the design motif of the ceremony at which Queen Victoria was made empress of India. From 1870 to World War I, the number of occasions at which Indians, depending on their status, roles, and regional origins, had to appear in their assigned costumes, increased enormously.

With the advent of the railroad, the viceroy and his suite, the governors, and other high officials and their retinues traveled more and more frequently. The central government and each of the major provinces had a cool-season and hot-season capital. The seasonal trips between these capitals provided occasions for an increasing number of meetings between the top rulers and princes, landlords, rich merchants,

and an army of lower Indian officials. The monarch's birthday, jubilees, the crowning of Edward VII and George V king-emperors of India, all provided occasions for the displaying of empire at home and in India.

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the trip to and from India was cut from months to a matter of weeks, facilitating the flow of royalty and aristocrats visiting India, and of Indian princes visiting the Continent and England. Indians as part of their tours would be presented at Victoria's court, at Windsor or at her "cottage," Osbourne House on the Isle of Wight. Here she had a "darbar room" built and decorated for receiving the homage of her loyal Indian feudatories. Indians were required on such occasions to appear in their "traditional" Indian royal dress rather than Western clothes.³⁵

"Orientalizing" India

The establishment of the Star of India and its investiture evoked in its intent and regalia British Victorian conceptions of a feudal past. It was part of the general process of enhancing the image of the monarchy and the aristocracy to symbolize a simpler past, in contrast to the rapid social, economic, and political change that characterized contemporary reality. This past was seen as the source of Britain's liberties, its legal system, and its natural order, which grew from an organic relationship between rulers and ruled. This was more than mere nostalgia for a past that might have never been. It was a powerful symbolic statement by the ruling classes (who themselves were not necessarily aristocratic) about order, deference, and hierarchy as the prerequisites for maintaining political and social stability during a period of economic and technological change.³⁶

As Britain had a feudal past, so did India, particularly the India of the princes and the great mass of the Indian peasantry. The application of social evolutionary theories to India by a wide range of British officials and scholars yielded a crucial ruling paradigm: the Indian present was the European past.³⁷ This construction of a universal history enabled the British to control the Indian past, as they too had been feudal but were now advanced out of this stage. But since the British were still in a position through their own history to direct the future course for India, it made the British part of India in their role as rulers.

India was seen as being capable of being changed through British beneficence. They had created the conditions for the Indians' advance up the social evolutionary ladder by introducing the ideas of private property and modern education, the English language and its thought and literature, railroads, irrigation systems, modern sanitation and medicine,

and authoritarian yet rational bureaucratic government, and the form of British justice. The British also knew the dangers of too rapid a move out of the feudal stage—the unleashing of disorder, dislocation, and potentially dangerous revolutionary forces that, if not controlled and checked, could lead to anarchy. To prevent this dangerous outcome, Indians had to be controlled, made to conform to the British conception of appropriate thought and action, for their own future good. India had a future, but its present had to be an "oriental" one to prevent a too rapid and hence disruptive entry into the modern world. What might be thought of as the orientalizing of the clothes of British rule in India began, as did the westernization of clothing in the army.

During the Great Uprising, the British quickly shed their heavy, tight, redcoated uniforms. W. H. Russell, who was sent by the *Times* to report on the war, wrote in one of his letters:

I have often thought how astonished, and something more, the Horse-guards, or the authorities, or the clothing departments, or whatever or whoever it may be that is interested in the weighty matters of uniform, and decides on the breadth of cuffs, the size of lace, the nature of trowser-straps, and the cut of buttons, would be at the aspect of this British army in India! How good Sir George Brown, for instance, would stand aghast at the sight of these sunburnt "bashi-bazouks," who, from heel to head and upwards, set at defiance the sacred injunctions of her majesty's regulations! Except the highlanders . . . not a corps that I have seen sport a morsel of pink, or show a fragment of English scarlet. The highlanders wear eccentric shades of gray linen over their bonnets; the kilt is discarded. . . . Lord Cardigan, in his most sagacious moments, would never light on the fact that those dark-faced, bearded horsemen, clad in snowy white, with flagless lances glittering in the sun, are the war-hardened troopers of her majesty's 9th lancers; or that yonder gray tunicked cavaliers, with ill-defined head-dresses, belong to the Queen's bays. . . . Among the officers, individual taste and phantasy have full play. The infantry regiments, for the most part, are dressed in linen frocks, dyed carky or gray slate colour—slate-blue trowsers, and shakoes protected by puggeries, or linen covers, from the sun. . . . It is really wonderful what fecundity or invention in dress there is, after all, in the British mind when its talents can be properly developed. To begin with the headdress. The favourite wear is a helmet of varying shape, but of uniform ugliness. In a moment of inspiration some Calcutta hatter conceived, after a close study of the antique models, the great idea of reviving, for every-day use, the awe-inspiring head-piece of Pallas Athene; and that remarkably unbecoming affair . . . became the prototype of the Indian tope in which the wisest and greatest of mankind looks simply ridiculous and ludicrous. Whatever it might be in polished steel or burnished metal,

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the helmet is a decided failure in felt or wickerwork, or pith, as far as external effect is concerned. It is variously fabricated, with many varieties of interior ducts and passages leading to escape-holes for imaginary hot air in the front or top, and around it are twisted infinite colours and forms of turbans with fringed ends and laced fringes. When a peacock's feather, with the iris end displayed, is inserted in the hole in the top of the helmet, or is stuck in the puggery around it, the effect of the covering is much enhanced. ... I have seen more than one pistol in one of the cummerbunds, or long sashes, which some of our officers wear round the stomach in the oriental fashion.³⁸

With the reestablishment of social order in upper India, the army was reorganized. What had been the Bengal Army was in effect dissolved. European soldiers who had enlisted in the Company service were pensioned and/or repatriated to Great Britain, and henceforth all of the European troops serving in the Indian army would be from regular royal battalions, which were rotated through India. The British officers of the Indian army were now commissioned by the king and would be permanently assigned to units made up of Indians, who were recruited from "the martial races"; Sikhs, who accounted for 20 percent of the army in 1912; Punjabi Muslims (16 percent); Gurkhas (12 percent); Rajputs, mainly from Rajasthan (8 percent); Dogras and Garhwals (7.5 percent); Pathans (8 percent); Jats (6 percent). The remaining soldiers in the army were made up of Marathas, Brahmans, Hindustani Muslims, and "other Hindus," of whom the only significant number were Telugus and Tamils.³⁹

In addition to the "class composition" of the new army, its dress was transformed as well, for both Indian soldiers and British officers. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the service uniform for Europeans and Indians was much the same—cotton khaki trousers and shirt, with a jacket added in cold weather. Indians were given "exotic" headgear: the Sikh turban as previously discussed, and each of the other major martial races had their distinctive turban in terms of wrapping and color. The Gurkhas began to be recruited after the Gurkha wars of 1814-1815 and took readily to European-style uniforms, which they have continued to wear in the British and Indian army to the present. Their distinctive headdress in the second half of the nineteenth century was the Kilmarnock cap, a visorless, brimless pillbox. For service in the Boxer Rebellion they were issued broad-brimmed felt hats, which they wore up to World War I in the Australian style with one side turned up. Subsequently they have worn it with the brim down and at a "jaunty angle." Their uniforms, with jacket and trousers, have been dark blue or green.

Vansittart, the author of the handbook on the Gurkhas for use by their

officers, described them as having a strong aversion to wearing a turban, as they associate it with the plainsmen whom they "despise." Vansittart goes on to eulogize the Gurkhas "as delighting in all manly sports, shooting, fishing . . . and as bold, enduring, faithful, frank, independent and self reliant . . . they look up to and fraternise with the British whom they admire for their superior knowledge, strength and courage, and whom they imitate in dress and habits."⁴⁰ The Gurkhas had a "traditional" weapon, the kukri, a twenty-inch curved knife carried in the waistband which became their trademark.

It was in designing the dress uniforms for the officers and men that the British exercised their fantasy of what an "oriental" warrior should look like. As was common in the second half of the nineteenth century, the cavalry units got the most colorful and dramatic uniforms. As was noted; during the Mutiny the British began to add cummerbunds and pagris—linen covers wrapped around their wicker helmets or cloth caps and hats. A few British went all the way and began to wear full turbans, which were recognized as having some protective function. A full turban could be made up of thirty or forty feet of cloth and, when thickly wrapped over the whole head and down the ears, could protect the head from a glancing sabre blow. General Hearsey, who commanded a division of the Bengal army, came from a family which had long provided officers, and many British thought he had Indian "blood." After the Mutiny, Hearsey had his portrait painted in a long black oriental-style robe, wearing a richly brocaded cummerbund and holding a scimitar. Could he have been seeking to appropriate part of his enemies' powers through using their clothes?

By the end of the nineteenth century, the dress uniform of the British officers of the cavalry had become fully "orientalized"; it included a knee-length tunic in bright colors, breeches and high boots, and a fully wrapped colorful turban. The Indian non-commissioned officers and troopers were similarly attired for dress parades and the increasing number of ceremonial functions.

The change in uniform for both European and Indian emphasized a basic conceptual change. One of the results of the Mutiny was to rigidify the already considerable differences between Indians and British. The Indians, seen by the British in the first half of the nineteenth century as misguided children, had been revealed by their actions in 1857-1859 to be treacherous and unchangeable. Outwardly they might conform to the sahibs expectation, but they could never be trusted. At any time their deep-seated, irrational superstitions could break forth in violence and overturn all the painful efforts of the conquerors to lead them in proper directions. Policies based on an assumption of change were proven wrong, so what was required was a strong hand capable of smashing any

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"sedition" or disloyalty, combined with an acceptance of Indians. Henceforth, the British should rule in an "oriental manner," with strength and with the expectation of instant obedience.

For this reason, Indians more than ever should look like Indians; those the British most depended- on to provide the strength to keep India, the soldiers, should appear as the British idea of what Mughal troopers looked like, with their officers dressed as Mughal grandees. Another characteristic believed to be quintessentially Indian or oriental was a love of show, of pageantry, of occasions to dress up in beautiful or gaudy clothes. Indians, it was believed, were susceptible to show and drama, and hence more occasions were found where rulers and subjects could play their appointed parts and could act their "traditions" through costume. Hence the insistence that the chiefs and their retinues should always appear in their most colorful (if outmoded) clothes. The first major demonstration of this new ruling paradigm was during the visit of the Prince of Wales to India in 1876.

The prince and his large suite traveled widely throughout India, arriving in Bombay, then proceeding to Ceylon and Madras, and reaching Calcutta in November of 1876. There he was treated to a month-long round of entertainments, balls, and levees, culminating in a large investiture ceremony for the Star of India. The trip was well reported in England, with correspondents from the local newspapers. *The Graphic* and the *Illustrated London Weekly* sent artists who recorded all the events for the home audience. In their drawings, the artists dwelt upon the exotic quality of Indian life and dress, such as the "wild" Naga tribesmen and women brought down to Calcutta to entertain the prince and British high society with their barbarous dances. The prince was also treated to a nautch—a dance by young women which was a popular entertainment for eighteenth-century nabobs. The dancers' beautiful and colorful dresses and their sensuous movements were anything but Victorian.

At center stage throughout the Prince of Wales' visit were the princes of India, in all their splendor. Neither the pen of the journalists nor the black-and-white line drawings of the artists could adequately capture the variety and color of the clothes, nor the extraordinary display of precious stones and jewelry with which the figures of the Indian rulers were decked. The intent of the whole visit was to inspire the princes' loyalty by the presence of the eldest son of their English queen, and to affirm their central role in the maintenance of the empire.

Everywhere he went, the Prince of Wales was showered with valuable gifts by his mother's loyal Indian feudatories. Princes vied to outdo their competitors with the value, ingenuity, and brilliance of the jewels, paintings, antique weapons, live animals, richly embroidered brocades, and

other art works which they presented to him. What he collected in six months of touring in India literally filled the large converted troop ship, the *Serapis*. When he returned, his trophies and gifts went on traveling exhibition throughout England and eventually wound up in a quasi museum in London at the Lambeth Palace. In return for their gifts, the Prince of Wales presented the princes with copies of Max Muller's English translation of the *Rig-Veda*.

It was not only the princes themselves who enthralled the prince and his suite as they traveled, but also their exotic retainers, dressed in a dazzling variety of costumes. The editors of *The Graphic* pulled out all stops in trying to describe for their readers the impression that these "military fossils" made on the Europeans.

One of the chief features of the Maharajah of Cashmere's reception of the Prince of Wales was the wonderfully heterogeneous character of the troops who lined the route from the river to the Palace. Never on record has such a miscellaneous army been collected together. The troops wore uniforms of all countries and all ages, and carried as many different weapons, ranging from chain armour and Saracenic javelins to the scarlet-uniforms and muskets of British soldiers half a century ago, the 12th and the 19th centuries being thus, as our artist remarks, face to face. There were troops in veritable native costume, turbaned, and carrying blunderbusses or flint-and-steel muskets; next to them would be a .red-coated company, with white, blue, or black knickerbockers, and striped worsted stockings; then would come a detachment in chain-mail and breastplates, and steel caps with high tufts; while others again wore brass helmets, and were clad in brass breast and back-plates, not unlike our own Household Cavalry. One corporal particularly attracted our artist's attention, being clad in a new tunic of cloth, on which the mark "superfine" had been left, a badge of distinction of which the wearer appeared highly proud. He bore an old trigger gun, with a bayonet with a broad-leaved blade. Notwithstanding the semi-European clothing and armament of many of the troops, ho¹ ever, very little of European discipline, or drill, apparently existed, and our sketch of "Charge!" will give an idea of the helter-skelter ruck—so characteristic of Eastern warfare—with which a squadron of cavalry obeyed the word of command. Our artist writes: "This regiment wore a green uniform with red facings—some were shod and others barefoot—their trousers were reefed up to their knees, while their sleeves were exceedingly lengthy. As for the horses, they had ropes for bridles, and in appearance were veritable descendants of Rozi-nants."⁴¹

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, the British seemed to eschew competing with the splendors of Indian royal clothes. Unlike their eighteenth-century counterparts who wore vividly colored silks

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and satins, they wore fairly informal coats, dark or muted in color, straight and at times baggy trousers, and plain shirtwaists and vests. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the *sola topi* (pith helmet) became ubiquitous, their headgear was a beaver stovepipe hat or a cap. The white ruling elite must have appeared dowdy in comparison with their Indian underlings, who dressed in a version of Mughal court dress while carrying out their official functions. The British appeared to have given up the sartorial struggle of trying to outdress the pageant of oriental splendor they sought to control.

It was Queen Victoria herself who suggested that the civil servants in India should have an official dress uniform, as did their counterparts in the Colonial Service. The administration of India was completely separate from the ruling of the other colonies, one being run through the India Office and the other through the Colonial Office. Although the question of a special uniform was raised several times after the queen expressed interest, the Council of India decided that prescribing a dress uniform would be an undue expense for their officials.⁴²

Lord Lytton, viceroy from 1876 to 1880 and a great believer in the power of ceremony and display as an integral part of ruling India, complained to his queen that "official functions" in India looked like "fancy dress balls," because there was no check on the "sartorial fancies of the civil service."⁴³ Although no uniform was prescribed for the Indian Civil Service until the early twentieth century, "some civil officers had provided themselves with one which was similar ... to the levee dress of the 3rd and 5th class civil servants at home and in the colonies."⁴⁴ The only civilians allowed a "dress uniform" by regulations were those who had "distinct duties of a political kind to perform, and who are thereby brought into frequent and direct personal intercourse with native princes." This uniform included a blue coat with gold embroidery, a black velvet lining, collar and cuffs, blue cloth trousers with gold and lace two inches wide, a beaver cocked hat with black silk cockade and ostrich feathers, and a sword.⁴⁵

The Gaekwar and the King

An incident occurred during the imperial darbar of 1911 that illustrates the official British concern with conformity of dress and manners expected of the Indian princes. In 1911, King George V and his queen traveled to India for his formal crowning as the king-emperor of India. This was to be the only time that a reigning monarch of Great Britain was to visit India before Independence. All three imperial darbars took place at the same site. In the first two, the structure marking the ritual

center was a dais on which the viceroy proclaimed the new titles of the emperor. In 1911 the focal point of the event was a large platform, covered by velvet awnings and drapery and dubbed the "homage pavilion," on which the king and his princess sat on thrones. In previous darbars, the Indian royalty and nobles had been more or less passive bystanders; this time, it was decided that the leading princes would individually offer "homage" as an expression of fealty and respect to their imperial majesties.

The Gaekwar of Baroda was highly westernized, and generally considered by the British to be a "progressive" ruler, but too friendly with a number of prominent Indian nationalists. Baroda was ranked second behind Hyderabad in the official order of precedence at the imperial darbar established by the Government of India for Indian states. Therefore, the gaekwar was to follow the nizam in offering homage. The day before the actual ceremony a rehearsal was held to instruct the princes in the proper form of offering homage to the king-emperor and his consort. They were told to walk up the steps of the platform, bow low before each of their majesties, and then walk backwards down the steps in such a fashion as never to show their back to the royal couple. The Gaekwar of Baroda was unable to attend the rehearsal and sent his brother to take notes for him.

On the day of the offering of homage, the gaekwar was dressed in a plain white knee-length jacket and his "traditional" red turban. He wore white European trousers and carried an English-style walking stick. He did not wear, as was expected, the sash of the Order of the Star of India. The gaekwar approached the king, bowed once, omitting any obeisance to the princess, took several steps backward, then turned and walked down the steps swinging his cane. It appears that at the time nothing was said about his behavior; subsequently however, led by the *Times* reporter, his behavior was interpreted as seditious. A major row ensued in the English-language press of India as well as in England itself over what was defined as a studied, purposeful, and seditious insult. The storm was revived three weeks after the event, when the newsreels taken at the darbar reached England. The *Illustrated London News* of January 29 reproduced a page of sequential stills from the film showing "very clearly the way in which the Gaekwar of Baroda, carrying a stick, entered the Presence, bowed curtly, and walked off with his back to the King-Emperor."⁴⁶ In addition to the pictures of the gaekwar they printed pictures of two other ruling chiefs paying homage with deep bows of reverence. The gaekwar and members of his court protested that, for personal reasons, the gaekwar was distressed on the day of the ritual, was confused as to what was proper behavior, and intended no insult or lack of manners by what had happened.⁴⁷

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The intentions of the gaekwar are less relevant than his failure to maintain the dress code expected of Indian princes. The most seditious touch of all would seem to have been the gaekwar's use of a walking stick, an accouterment of the white sahibs, military and civilian, which marked the insouciance they displayed in the presence of the Indian masses. It was also used on occasion to thrash Indians whose actions, manners, or appearance irritated them.

In India, the military "orientalized" to overawe the Indian princes and the heathen masses; at home, the ruling classes archaized their ceremonial dress to overawe the new middle classes and the potentially dangerous lower orders of society. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the British at home increasingly invented or reinvented civic rituals at all levels of the polity. These rituals called for the creation of costumes, regalia, and accouterments to mark them as special and hallowed by tradition. They were designed to evoke in participants and audience, from the lord mayors of small cities to wealthy merchants and bankers in London, to the royal family, to union officials, a collective conception of the past.⁴⁸ The use of costumes and accouterments developed for such civic rituals were transported to India by the British to hierarchize the grandeur of their Indian princes. As a writer in the *Illustrated London News*, summing up what for him was the success of the imperial darbar of 1911, explained:

Despite the oft-repeated statement that this age is a very drab one sartorially so far as the West is concerned, there are various occasions on which Europe is able to show the Orient that it, too, can display itself in brilliant plumage. Such instances as the Coronation of King George and Queen Mary and that of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra jump to the mind at once: and to these memories of glittering kaleidoscopic state pageantry must now be added those of the Great Durbar held so recently at Delhi. There Europeans vied with Asiatics with excellent effect.⁴⁹

Indians in Everyday Clothes

One of the first impressions formed by British travelers to India in the nineteenth century was of the nakedness of most of the Indians whom they encountered on their arrival. Most British travelers to India from the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century arrived either in Madras or at Diamond Harbour, down river from Calcutta. Madras was an open roadstead where British passengers had to disembark from their ships into open row boats manned by Indian boatmen. At Diamond Harbour many travelers transferred to barges or small sailing boats for the

remainder of the trip to Calcutta. The boatman was usually the first Indian they were able to observe closely. James Johnson, a surgeon in the Royal Navy who was in India in the late eighteenth century, records his impressions of the dress of the Bengali boatmen (*dandi*):

The habilment of the Bengal *dandy*, or waterman who rows or drags our *budjrow* (barge), up the Ganges, consists in a small narrow piece of cloth (*doty*), passed between the thighs, and fastened before and behind to a piece of stout packthread, that encircles the waist. In this dress, or undress, corresponding pretty nearly to the figleaf of our great progenitor, he exposes his skin to the action of the tropical sun, a deluge of rain, or a piercing northwester, with equal indifference!⁵⁰

British women newly arrived in India recorded their shock not only at the seminakedness of lower-status Indian household servants, who seemed constantly underfoot, dusting, sweeping, lounging about, or playing with the *babalog* (white children), but also at their free access to the bedrooms of the memsahibs as if they were non-males. The traveler or sojourner in India quickly adjusted to the near nakedness of the Indian males, which after a while did not shock British sensibilities "owing to the dark colour of the skin, which as it is unusual to European eyes has the effect of dress."⁵¹ They then began to discern great variation, based on region, caste, sect, and wealth, in Indian dress.

Indian Hindu male dress consists of three large pieces of cloth. One, the dhoti, is wrapped and folded in various ways, and covers the lower half of the body. A second piece, worn in cooler weather, is a cotton shawl, or chadar. The third piece, a long, narrow strip of cloth which is wrapped around the head, is the turban or pagri. The usual textile for these cloths was cotton, but on occasion silk would be worn. There is, however, enormous variation in how parts of the dhoti are tucked into the waist and in the length of draping. Such details frequently indicate the occupation or status of the wearer. Most Hindu dhotis were white and without seams. Even Hindus whose work required them to wear Muslim-style stitched clothes, and later European jackets or coats of various kinds, would change into a dhoti when arriving home.

The basic difference between Hindu and Muslim clothes was that Muslim clothes were tailored, which involved the cutting and sewing of cloth, but Hindu clothes were of uncut pieces, formed into garments by folding, tucking, and draping. Although it was frequently asserted that in ritual and domestic contexts in the nineteenth century, uncut and unsewn clothing was invariably worn, I have found no adequate explanation of this injunction to use only uncut cloth when performing puja worship. This is certainly a common habit today among more orthodox

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Hindu males, who will bathe and then put on a fresh dhoti; on most auspicious ritual occasions such a dhoti will be of silk.

My speculation is that the use of unsewn cloth or a dhoti for males performing puja, or the use of sets of specified cloth and clothes as presentations, reflects an underlying concept of the necessity of completeness, or unpenetratedness, of totality, which is congruent with Hindu ideas of cosmogony. Parallel to the male wearing only an unsewn garment during puja were women who, by the late nineteenth century, had taken to wearing a choli, a sewn blouse, or a petticoat, which they removed while cooking food. Cooking had to be done in a specially designated and ritually cleansed area of the house.

N. C. Chaudhuri has described how males who worked in Mughal courts or in British offices would wear Muslim dress, but followed the rule that such garments were "worn for work only, and never in personal life. . . . Hindus who put on Muslim costume for public appearance scrupulously put them off when going into the inner house, and for religious observances, and they would never dream of wearing anything but orthodox Hindu clothes." The mansions of wealthy Calcutta Hindus in the late nineteenth century frequently had a western-style dressing room, complete with a wardrobe made in England, adjacent to the master's bedroom in the outer apartment of the house. There the master would change into Hindu clothes before entering the inner apartment and courtyard, the province of the women and the deities of the house.⁵²

The exception to the rule of eschewing sewn clothing at home in pre-nineteenth-century India was in the Punjab and Rajasthan. The Rajputs appear to have taken to wearing a *jama* (sewn coat) before the advent of the Mughals.⁵³ What was conventionally thought of as Mughal court dress adapted major elements of Rajput dress during the time of Akbar.⁵⁴ It was also during this period that marking features were established to differentiate Hindu from Muslim attire, even when they were wearing the same type of coat (a *jama* or *angarakha*). The *jama* has ties that fix the flap of the upper half of the garment under the armpit and across the chest; Muslims wear their *jama* tied to the right, Hindus to the left. The *jama* became reduced to a shirt-like garment for cold weather among peasants of upper India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the custom of tying continued to follow the old pattern of left for Hindus, right for Muslims.⁵⁵

The Mughal rulers prescribed a form of their own dress for Hindus associated with them or employed in their offices and as officials. However, the British tried to have Hindus who worked for them—whether as domestic servants or as clerks, writers, and revenue and judicial officials—continue to wear the Mughal-style dress appropriate to their

functions. Writing about British attitudes toward Indians wearing European clothes, N. C. Chaudhuri trenchantly sums up the situation: "They, the British, were violently repelled by English in our mouths and even more violently by English clothes on our backs."⁵⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century, increasing numbers of urban Indians, particularly in Calcutta and Bombay, began to wear articles of European clothing. In Bombay the lead was taken by the Parsis, a group descended from the Zoroastrians, who had fled from Persia when the Islamic rulers began to persecute them for maintaining their religion; The Parsis settled in coastal areas of Gujarat, and by the eighteenth century were an important component of the population of Bombay, as carpenters, builders, and boat builders. By the early nineteenth century, some had become successful merchants, bankers, and European-style businessmen. Although they maintained a distinctive style of dress, particularly in the caps they wore, trousers, shoes, and an adaptation of a long English frock coat became new elements of their distinctive costume.

By the 1880s many successful, wealthy Indians and Western-educated Indian males had taken to wearing European clothes in public. Even those who normally wore a complete Western outfit, however, did not take to Western headgear. Many Indians continued to wear a turban with European clothes, particularly in the cold season. They also took to wearing a great variety of caps, from military forage caps to a wide range of brimless skull caps. The one type of hat that Indians did not wear was the pith helmet.

By the eighteenth century, the Europeans were aware of rules governing where Indians could wear footcoverings, and before whom they could appear in slippers. During a visit in 1804 to the peshwa in Poona, the head of the Maratha Confederacy, Lord Valentia, who was touring India collecting botanical specimens, observed the expected behavior. Accompanied by the long-time British Resident Colonel Close and his retinue, he entered the courtyard of the palace in a palanquin, but from there had to continue on foot. He entered the darbar room, and before stepping on the white cloth covering of the floor, took off his slippers. Lord Valentia was met by the peshwa's *dewan* (prime minister), and after a few minutes the peshwa entered and remained Standing by his throne (*gaddi*, literally a cushion). Valentia approached, flanked by the *dewan* and the Resident, and was lightly embraced by the peshwa. Then, after the peshwa seated himself, Valentia had to sit on the floor crosslegged as "we had no chairs or cushions, and were not permitted to put out our feet, as showing the sole of the foot is considered disrespectful."⁵⁷ After formal conversation, done through an interpreter who spoke only to the *dewan*, who in turn spoke to the peshwa, Valentia was invited to have a private conversation with the peshwa in a small room adjacent to the

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darbar. Here, seated on a small "Turkey" rug next to the peshwa, they spoke more informally for over an hour before returning to the darbar room for dismissal. Valentia recorded, "I was extremely tired with my position, that it was with some difficulty that I could rise, and for a few minutes was obliged to rest against the wall."⁵⁸

In portraits, successful and rich Europeans in India frequently are portrayed in their offices with several of their Indian employees or associates. The crucial Indians for the Europeans were their banians, a title minimally translated as "cash keeper." These were men who ran both official and commercial activities of the British. They secured credit, dealt with most Indians on the sahibs' behalf, kept their books, and were their factotums in all their public dealings. Another employee of high status was the munshi, inadequately described as a "scribe." The munshis frequently were highly educated Muslims who acted in the initial phases of a European's career as his teacher of Persian and Urdu, and later as a confidential secretary responsible for his correspondence with Indian officials and rulers. In eighteenth-century paintings, the munshi and banian have their slippers on while the bearer or hukkah bardar is barefoot. This is obviously a concession on the part of the European to the high status of these employees. Captain Thomas Williamson spent upwards of twenty years in India in the 1780s and 1790s. His *East India Wade Mecum* (1810), the first guidebook for Europeans to provide detailed instructions on managing a household and observing proper manners, observed that:

A Banian invariably rides in his palanquin attended by several underlings. . . . He, to a certain degree, rules the office, entering it generally with little ceremony, making a slight obeisance, and never divesting himself of his slippers: a privilege which, in the eyes of the natives, at once places him on a footing of equality with his employer.⁵⁹

In the 1830s F. J. Shore, a judge in upper India, complained that "natives of rank" walk into the rooms of Englishmen with their shoes on. He attributed this practice to a combination of the bad manners of the natives of Calcutta "who are of an inferior order" and the ignorance and carelessness of Europeans who do not know eastern etiquette.⁶⁰ Shore, who was highly critical of his countrymen's lack of knowledge and their disdain for the people of India, explained to his European readers they should not allow Indians in their presence with shoes. If Indians did so, the sahib should explain to them that:

"Nations have different customs; ours is to uncover the head—yours to uncover the feet, as a token of respect. You would not presume to walk into the sitting-room of another native with your shoes on; why then do you

treat me with a disrespect which you would not show to one of your own countrymen? I am not prejudiced, and it is quite immaterial to me which practice you choose to adopt. You can either take off your shoes or your turban, but I must insist on one or the other mark of civility if you wish me to receive your visits." This is unanswerable by the native; and those English who have acted in this manner, have been decidedly more respected by the people.⁶¹

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 "on official and semi-official occasions ... to appear in the presence of the servants of the British government" wearing European boots or shoes.⁶² Twenty years later, the rule was made general throughout India and now included government courts, as the practice of wearing European dress had spread up-country, among "educated native gentlemen accustomed to European habits." The rule was to apply only to the public parts of courts, and not the chambers of the judge. His rooms were "private" and hence he could there enforce whatever rules he wished.

There were several issues lurking beneath the seemingly trivial question of which Indians of what status could wear what kinds of shoes, and where. Indian Christians always were allowed to wear their shoes wherever Europeans would normally wear their shoes. Europeans had long objected to removing their shoes when entering an Indian temple or when appearing in the darbar of an Indian ruler. The British construction of the rules governing the wearing or non-wearing of shoes was that Europeans did not have to conform to Indian custom, but Indians had to conform to European ideas of what was proper Indian behavior. The Europeans could also decide when an Indian practice had changed sufficiently to allow their subjects to follow new rules. The "victory" of the Bengalis, in getting rules regarding the wearing of shoes changed, encouraged some of them to try to have changed the rule that they must wear turbans while they were in government offices.

A group of Bengali officials in the 1870s petitioned the lieutenant-governor of Bengal to allow them "to adopt the European custom of uncovering the head in token of respect in durbars and courts of justice, and on all other official occasions and places."⁶³ The petitioners pointed out that the "wearing of the pagri [turban] is at present not a national custom of the Bengalis." Many Bengalis, they wrote, think the pagri an unreasonable headdress, as "it does not act as sufficient protection from the glare and heat of the sun," and is inappropriate to "active occupations." As a result of the decline in the use of the pagri, they claimed that Indians who work in government offices are forced to keep two

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headaddresses: A pagri, which they carry in boxes or store in their offices, and a "light cap" which they actually wear. When a European superior approaches them while they are working in the office, they remove their caps and put on the pagri.

The Indians suggested a simple solution to the question: "We think that the best course is to wear caps and to uncover the head as token of respect." They pointed out that this would not prevent those Indians who continued to wear pagris from doing so, but those who by inference were more progressive in their dress and manners should not be forced to continue a custom they thought old-fashioned. In making their request, the petitioners felt they were acting in concert with the rulings about shoes, as that question was settled by the acceptance of the fact that Indians could wear shoes while the rest of their dress was "oriental," and did not require Indians to adopt fully European dress. Hence, substituting the wearing of a cap indoors rather than going bareheaded in the European fashion could seem appropriate. To continue to be forced to wear a pagri in the presence of Europeans rather than wearing brimless caps could act "as a cause of moral depression on the people."

The lieutenant-governor was strongly opposed to the suggested innovation. He did not think the petitioners represented "even the middle class of the natives of Bengal." It was proper for native gentlemen to wear whatever they wanted in private life, he wrote, but the use of the cap "was a very slovenly and unbecoming style of dress for public occasions." The lieutenant-governor declared that "no European of respectability would appear in such caps." They were not "western" nor were they "oriental," and hence by application they were some kind of bastard concoction, which furthered a tendency he abhorred toward laxity in dress and manners—and dress and manners were the means by which Indians showed proper respect in the office and on public occasions. Sir Ashley Eden then went on to lecture those Indians seeking to change current dress codes:

If any change in the rules is to be made it should not in the Lieutenant-Governor's opinion, take the shape of further relaxation of existing customs. Indeed, the Lieutenant-Governor thinks that the chief change required, is that some of the Native gentlemen, especially native officials, who attend levees and darbars should pay greater attention than heretofore to their customs, and should in this way imitate the European custom of showing respect by not appearing on such occasions in the ordinary clothes in which they have just left their desks or court-houses. The new prevailing laxity in this matter may possibly have some bearing on the want of cordiality in the relations between Europeans and Natives, of which such frequent complaint is made by those who remember a different state of things. Attention to

costume was a form of respect in which the forefathers of the present generation were never deficient. In giving up the customs of appearing with the head covered on public occasions, Native gentlemen are adopting neither the customs of the West nor of the East, and the movement is one which the Lieutenant-Governor deprecates and which he is certainly in no way prepared to encourage.⁶⁴

Indian Women's Dress and European Conceptions of Modesty

In the iconography of colonial India, the two most enduring representations of Indians are of "naked fakirs" and of graceful sari-clad women, carrying water pots on their heads as they return from the village well. Nineteenth-century British males, whose female counterparts at home and in India went to great lengths to obscure or rearrange the natural shape and outline of their bodies from the neck down, were obviously highly admiring of the seemingly unfettered Indian women whom they saw on the streets, or on the paths and in the fields of rural India.

Major Royal Sherer, who was posted to Madras in the early 1820s, recorded his impression of "native women of a common class" carrying water back to their houses with "erect carriage and admirable walk." Their "simple dress" consisted of "one piece of cloth wrapped twice around their loins in its breadth, and passing in its length over the bosom is either disposed mantle-like to cover the head, or thrown gracefully across the left shoulder. . . . Their shining hair rolled up into a knot at the back of the head."⁶⁵

Edward Balfour, author of the *Cyclopedia of India*, was even franker in his enjoyment of the gait, appearance, and in his eyes the sensuality of Indian women and their dress. For his mid-Victorian readers, he painted a vibrant and exciting picture of a street scene in Bombay as it appeared on the occasion of a festival: "The large and almost bovine Banyan and Bhattia women roll heavily along, each plump foot and ankle loaded with several pounds weight of silver. The slender, gold tinted Purbhu with their hair tightly twisted, and a corona of mogra flowers, have a shrinking grace and delicacy which is very attractive. The Mar-wari females, with skirts full of plaits . . . and sari dragged over the brow ... are very curious figures, seldom pretty. Surati girls, with their drapery so tightly kilted as to show great sweeps of the round, brown limbs, smooth and shapley." The Surati girls are Venuses of the "stable and kitchen" and are frequently seen "with a child on their hips." Then there were the "trim little Malwen girls," whose skin, from "confinement" in the cotton factories, is getting "fairer and lighter," who "sling quickly along with a saucy swing of their oscillant hips."⁶⁶

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British and Indian conceptions of the relationship between women's dress and appearance in public and female modesty were in marked contrast with one another. Upper-class Indian women in north India, both Hindu and Muslim, were rarely seen outside of their homes, and within their houses usually spent most of their time in their own quarters, the *zanana*. For these women there was an elaborate code of avoidances of certain male affines, and sharp separation of the domains of males and females. Modest behavior centered around the face and head; covering for the rest of the body could be more or less casual and to some extent revealing of the shape of the body. If a male entered the female quarters, usually announced by a servant or by a loud cough, women would quickly cover their faces with their sari or a scarf, unless the visitor was classified as a younger brother. If upper-class women were to go out, they would usually travel in a closed palanquin or a totally cloth-draped conveyance. If they had to move in public on foot, they would be covered from head to toe in a wrapper, or would wear their saris in such a way as to cover their heads and obscure their faces completely. In the north, lower-class or lower-caste women would be seen in public, at times working the fields, assisting males in their work, or moving about on errands. In the south, except in areas of Muslim settlement, women tended to be less restricted in their movements and their appearances in public.

British women in India similarly restricted their public appearances to areas defined as British space, and when seen outdoors were usually riding horses, in carriages, or being carried. They were, however, much concerned to be well covered both in terms of protecting their skin from the Indian sun and for modesty's sake. In the house, they shared the domestic space with their husbands and male Indian servants. Although British women would cover their heads with bonnets, caps, or shawls, and in the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century with sun helmets, they would make no effort to obscure their faces. In fact, their faces, lips, and complexion were lovingly painted or chronicled by European men, and admired or denigrated by other women.

Unlike their European counterparts, Indian women of all statuses did not wear undergarments that confined or constricted their breasts, stomachs, and/or hips. When Indian women wore bodices or blouses (*choli*), in the later nineteenth century, they were made to be form-fitting and to accentuate the shape of their breasts. Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali, an Englishwoman married to an upper-class Muslim in Lucknow in the early nineteenth century, who lived for a number of years happily in a *zanana*, described for her British readers the *angiya* (bodice) worn by her Muslim relatives. The garment was made of gauze or net or muslin, "the

more transparent in texture the more agreeable to taste. . . . It is made to fit the bust with great exactness, and to fasten behind with strong cotton threads; the sleeves are very short and tight and finished with some fanciful embroidery or silver riband."⁶⁷

Until quite recently, Indian women have shown little inclination to adopt items of Western women's attire, except for adding petticoats under their saris, and the choli. Even in households in which the men wore Western clothes, women usually continued to wear versions of the sari. Since the late nineteenth century, prepubescent girls have been wearing European-style frocks, or a *cameeze* (*kamis*)—a word and a garment presumably modeled on the European shirt.

S. C. Bose, who roundly condemned the Bengali babus in late nineteenth-century Calcutta for their imitation of European dress, thought their wives, sisters, and daughters could be more decently attired if they "adopted a stouter fabric for their garment in place of the present, thin, flimsy, loose, sari." He highly approved of the fact "that a few respectable Hindoo ladies have of late years begun to put an *unghia* or a corset over their bodies," but their "under vestments are shamefully indelicate." Bose went on to lecture "the Baboos of Bengal" that they should strive to introduce a salutary change "in the dress of their women folk, which private decency and public morality most urgently demand." Bose recommended changes in female dress that were less revealing, and averred that well-corseted bodies had to "go hand in hand with religious, moral and intellectual improvement. The one is essential to the elevation and dignity of female character as the other is to the advancement of the nation in the scale of civilization."⁶⁸

Official India did not concern themselves with women's attire as they did with that of their Indian employees and allied princes. Until the later part of the nineteenth century, women did not often appear on those public occasions when the Raj was on display. The Begum of Bho-pal, her face entirely veiled and her body fully draped in her mantle of the Star of India, was a curiosity much commented on and a mainstay of the illustrated periodicals of the later nineteenth century. When women did appear in public, as at the visit of the Prince of Wales to Gwalior in 1876, the British artist sketching the scene depicted many of the women with head bowed and hands covering their faces.

Although officially the Raj was little concerned with the "decency" or indecency of women's attire, there were Europeans who were very much concerned with how Indian women were dressed—the Protestant missionaries. During the first half of the nineteenth century in Travancore, a princely state on the southwest coast of India, Protestant missionaries had been successful in converting a substantial number of low-caste Shanars, or Nadars as they came to term themselves. The

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southwest coast is sociologically and culturally one of the most complex regions in the subcontinent, with a significant population of Muslims, Moplahs (Muslims), a community of Syrian Christians, and even Jews who date from the first or second century G.E. In addition, there was a large and highly stratified Hindu community. European observers of the nineteenth century regarded the caste system of Malabar in general and Travancore in particular as the most rigid in the subcontinent.

The nineteenth-century historian of the Travancore state, P. Shun-goony Menon, described his homeland with pride and some hyperbole as "perhaps the only kingdom in India which preserves its original caste, religion, customs, manners and institutions etc."⁶⁹ He went on to quote with approval the comments of the compiler of the Travancore records "that Travancore is one of the very few remaining specimens of a pure Hindu government, the institutions of which have never been affected by the Mohammedan conquest."

The Nadars, among whom the missionaries were to have so much success, are usually described as palmyra tappers, the sap being used to make jaggery, a form of sugar which when distilled becomes toddy. Some Nadars were also carters and semi-nomadic; others were agricultural laborers and tenants of Nair landlords. They were concentrated in the southwestern tip of India, some in the Tinnevely district of Madras, and others across the border in the southernmost part of Travancore. The Nadars were ranked below shudra Nairs, who were the military and landholding caste in the state, and the untouchable "slave castes," who were bound to upper-caste landholders and the state. The highest ranking caste, the Nambudri brahmans, were priests, landlords, and state officials.

There was a highly specified code of respect and avoidance behavior enforced by the state. Caste status was marked by fixed distances to which a low-caste person could approach a brahman: the Nadars were supposed to remain thirty-six paces from the person of a Nambudri brahman. -They were also prohibited from carrying umbrellas, and wearing shoes or golden ornaments. Their houses had to be only one story high, and they could not milk cows. Nadar women could not carry pots on their hips nor could they cover the upper part of their bodies.TM Nair women were allowed to wear a light scarf around their shoulders, which at times would be draped over their breasts. However, they were expected to be bare-breasted in the presence of brahmans and other high-status people, as a sign of respect. In addition, all castes below the rank of Nair could wear only a single cloth of rough texture, which was worn by both men and women and which could come no lower than the knee nor higher than the waist.⁷¹

Syrian Christian and Moplah women were permitted to wear a short,

tight-fitting jacket, the *kuppayam*. The Syrian Christians were in a relatively privileged position in the state and were, like the Nairs, warriors and landholders. The Moplahs also supplied troops and were merchants. The conversion to Christianity of the Nadars began in the Company's Tinnevely district. Here the Nadar women began wearing "long clothes" at the request of the missionaries; as conversion spread across the border into Travancore, the Nadar women began to wear the Nair breast cloth. Colonel John Munro, who was both the British Resident and dewan (prime minister) at the Travancore court in 1813; issued an order granting permission to "women converted to Christianity to cover their bosoms as obtain among Christians in other countries." This order was quickly rescinded when the pidakakars, members of the raja's ruling council, complained that such an order would eliminate the differences among castes and everything would become polluted in the state. Munro modified his orders by forbidding the Nadar women to wear the Nair loose scarf, but allowing them to wear the *kuppayam*, the jacket worn by Syrian Christians and Moplahs.⁷³

In the next ten years the missionaries followed a policy of vigorous proselytizing with an educational and economic program aimed at changing the economic and legal position of dependence of their low-caste followers. One of their first acts was to establish a school for Nadar girls in which they were trained in European-style lace making. Earnings from lace making and other cash-producing activities were used to buy their "freedom" from their landlords, who had extracted various forms of labor from them. The Nadars, somewhat ironically, also profited from their traditional trade of toddy tapping, as the Company's government here and everywhere in India controlled and encouraged the use of alcohol. Establishing a system of shops for its sale, the government taxed its use and collected fees from the licenses granted to the sellers. The missionary agenda, in addition to conversion of the Nadars, was to free them from what they saw as the thralldom of "the heathen caste system." To do this meant establishing communities, centered on chapels, churches, and schools, and to enhance their sense of worth and separate them from other subjects of the Travancore kings. The missionaries, directly and through the British Resident, established a position of influence with the king and his immediate court as representatives of culture and political order whose power was clearly growing throughout India. In doing this they attempted to bypass, the king's local and regional officials, usually drawn from or with close connection to the dominant landed caste of the Nairs and Nambudris, who resented what they took to be the pretensions to higher status within the caste system being demonstrated by their inferiors, the Nadars.

Although the wives of the missionaries had designed and were pro-

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ducing a loose jacket that met their criteria for modest clothing that befitted Christian women, the Nadar women continued, with or without the jacket, to prefer to wear the Nair-style breast cloth. In the 1820s there was an increasing number of incidents in markets and other public places, when Nadar women wearing the Nair breast cloth were attacked, stripped, and beaten; chapels and schools were also burned. The government of Travancore in 1828 acted to prevent further violence by restating the previous policy of forbidding the Nadar women to wear the Nair-style cloth, but allowing the jacket. The king reaffirmed the requirement that the Nadars, like other low castes, were still required to perform *ooliam* service—corvee labor—and that Nadars were enjoined to act in relation to upper castes according to "usage before conversion."⁷⁴

In 1859, trouble broke out in Travancore. General Cullen, the British Resident, reported to the governor of Madras "that the wearing of the cloth by Shanar women, like that of the Shudras [Nairs] had led gradually to violent outrages and quarrels and almost to an insurrection."⁷⁵ Cullen explained that many of the Nairs had misinterpreted Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858, which ended the Company's rule and established direct rule of India under the Crown of Great Britain. In the proclamation she stated that "we shall respect the rights, dignities and honour of Native Princes as our own" and then went on to state, "in framing and administering the law due regard" would "be paid to the ancient rights, usages and customs of India."⁷⁶ The proclamation was widely read and disseminated in all the languages of India. The Nairs and the officials interpreted the proclamation to mean that it not only prohibited all future interference with caste, "but annulled all previous interventions."⁷⁷

Although Cullen leaned toward enforcing the right of the Travancore state to enforce rules forbidding the wearing of the Nair cloth by Nadar and other low-caste women, the government of Madras, under pressure from missionaries in England and in India, instructed Cullen in no uncertain terms that they were a Christian government and "the whole civilized world would cry shame on us, if we did not take a firm stand" against the king of Travancore.⁷⁸

The maharaja did not completely yield to the pressure of the Madras government, but seemed to satisfy them that "he was desirous to put an end to the barbarous and indecent restrictions previously existing on the dress of Shanar women." In his proclamation of July 26, 1859, he agreed to extend the privileges previously granted to Nadar Christians to all Nadars, as he didn't want any of his subjects to "feel aggrieved"; all could wear jackets like Christian Nadars, and they all could dress in "coarse-cloth, and tying themselves round with it as the Mukkavattigal [low-caste fisherwomen] and they could cover their bosoms in any man-

ner whatever; but not like the women of higher caste."⁷⁹ These "rights" were further extended to Iravars, another low caste that was rapidly being converted to Christianity.

The solution was far from satisfactory as far as the missionaries were concerned. The proclamation was seen as, if anything, retrograde. Christian Protestant women occupied a good position in Travancore life, "socially and morally," wrote the Reverend Samuel Mateer of the London Mission Society. They were educated and "trained in the habits of refinement and comfort"; they were accomplished in the work of producing "embroidery or beautiful lace, for which medals have been given at some of the great Exhibitions." Yet they were still forced to wear coarse cloth, which although tied across the breasts left the shoulders bare, as in the dress of fisherwomen, whom the Nadars considered beneath them. Mateer found this attempt to legislate dress counter to the spirit of "advancing civilization," and the prescribing of the coarse, that is, handwoven, cloth was a "suicidal policy in respect to the development of commerce and manufactures."⁸⁰

It appears the Nadars continued to ignore the restrictions, and evolved a costume that imitated the costume "of the higher class Hindus." P. S. Menon, who was dewan, a peishcar (high revenue official), and who had been personally involved in the events of 1859, wrote "that this style of costume adopted by the Shanar converts was with the express object of annoying the Hindu section of the population." Menon believed that it was the missionaries who were directly behind what could only be thought of as a direct insult not only to Nairs, but to all Hindus. He conceived of the dress as part of a concerted plan on the part of the missionaries, who used their color and nationality to influence the Madras government, "to create in the Hindus a spirit antagonistic to the Christian religion," and by implication to draw the British government into supporting the Christian converts in Travancore.⁸¹ He may have been right, as Mateer states, that not until "all classes of the community are allowed, as in Tinnevely [a part of British India] full liberty to follow their own inclinations and tastes in matters of dress, personal adornment and comfort" would the issue be settled.⁸²

The controversy over the breast cloth lives on in the works of the historian R. N. Yesudas.⁸³ The analysis and discourse which Yesudas adopts translates the battle into part of a wider class struggle, and the missionaries are credited with providing the conditions for a Marxist-style social revolution. T. K. Ravindran, in the Foreword to Yesudas' *People's Revolt*, considers the battle waged by the Nadar women as a victory in the march of progress against entrenched habits, customs, and privileges of orthodox Hindus, who are the representatives of a "licentious, degenerate, pleasure loving feudal caste-culture." These Hindus have dominated an "oozy, slavish and meek underprivileged class" until,

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through "the conscious and voluntary efforts" of the lower classes, they overthrew the outmoded social and political order and showed the way toward "the social regeneration of Travancore."⁸⁴

Whether the breast-cloth controversy was part of an epic struggle to free the lower classes from feudal domination, as Yesudas and Ravindran would have it, or part of a wider movement within the caste order of south India for the Nadars to raise their status in the social hierarchy, as Hardgrave would have it, or the triumph of decency and Christian values, as Mateer would have it, would seem paradigmatic of the relationship between clothes and colonialism. Changes in dress become the tokens of much wider social, economic, and political changes that refracted in unpredictable ways, from the point of view of the principle actors in the events. For the missionaries, as part of their civilizing package, Indian women had to be modestly dressed, taught useful skills, and be freed from the domination of—in this case—brahmins and Nairs who were Sexually as well as economically exploitative. A bare-breasted woman, by definition was the object of male lust. Significantly, it was the wives of the missionaries who seemed to have taken the lead in designing a properly demure clothing style.

The Nadars utilized the position and influence of the missionaries to attack directly their superiors in the state hierarchy; throughout the controversy they were much more concerned with wearing the Nair woman's scarf or adopting the dress of upper-caste women than appearing to meet the missionaries' concern with decent dress *per se*. The controversies became crucial in the formation of a wider caste or group identity, which fit with the capacity to take advantage of new economic opportunities created by the conditions of foreign colonial rule, through the government's encouragement of the use of alcohol to increase revenue. As Hardgrave has traced, some of the Nadars moved from being toddy tappers and makers to being sellers and transporters of the toddy, and from these activities into other lucrative occupations. In the twentieth century, the Nadars in Madras utilized their religious, caste, and economic networks to become a political force. By trying to overthrow the prescriptive rules imposed by the Travancore state, a wider market for machine-manufactured cloth would be created, Mateer argued, so that decency and proper dress would be linked with the expansion of the markets for British industrialists, and all this could be done in the name of the advancement of civilization.

The Uniform of the Indian National Congress

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was increasing documentation of the declining production of fine cotton textiles in India.

Muslins of Dacca, printed cloths of the south of India, palampores, fine woolen shawls of Kashmir and the Punjab had all but disappeared.⁸⁵ While the demise of fine weaving and printing was being decried, it was also noted that cheaper and coarser cotton cloth, frequently woven out of imported thread, continued to be in demand as it was cheaper and sturdier than Lancashire-made dhotis and saris. The effects of European imports on the production of Indian textiles were highly differentiated on a regional basis, and reflected ritual imperatives, changing social statuses, and taste. E. B. Havell, superintendent of the School of Arts in Madras and subsequently of the Government Art School in Calcutta, who was the most influential of the Europeans concerned with the restoration of Indian fine arts and crafts, described the complexities of the situation in regard to Indian textiles in Madras:

The European goods have their great advantage in point of cheapness, and consequently the native manufacturer who supplies the wants of the low caste and poorer classes has suffered most.

White Cloths—for Male Wear. Two kinds of white cloth for personal wear are produced by the native weaver: first, a plain white cloth with a narrow border of coloured cotton, and sometimes with a broader band woven across each end, which are worn by the low caste poor; and, secondly, superior cloths of fine texture in which the borders are broader and of silk, and generally embroidered with a simple pattern, and the bands at each end either of silk or of silver lace. These cloths, originally intended for Brahmins only, are now indiscriminately worn by the wealthier classes of every caste. The first of these has been almost entirely superseded for general wear by English long cloth, which is cheaper than the native cloth by about one half. Still, the manufacture is carried on throughout the districts on a very small scale, for the native cloth is always worn, by those who can afford it, on occasions of ceremony, and by some it is preferred on account of its superior durability and thicker texture. The manufacture of the finer cloths still occupies a very large proportion of the weavers, and is extensively carried on in and around about Madura and Salem. The prosperity of this industry has also been affected to a less extent by the cheapness of European goods, in a similar way, that whereas a well-to-do native would formerly have four to six country cloths in constant wear, many now reserve the more expensive costume for the religious and domestic ceremonies at which a Hindu would expose himself to ridicule if he appeared in other than this traditional dress. But as these cloths are only within the reach of the wealthier classes, it is probable that the spread of Western ideas and mode of dress has had more prejudicial effect on the industry than the mere cheapness of European goods. Both in the fine, but more especially in the inferior cloths, the profits of the weaver seem to be reduced to a very low margin.

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Cloths for Female Wear. The manufacture of cloths for female wear is carried on on a very extensive scale, and has not declined to such an extent as the other, for though the industry has suffered considerably in the inferior kinds by the competition of English and French cheap printed cotton goods, European manufacturers have not hitherto produced anything which can at all compete with the finer cloths of Tanjore, Kuttalam and Kuranad, and other places. While the more gorgeous beauties of the textile manufactures of the north, such as those of Benares, Surat and Gujerat, have been fully recognised, it is a pity that the more sober, though none the less remarkable, artistic qualities of these fine cloths and their adaptability in many ways to decorative purposes have not been better appreciated. Artistically speaking, a decline is only noticeable in the cotton cloths, most of which have lost their characteristic beauty by the use of European dyed thread. The Madura cloths, however, are an exception.⁸⁶

The decline of the craft production of Indian cloth, used for dress, decoration, and rituals, was caused by a combination of price and the changing of taste of Indian consumers. In the 1860s European manufacturers had not yet developed an adequate knowledge of the varied tastes of Indians or the functions of cloth in India. James Forbes Watson, reporter of economic products at the India Office in London and director of the India Museum, was a lifetime student of Indian textiles who produced eighteen volumes containing seven hundred samples of Indian textiles. Twenty sets of what Watson thought of as portable "textile museums" were distributed in Great Britain and India. His goal was to acquaint manufacturers with the "tastes and needs of their Indian customers." In addition to his sample books, he wrote what remains today the most extensive single-volume study of Indian dress and textiles, *The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India*. In this work he explained that to be successful, the manufacturer producing cloth for the Indian market had to know "how the garment was worn, by which sex and for what purpose." Above all, he had to grasp "the relationship between the size of cloth, its decoration and use, if he were to be successful in selling textiles in India." The European manufacturer might produce a cloth that was correct in size, length, and breadth for a turban or *lungi* (loincloth) but it might prove "unsaleable because its decoration is unsuitable . . . or because it is not in good taste from an Indian point of view. "

Watson cheerfully stated that increased consumption of European cloth in India would be good for both the Manchester manufacturers and the people of India. Indians were underclothed and hence cheap textiles would be a boon for them. If the Indian weavers couldn't compete, it wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing as:

In a great productive country like India it is certain that *she* will gain; for if supplies from Britain set labour free there, it will only be to divert it at once into other and perhaps more profitable channels. It might be otherwise if India were not a country whose strength in raw products is great and far from developed; but as it is, her resources in this direction are known to be capable of a vast expansion and to be sufficient to occupy the energies of her whole people.⁸⁸

As can be seen by the exchange between the lieutenant-governor of Bengal and his Bengali underlings, Indian tastes in clothes were rapidly changing. The thousands of clerks and functionaries who worked in the government and commercial offices of Calcutta and Bombay had by the late nineteenth century developed a distinctive form of dress, a mixture of Indian and European. They wore an unironed white European shirt with tails out, covering the top of their finely draped white dhoti; their legs were bare to mid-calf, showing white socks held up by garters, and their feet were shod in patent leather pumps or short boots produced by Chinese bootmakers in Calcutta.⁸⁹

Some of the wealthier and more flashily dressed Bengalis were described by S. C. Bose as thinking that an adaptation of the European style of dress could bring them the benefit of "modern civilization" by "wearing tight pantaloons, tight shirts and black coats of alpaca or broadcloth." They would top this costume with "a coquettish embossed cap or a thin folded shawl turban."⁹⁰

The wealthy of Calcutta sought to modernize not only their dress, but their home furnishings as well. I noted above the separation of the large Calcutta mansions into two sections: a domestic one of the women which was private, and a public set of rooms used by males for entertaining their Indian and occasional European guests. The drawing rooms were furnished in a mixed "oriental" and "western" style.

A Canadian visitor, Anna Leonowens, described a visit to the home of a wealthy gentleman, Bam Chunder, in Bombay. She described him as "educated in all the learning of the East as well as in English, but never the less a pure Hindoo in mind and character." The occasion was for an evening of Indian dance, drama, and music. Her host was dressed in a "rich and strikingly picturesque" manner. He wore deep crimson satin trousers, a white muslin angaraka or tunic, a purple vest with gold embroidery, a fine Cashmere cummerbund, white European stockings, and embroidered antique Indian slippers. The entertainment took place in a large room, furnished in the oriental style, with *kincpb* (brocade) wall hangings decorated with peacock feathers. The floors were a fine tile mosaic, and around the walls on tables and shelves were a "melange of European ornaments, clocks, antique pictures, statues, celestial and ter-

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restrial globes and a profusion of common glass wear of the most brilliant colors."⁹¹

It was not only the wealthy, Western-educated, or urban middle classes whose dress was beginning to change, but more common folk as well. Tribesmen recruited from the hills of southern India as labor on tea and coffee plantations spent some of their wages on turbans and caps (innovations for them) and woven coats "of English cut" for festival clothes.⁹² An Indian working for Edgar Thurston, superintendent of the Madras Government Museum and head of the Ethnographic Survey of Madras, appeared wearing a white patchwork shirt, adorned "with no less than six individual and distinct trademarks representing the King-Emperor, Britannia and an elephant, etc." The inclusion of the printed trademarks was generally popular; soldiers of the maharaja of Kashmir wore jackets blazoned with the manufacturer's identification of "superfine."⁹³ European manufacturers were supplying cloth with all sorts of designs, which according to Thurston met the "Indians' love of the grotesque," a taste nurtured by exposure to the "carvings on Hindu temples and mythological paintings." One of the most popular patterns in cloth manufactured for use in women's petticoats had a border "composed of an endless procession of white bicycles of ancient pattern with green gearing and treadles, separated from each other by upright stems with green and gold fronts."⁹⁴

While a few Europeans were proselytizing for better taste and seeking to "direct progress in a right groove and to prevent the decline of Indian art," some early Indian nationalist writers were developing a critique of the Government of India's policies furthering the destruction of Indian "manufactures," which they claimed advantaged British manufacturers to the detriment of incipient Indian efforts to establish modern industry. The early nationalists also argued that government revenue policies were contributing to the continued misery of the mass of Indian cultivators.⁹⁵

Thus there were two streams of thought: the aesthetic and moral concern of Europeans influenced by the arts and crafts movement in Great Britain and their Indian experience, and the early Indian nationalist critique of government policies leading to the continued impoverishment of India. These two streams of thought provided a major part of the ideology of the swadeshi movement in Bengal, 1903-1908. The movement's goals were complex, but one aim was to encourage the development and use of indigenously produced goods through a boycott of European manufactures. As the movement developed, there was increasing discussion and propaganda to encourage Indian weavers and to revive the hand spinning of cotton thread.⁹⁶ These ideas were taken up and formalized by Mahatma Gandhi through the next decade. Gandhi had

been much influenced by Ruskin's and Morris's critiques of modern industrial society and its destructive and alienating effects on the bodies, minds, and morals of the European working classes.⁹⁷ Gandhi continually articulated and elaborated on the theme that the Indian people would only be free from European domination, both politically and economically, when the masses took to spinning, weaving, and wearing homespun cotton cloth, khadi. To give substance to these theories, he created the enduring symbols of the Indian nationalist movement: the *chakra* (spinning wheel), which appeared on the Indian National Congress flag and continues to be ambiguously represented on the Republic of India's flag, and the wearing of a khadi "uniform," a white handspun cotton dhoti, sari, or pajama, kurta and a small white cap.

In 1908, when he was still in South Africa, Gandhi began to advocate handspinning and weaving as the panacea for the growing pauperization of India. (Decades later, Gandhi could not recall ever having seen a spinning wheel when he began to advocate their use),⁹⁸ In 1916, after his return to India, he established an ashram where a small group of his followers were, to begin practicing what Gandhi had been preaching. The first order of business was to find or develop a *chakra* to implement his call, not only to boycott foreign-made cloth and thread, but to make and wear their own khadi. At first they had to make do with cloth that was handwoven, but made of mill-made thread produced by Indian mills. It was not until 1917 or 1918 that one of his loyal followers, Gan-gabehn Majumdar, located some spinning wheels in Raroda and encouraged some weavers to spin and weave cloth for the ashram. The next step was to try to produce their own cloth at the ashram; the first result was a cloth thirty inches wide, which was too narrow for an adequate dhoti. The first piece of cloth produced cost seventeen annas per yard, grossly expensive for the time. Finally Gangabehn was successful in getting cloth of adequate width, forty-five inches, made so that Gandhi was not "forced to wear a coarse short dhoti."⁹⁹

I have been unable to find out when and how Gandhi created the uniform of the Indian National Congress, but it was clearly between 1918 and 1920. During the first Non-Cooperative Movement of 1920-1921, the wearing of khadi and especially the cap, by now dubbed a "Gandhi cap," was widespread and became the symbolic focus, once again, of the British-Indian battle over headdress. In March of 1921, Gandhi reported that some European employers were ordering that the white khadi caps not be worn in the office. Gandhi commented that "under the rule of Ravana," the villain in the Ramayana, "keeping a picture of Vishnu in one's house was an offence, [so] it should not be surprising if in this Ravanarajya [Raj of Ravana] wearing a white cap . . . not using foreign cloth, or plying the spinning wheel came to be considered offences."¹⁰⁰

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A month later, the collector of Allahabad in eastern Uttar Pradesh forbade government employees from wearing "the beautiful, light inoffensive caps." A few months later in Simla, Indians in government service said they risked dismissal if they wore khadi dress and caps. A lawyer in Gujarat was fined two hundred rupees and ordered out of court for wearing the cap; when he returned an hour later still wearing the cap, another two hundred rupees were added to his fine.¹⁰¹ The campaign, as far as Gandhi was concerned, was highly successful. When an English businessman dismissed a young clerk for wearing the offending hat, he declared "the manager by his simple act of dismissal of a poor Indian employee had given political color to the transaction." The British were falling for Gandhi's symbolic transformation of the khadi cap into a sign of rebellion. He urged Indians everywhere, by the simple act of wearing a hat, to bring the Raj to its knees.¹⁰² The British, Gandhi argued, were confusing Non-Cooperation with the use of khadi, thereby reinforcing the power of the movement. If they were so frightened by the mere wearing of a khadi cap, which was a "convenience and symbol of swadeshi," what might happen if he, Gandhi, asked government employees to stop working, and not just wear khadi?

The chief justice of the High Court of Bombay issued a letter to all judges under his jurisdiction to bar pleaders in their courts from wearing the Gandhi cap; if they continued to do so, he said, they were to be charged with contempt of court for having been disrespectful to the judge. The chief justice went on to state, "No pleader should appear in Court if he wears any headdress *except* a turban." Gandhi also reported that a Muslim youth was shot by a European youth for selling or wearing a Gandhi cap."¹⁰³

Mad Dogs and Englishmen Go Out in the Midday Sun

Aside from the questions of power, status, and respect reflected in clothing, the British were also concerned about how their clothing might protect them from heat and disease. For the majority of English men and women the adaptation to life in India began on shipboard. The length and nature of the trip was to change from the eighteenth century, when the trip around the Cape of Good Hope to Madras or Calcutta could take upwards of seven or eight months. In the 1840s it was down to 100-120 days, with voyages sometimes beginning in England or in one of the Mediterranean ports going to Alexandria, then over land to Suez, and then catching another ship for Bombay or the east coast of India. With steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1867, the voyage could be done in a month or six weeks; by the time of the First World War it was down to a little over three weeks.

The form of the trip,' its symbolic significance, and the preparations for the trip and life aboard ship maintained a constancy through all these changes. Comforts aboard ship increased but the meaning of the voyage remained the same. The outward-bound voyage for most meant a new life and separation from family, friends, and the green fields, gardens, and cool damp climate of England. On ship the "griffin" (newcomer) or "spin" (unmarried woman or spinster) mingled with the old hands, who began their socialization to the codes of conduct expected of pakka sahibs and memsahibs.

The first set of questions the voyager faced, no matter what his or her purpose for going to India, was about collecting a proper kit for the voyage and for life in India. The voyagers in the early nineteenth century were advised to bring with them enough clothes to last through the voyage, as there were no laundry facilities aboard ship. Captain Williamson suggested no fewer than four dozen shirts of a very fine "stout calico, such as may be used in a hot climate, where linen is particularly prejudicial to health due to its feeling cold when moist with perspiration."¹⁰⁴ About a dozen of the shirts should be of superior quality and with frills. He advised an equal number of undershirts,- some of which should reach to the hips to serve as sleeping garments.

The male voyager would require four pairs of pantaloons, two of heavy and two of light cloth, in addition to an unspecified number to wear when he would get to India. He needed woven cotton underwear, about six dozen pairs of stockings of varying length and material, two or three velvet stocks, four dozen linen neck handkerchiefs, and an equal number made of some inferior material for underwear, plus two or three woolen waistcoats and two dozen white Irish linen waistcoats. Our voyager should be equipped with a warm greatcoat, presumably for the Atlantic portion of the voyage, and two or three other coats or jackets for the voyage, along with several pairs of boots and shoes. Young men in the Company's military service, as they wouldn't know which regiment they were going to be assigned to, were warned not to have their uniforms made up in England, since they would not have the proper facings, collars, and cuffs. They should, however, take along a bolt of superfine scarlet broadcloth of good quality, which could be made up into uniform coats after arrival in India.

Captain Williamson was silent on the question of the necessary kit for a lady traveling to India. Rather he thought it necessary to instruct his readers on the costs and benefits of acquiring an Asian *chere amie*. Forty rupees a month or about forty pounds a year would provide our English sojourner not only with a bed companion but someone who could manage his household. Nine out of ten women, he advised his readers, "domiciled by gentlemen are Mussulmans, Hindus being far more scru-

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pulous."¹⁰⁵ The other possibility was a Portuguese lady, as they made far better housekeepers than their Muhammadan counterparts, but Williamson had found them too full of pride about their ancestry, and vindictive. Williamson provided his reader with ten pages of description of the jewelry which Indian ladies preferred and which made up part of their pay.

Fifteen years after Williamson's first edition of *India Vade Mecum*, a digest of this work, with additions, was produced by J. B. Gilchrist, the pioneer linguist who had written while still in India a series of grammars, dictionaries, and class books on Hindustani for the aid of Englishmen who had to learn the language. On his return from about twenty years in India in 1803, he opened up a language school in London. Times had changed and the reader would get no instructions from Gilchrist on hiring an Asian *chere amie*, but we are told about the kiteflying capacities of Muslim ladies and get an abridged version of Williamson's directory to Indian jewelry.

He did, though, provide a list of "Necessaries for a Lady Proceeding to India":

- 72 Chemises
- 36 Night Gowns
- 36 Night Caps
- 3 Flannel Petticoats
- 12 Middle ditto, without bodies
- 12 Slips
- 36 Pr. Cotton Stockings
- 24 Pr. Silk ditto
- 2 Pr. Black Silk ditto
- 18 White Dresses
- 6 Coloured ditto
- 6 Evening ditto
- 60 Pocket Handkerchiefs
- 4 Dressing Gowns
- Silk Pelisse
- 3 Bonnets
- 12 Morning Caps
- 24 Pr. Long Gloves
- 24 Pr. Short Gloves
- 4 Corsets
- 6 Pr. of Sheets
- 6 Pillow Cases
- 36 Towels
- Riding Habit. . .

The quantities of clothes suggested for both men and women going to live in India did not vary much through the first half of the nineteenth century, but the nature of the materials thought best fitted for the Indian climate did. Gilchrisi advised ladies going to India to take fifteen flannel petticoats, and for civilian employees of the Company he advised taking about twelve yards of flannel for waistcoats. There is indeed a cold season in India when flannel and woolen clothes are desirable, particularly in the evening. But Gilchrist does not discuss the use of various kinds of cloth for clothes, nor does he comment on the objections of Dr. James Johnson to the use of flannel clothes in India.

Johnson, a naval surgeon who served in India and the West Indies, was the author of an extensive discussion of the diseases of India in relation to the climate and its effects on Europeans, published in 1813. The European, when he enters the tropics, said Johnson, "must bid adieu to the luxury of linen," linen being the common textile used for underwear by Europeans of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The danger of linen in the tropics was its retention of perspiration, for if there was a breeze the wet linen "would often occasion a shiver and be followed by dangerous consequences." Johnson went on to explain that flannel was inconvenient for three reasons: it was too heavy, it was a much too slow conductor of heat from the body, and most importantly it was too irritating to the skin, and would "increase the action of the perspiratory vessels on the surface, where our great object is to moderate that process."¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, for many decades thereafter flannel next to the skin was recommended to the European living in the tropics.

From the time of the Greeks down to the early nineteenth century, there was a cluster of ideas about the internal heat of the body, "the vital flame innate in heart," which had to be cooled by breathing and by the production of fluids and vapors, bile, urine, phlegm, and sweat. Not only was respiration necessary to cool the body but the skin itself was thought to breathe through the pores as well. The pores of the skin were involved therefore in a double function of bringing cool air in and allowing waste to leave in the form of sweat and vapors. It was long believed by medical practitioners and scientists that there were two forms of perspiration: the visible one and an invisible one, termed insensible perspiration. This insensible perspiration was the means by which "the denser excrement is eliminated." If this necessary body function was blocked, sickness and disease would follow. Hence the use of heavy bed clothes, heated rooms, hot baths, and hot drinks for the treatment of disease and to "release obstructions of the pores."¹⁰⁸

Associated with the theories about perspiration, visible and insensible, was the doctrine of the "consent of parts" or "sympathies." Dr.

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Johnson explained: "There exists between different and often distant parts of the body, a certain connexion or relation, that is, when *one* is affected by particular impressions, the *other*, sympathises, as it were, and takes on a kind of analogous action." The most widely noted of these sympathies is between the external surface, the skin of the body, and "the internal surface of the alimentary canal." Johnson went on to explain this relationship by an example. There is a man who has been out in the hot sun and his body temperature has risen to 100 degrees. When he comes in, he takes a glass of cold water and his body cools to 99, at this point "the external surface of the body immediately sympathising with the internal surface of the stomach relaxes, and a *mild* perspiration breaks out, which reduces the temperature to its natural standard, 98 degrees."¹⁰⁹

Theories about the role of perspiration in "the consent of parts" were to continue to be standard assumptions in medical practice until the twentieth century, and were to have a determining effect on the clothes which Europeans wore in India and other tropical areas. Physicians, old India hands, tropical outfitters, and the writers of guide books and manuals of instruction were unanimous and constant in advising the traveler or sojourner in India to wear flannel next to the skin at all times. For example: "Most people wear flannel under their clothes, and a very proper practice it is, and an excellent protection against sudden alterations of weather."¹¹⁰ And: "whatever may be said upon the subject of wearing flannel in India, I am quite certain that no one thing is more essential to health in warm climates than the continual use of flannel."¹¹¹

W. J. Moore, deputy surgeon general of the Indian Medical Service, wrote *A Manual of Family Medicine for India*, which won a prize offered by the Government of India in 1873 for the production of a manual suitable for use for all those British scattered about India, "more or less remote from medical and surgical aid." In its various editions this was to be the standard work on health and hygiene for Europeans in "unhealthy localities" until the 1920s. Moore advised equestrians, even in the hottest weather, to wear "cord breeches and flannel, with overcoat of flannel or cotton" when out riding.¹¹²

Dr. Julius Jefferies, inventor of the *sola topi*, wrote extensively on the relationship between clothes and health in the European military in India. He argued that the campaigner's skin required a protective partition between it and the atmosphere as a barrier "against the passage of heat and gaseous particles either way." The physical properties of flannel made it the ideal textile for this important function, as it was "slow conducting, porous and spongy." This enabled flannel to "husband the resources of the skin"; it blocked the entrance of heat from the air into the body and prevented the too rapid cooling off of the body as it husbanded

"all sensible perspiration." He recommended wearing flannel underwear that covered the whole body and the arms and legs. Having worn such an outfit himself for seven years, he completely escaped from cholera, dysentery, and fever.

By the 1880s the injunction to wear flannel next to the skin had become reduced to the wearing of a flannel or woolen cummerbund at all times around the waist; this was referred to as a "cholera belt."¹¹⁴ When I went to India by sea in July of 1952, as soon as we entered the Suez Canal I was warned by fellow passengers never to sleep without something covering my middle, particularly if I were under a fan. This advice was reinforced by my edition of Murray's guide, published in 1949, which strongly recommended a flannel cummerbund, a belt of flannel 8 inches to 12 inches wide around the waist with tapes over the shoulder, to be worn at all times.¹¹⁵

The redoubtable Flora Annie Steel, who spent twenty years in India in small district towns in the Punjab as the wife of a collector and magistrate, and who was an educational officer and novelist, was one of the few who cast doubt on the desirability of heavy clothing and flannel next to the skin during the hot season. Although she stated that "flannel next to the skin day and night is of course the shibboleth of doctors, and doubtless they are right," in the next sentence she cited her own experience of having spent many hot seasons on the plains, comfortably wearing silk, discarding her stays, and dressing in nun's veiling and serge. The key to health, she said, was proper food and "avoiding chills and heats."¹¹⁶

Even after cholera was established to be a water-borne disease, the cummerbund continued to be regular issue in the British, French, and German armies in the tropics. The American army of occupation in the Philippines was issued flannel shirts. Periodic unannounced inspections were ordered for the Bengal army as late as 1888 to insure that the men continued to wear their cholera belts.¹¹⁷ Although by 1900 the flannel cummerbund was no longer worn to prevent cholera, it continued to be worn as protection against dysentery, diarrhea, and liver disorders, and was widely believed to maintain the bowels in good working order. The concerns of the British in India with their colons is neatly summed up in the statement of "an ex-civilian" offering advice to a newcomer. "If I were asked what is necessary for a man going to India in any department? I should say good bowels and Hindustani; failing either he will not succeed."¹¹⁸

The insistence on the use of flannel and the cummerbund, rooted in a theory of disease, had highly charged symbolic significance. In the cultural construction of the body, Europeans saw the body as having two halves: the half above the waist was the locus of the higher functions,

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thought, and conscience; the heart and head were the centers of the senses, feelings, and passions. The top half of the body was thus positively valued and was pure. The lower half of the body was seen as impure, the site of basic instincts that had to be controlled. Renbourn noted that "the flannel belt has become symbolic of duty, of a tight rein over basic instincts and of protection from a hostile environment."¹¹⁹

From the earliest days to the present, Europeans have viewed the Indian environment as dangerous. The heat, the direct rays of the sun, the heavy moisture in the air during the rainy season, the dust and hot winds of the dry season, the odors of the extensive marshes, the sudden drops of temperature in the evenings and dew of early morning, the odor of urine, feces, of rotting fruit and vegetables of the crowded cities and towns—these meant danger, pestilence, and disease, sudden death or lingering maladies, enervation and ultimately the degeneration of the vigorous European constitution.

Learned arguments developed that reflected changes in biological and social theory throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as to whether white men could ever adapt to life in the tropics. One school held that with adequate precautions and through the process of "seasoning,"—changing diet, adjusting one's clothes, mode of life and accepting an initial period of fevers and fluxes—the body could adjust to a radically different climate. This process could be made more effective if proper personal hygiene and adequate sanitary measures were followed, relating to water, preparation of food, and disposal of body wastes. Attention had also to be paid to the location and construction of proper housing for Europeans to ensure free circulation of air to carry off as quickly as possible disease-inducing miasmas. A requisite for the health of the white man in the tropics was the prohibition, particularly in the heat of the sun, of any strenuous physical exercise. An army of dark-skinned servants was required to relieve the sahib of strenuous work. Even the enlisted white man in the tropics required personal servants to carry his pack during marches by day, and needed "coolies" for the necessary constructions accompanying military actions. There was an opposing school which argued that even with all these precautions white men could not adjust to the tropics.

To the late-twentieth-century reader, there would seem to be a contradiction between the concerns of Europeans to ensure for fresh, easily circulating, clean air, and their clothes, which prevented the circulation of air. The men wore tight-fitting jackets and well-buttoned shirts bound round the middle with a cummerbund, and long flannel underwear. The women were layered with tight-fitting blouses or bodices, heavy skirts, multiple flannel chemise and underdrawers, and tightly laced stays. But whatever else their function and meaning to the British in nineteenth-

century India, clothes were a protective device against the manifest dangers of foul air emanating from marshes, swamps, rice fields, and the animal exhalations of humans. The air was so saturated with miasmata, Emma Roberts cautioned her readers, that even in the warm weather they should not dispense with their mosquito nets, under the mistaken impression that they "prevent the free circulation of the air." In addition to the protection they afford from the bite of insects, they also protect "from the miasma with which the atmosphere is frequently loaded. The moisture which is often found on the outside of these curtains showing how much they tend to preserve the party sleeping within from actual contact with baleful influences." Malaria, cholera, bowel disorders, chills, fevers, and croup were believed to be caused by the atmosphere. There' was a perpetual and never-ending battle fought against the effects of chills, which appeared to be more dangerous than heat. To sleep in a draught could expose one to be awakened with a "stroke of the land wind," which in some instances "will deprive the individual so attacked, of the use of the limbs, and will at any rate be productive of severe pain."¹²⁰

How was it that Indians could live and work in an atmosphere so highly dangerous to Europeans? It turns out that Indian anatomy, skin, and physiology are different from that of the Europeans. Dr. Johnson observed that boatmen could row for hours in the "scorching noontime heat," and when a boat would become stranded on a sand bar would jump into the water to free it. If a European would subject his body to such sudden changes in the surface temperature of the skin, he did so at "the risk of his life" or the destruction of his health. Nature fortunately has provided the poor Indian who has to labor in such a fashion with protection in the "color and texture of his skin." It was lucky for the Europeans who had to depend on the Indian's labor that the "extreme vessels" (pores) of the Indian's skin "are neither so violently stimulated by the heat, nor so easily struck torpid by sudden transitions to cold." The Indian's skin and the whole process of perspiring are different from that of the Europeans. Indian skins "secrete a very different kind of fluid being more of an oily and tenacious nature than the sweat of the European."¹²¹ Not only did visible perspiration and insensible perspiration pass through the skin, disease-causing miasmas could enter the European's body through the same means, with pain and death following in short" order.

As if the miasmata-laden atmosphere of India was not enough of a threat, another killer lay in wait for the unsuspecting European—the sun. Dr. Johnson had noted that the two indispensable items of Indian clothing were the cummerbund and the turban: the one to protect the viscera of the abdomen from the deleterious impressions of cold, the

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"other, to defend the head from the direct rays of a powerful sun."¹²² Johnson recommended not that Europeans adopt turbans as their headgear in India, rather that they place a wet handkerchief folded in their tall beaver hats to keep their heads cool.

The British in India did not develop and widely use any special hat as protection from the sun until the 1840s. Europeans had long feared direct exposure during the hot season to "the blows or strokes" of the sun, which it was believed caused apoplexy or sunstroke.¹²³ Indians and other dark-skinned peoples were believed by Europeans to be immune from these blows or strokes because they had a denser scalp or a thicker cranium. If a European man had to be out in the sun in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, he made sure his head was covered, usually with a tall stovepipe hat, and if he was walking he was frequently accompanied by a servant carrying a chatta, an umbrella or sun shade. Dr. Julius Jefferies, who was nothing if not inventive, stated that when he was in the Himalayas in 1824, "where the power of the sun is very great," he had made for himself a gothic-shaped hat with a wicker frame, over which he placed layers of cotton Wadding, lined inside and out with white silk, and with ventilating space for free movement of air. He followed this hat with another: "the next which I used for several years had a cylindrical crown of large dimensions and a very broad brim. It was formed of two layers of pith *sola*, one-third inch thick, nearly one inch apart all around the top, with very free exits for the currents of air."¹²⁴ Jefferies was referring to pith of the *sola* plant, a light, easily shaped material. Sometimes the helmets made from *sola* were referred to by the British as "solar" topis. *Topi* is the Hindi term for hat, the Hindi *sola* being changed into the English "solar" by borrowing and a reanalysis through a folk etymology into a "solar topi" (sun hat).

During the siege of Delhi and the defense of the Residency in Lucknow in 1857, which took place during part of the hot season and during the monsoon, the formality of British military dress broke down. Large numbers of European and Indian troops had to march and maneuver in what were defined as terrible conditions. This was reflected in the protective headgear. While some troops fresh from Britain continued to wear their bearskin buskins, shakos, and forage caps, others, particularly officers, took to wearing helmets they thought more fitted to the exigencies of having to fight in the sun. Most popular were a wicker helmet that was vaguely modeled on Roman military headgear, with a pagri wrapped around the lower part of the crown; *sola* topis, with broad brims; and the "Napier topi," a brimless hat that featured a pagri acting as a neck curtain to keep the rays of the sun from the back of the neck. British officers who led irregular cavalry units frequently wore turbans, as did their men. The ever-inventive Dr. Jefferies, who by now had re-

tired to England, actively proselytized for several of his own inventions in a book, *The British Army in India: Its Preservation by an Appropriate Clothing*; and in his extensive testimony before the Royal Sanitary Commission on the Army in India in 1863.

Jefferies assumed that very few natives of Britain "can long endure exposure to the sun without serious damage to the constitution unless . . . scientifically protected." He further assumed that to protect the British soldier in India effectively one had to proceed in a "scientific manner, and neither experience or usages of the Indians as far as clothes are concerned can provide a guide in developing the correct solutions to the problem." After explaining the processes by which heat is increased or decreased in its effects on the body, he criticized existing clothes and hats to show that they accumulate and fix heat, particularly on the head. The direct rays of the sun and high atmospheric temperatures in India excite the nervous skin, he said, especially that of the head, and the brain then acts on the impression from the overly excited skin "so acutely as to rule its own destruction by apoplectic congestion. The man falls struck by the sun. But much more frequently the brain, *the fountain of vital influence*, impresses its infirmity upon all the other organs, especially the liver, intestines and skin."¹²⁵ Having analyzed the causes of sunstroke in relation to the "killer clothing" which the British soldier had to wear, Jefferies turned to the question of the design of a scientifically produced helmet and body covering that would protect the soldier from the effects of the sun and atmosphere and his human enemies as well.

He designed helmets with an internal suspension system fitted to the actual head shape of the wearer, which allowed for several inches of air space between the top of the head and crown of the helmet. They were also designed to have a ventilating system based on convection, so that air would freely circulate and thereby keep the head cool through the evaporation of perspiration, and curtains of cloth to protect the back of the neck.¹²⁶ Jefferies then went on to develop a design of "body dress for British soldiers in India." He criticized the current practice of the army which encased men in heavy, tight-fitting jackets and trousers that were far "too retentive of the animal heat." Some had argued that the least and lightest clothing was best, as it allowed the freest action of evaporation. However, light cotton clothing without flannel underwear did not protect "the spine and trunk of the body" from the rays of the sun and radiations from walls and the ground. The back of a marching soldier exposed for many successive hours to the fierce "impulses of a tropical sun" needed more protection than a few layers of clothing. Jefferies advocated a kind of fore-and-aft curtain of metalized cloth, which would be layered on the front and back of the soldier, reflecting the sun and also allowing for convection to occur to carry off some of the heat.

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As far as I know no one took seriously Jefferies' elaborate designs for headgear and "cun screen tunic" for soldiers or civilians. The sola topi in its military version of canvas, pith and later cork became standard summer dress for the European troops. To meet Jefferies' and others' concern for protection of the neck and especially the spine, neck curtains could be added to the rear brim of the sola topi, or a long strip of cloth could be wrapped around the crown, with a long end dangling down to provide a neck curtain.

Many physicians, though, felt that simple cloth was not enough protection for so vital a part of the body as the spine, and the spine pad or protector was designed. Dr. Moore graphically described the perils to which the spine was exposed, and offered this prescription:

What is required is a permanent and immovable protection for the spine; a protection which may be put on and off with the clothing. And this is to be obtained by placing a pad about seven inches long and three wide from the collar of the coat to about the lower angle of the blade-bone. This pad should be constructed of cork shavings, a material which, while acting as a non-conductor of heat, is light, and sufficiently soft not to occasion inconvenience even if lain upon. The shavings should be stitched, so that the position of the pad cannot alter. The thickness of the pad should be about three inches.¹²⁷

The sahibs had by 1870 generally adopted a "uniform," the distinctive components of which were sola topi with pugri, spinal pad, and cholera belt of flannel cummerbund. The topi was the most obvious mark of the ruling caste. British were rarely, from this time until the final demise of the empire, bare-headed. Men, women, and children each had their versions of the topi. The military, police, civilians, and political officers each had distinctive types of protection from the common enemy, the Indian sun. In the hills or during the cool season the topi might be replaced with the felt terai hat, which originated with the Gurkhas and subsequently spread into other parts of the empire, particularly South and East Africa, where the double terai with its distinctive red silk lining was to be popular until the 1960s—its name, *terai* (the wooded swampy sub-Himalayan tract), indicating its origins.

Medical research and theory continued to explore the effects of the sun's rays and heat on the European heads and bodies in India. By the end of the nineteenth century, the term "sun stroke" tended to be replaced by the term "heat stroke," and physicians began to argue that it might not be the direct rays of the sun beating on the cranium which were the direct cause of sun stroke. The experience of white-skinned troops, American, Australian, and British, who worked and fought in the southwest Pacific and in the China, Burma, and India theaters of World War

II, finally put to rest the strongly held beliefs that white men couldn't survive in the tropics if they worked in the noonday sun without their pith helmets and specially designed heavy protective clothing. It was found that minimally dressed, bare-headed soldiers could toil all day in the tropical sun, as long as "they had plenty of water and could retreat into the shade occasionally. Today the pith helmet is all but gone in India; it is occasionally seen in a kind of scaled-down cheap version of a khaki canvas-covered pith helmet on the head of an officious stationmaster or whistle-blowing conductor, a last heritage of the Eurasians who provided many of the crews for the Indian railways in the pre-Independence days.

Heads and Feet: Turbans and Shoes

From the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the British and Indians fought out a battle about the proper forms of respectful behavior, centered on heads and feet. But to say that turbans, caps, and shoes were symbolically charged for both groups tells us little. What were the underlying meanings of this battle?

Europeans explained the nature of Indian headdress in functionalist and materialist terms: the turban was for the protection of the head. Watson described the Indian turban as providing "protection from the heat of the sun, it is usually of a fine muslin-like texture, which when folded, is at once bulky and porous—this admirably fulfilling its main purpose . . . [the light cloth] is a good non-conductor" and "allows the free escape of perspiration."¹²⁵ Indians clearly did not share the idea that the turban or other headdresses were primarily for protection from the sun. The elaborate decoration of the caps, the jewel-bedecked turbans of the rulers, and the choice of a hat as a major symbol of the Nationalist movement all indicate that hats are much more than a form of protection from the heat or the rays of the sun.

I can only sketch some of the possibilities that might help explain the significance of head coverings for Indians. Clearly, there is no simple answer to the question of the significance of the head for Indians. Abu'l Fazl wrote that for Muslims the head is the seat of the senses.¹²⁹ For Hindus the head is the locus of the eyes, including the third or inner eye in the center of the forehead. Lawrence Babb has persuasively argued that sight is the crucial sense cosmographically for Hindus. "Hindus wish to see their deities."¹³⁰ Today, Hindus live in constant sight of the deities, in the form of ubiquitous colored lithographs, which emphasize and accentuate the face and eyes of the deities. Indians wish to see and be seen, to be in the sight of, to have the glance of, not only

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their deities, but persons of power. The concept of darshan, to see and be seen, includes going to a temple, visiting a holy man or guru, or waiting for a glimpse of a movie star or the prime minister.

Babb stresses that the Hindu conception of "seeing" is not "just a passive product" of "sensory data originating in the outer world"; it involves the observer directly with the person or deity seen. Hindus live in a substantive world in which there are constant flows of various forms of matter, among them emanations from "the inner person, outward through eyes to engage directly with objects seen, and to bring something of these objects back to the seer."¹³¹ Not only is the head the seat of sight, but it is also the part of the body that concentrates positive flows of substances and powers within the body. In the practice of raj yoga, for example, one seeks to concentrate through exercise and meditation the power of the whole body in the head.

As the head is the locus of power and superior forms of knowledge, the feet become the opposite. The feet are "the sources of downward and outward currents of inferior matter." When a Hindu visits a guru, a parent, a patron, a landlord, a government official, or a god, he or she will touch their feet. This is an "act of submission or surrender" but it is also a reciprocal act, as one is obliged to offer "shelter and protection to the one who has surrendered." By touching the feet one is taking what is ostensibly base and "impure" from a superior being and treating it as valuable and "pure."¹³²

I think Babb's exegesis and analysis, which draws on the work of Wadley and Marriott in their discussions of power and substantive flows, provides an explanation for the significance of the head and feet, and hence their coverings. It explains why Lord Valentia was correct in surmising that his feet, if pointed toward the peshwa, would have defiled him; they were the source of impurity. Shoes and slippers were dirty, not just from being used to walk around in, but as the repositories of base substances flowing from the wearer's body. This is why it was an Indian custom not only to take off one's dirty shoes or slippers when entering the space of a superior, but more importantly, to sit so that the feet would not imperil the well-being of others.

The solution worked out in Indian courts to accommodate the inability of Europeans to sit for long periods on a rug or a cushion with their feet tucked under them was to allow them to sit on chairs; thus their feet, covered or uncovered, would be facing downward. Today, or at least yesterday—thirty-five years ago when I was doing field work in a village—the few villagers who had chairs would sit on them, particularly if they had provided me with a chair, but with their feet off the ground and tucked up under them.

A painting by Thomas Daniel, based on sketches by James Wales,

shows Sir Charles Malet delivering a ratified treaty to the peshwa in Poona in 1792; we see almost all the Indians and Europeans sitting or kneeling on a large rug, while the peshwa sits on a slightly raised platform, supported by large cushions. Of the fifty-odd figures depicted, all but two have their feet placed so that they cannot be seen. Some of the English appear to have lap cloths or cummerbunds covering their feet; one English military officer is wearing boots, but the sole of his boot is on the ground. One Indian soldier is kneeling in such a fashion that one bare foot can be seen, but he too has the sole of his foot firmly on the rug.¹³³

The writers of guide books who advised British travelers never to touch an Indian on his turban or head were correct, but this was not merely politeness in observing yet another peculiar Indian custom; because the hands, like the feet and mouth, are sources of impurities, touching the head would threaten the well-being of the Indian being touched.

In the conceptual scheme which the British created to understand and to act in India, they constantly followed the same logic; they reduced vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms. If Indians wore shoes in the presence of sahibs, they were being disrespectful in the early nineteenth century. But to Indians, the proper wearing of slippers or shoes stood for a whole difference in cosmology.

The European concepts of custom and superstition were a means to encompass and explain behavior and thought, and allowed the British to save themselves the effort of understanding or adequately explaining the subtle or not-too-subtle meanings attached to the actions of their subjects. Once the British had defined something as an Indian custom, or traditional dress, or the proper form of salutation, any deviation from it was defined as rebellion and an act to be punished. India was redefined by the British to be a place of rules and orders; once the British had defined to their own satisfaction what they construed as Indian rules and customs, then the Indians had to conform to these constructions. Wearing the Gandhi cap thus was a metonym for disorder. To the Indian this cap was indeed a symbol, but a highly complex one. Involving a cos-mological system which set the meaning of the head and its covering, it had as well an ideological referent as a critique of British rule in India, and embodied to its wearer a protest against the insults and deprivations of 150 years of colonial rule.