

India

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India extends from the high Himalayas in the northeast to the Karakoram and Hindu Kush ranges in the northwest. The major rivers—the Indus, Ganges, and Yamuna—spring from the high, snowy mountains, which were, for the area's ancient inhabitants, the home of the gods and of purity, and where the great sages meditated.

Below the Karakoram range lies the beautiful valley of Kashmir; to the north of Kashmir is Ladakh. Although the mountains have always formed forbidding barriers, passes through them permitted the migration of a range of ethnic groups from Central Asia and beyond. These nomads—the Scythians, the Huns, and many others—settled in North India and then penetrated further, bringing varied lifestyles, beliefs, ideas, and skills, as well as ways to express themselves through dress, ornaments, rituals, rites of passage, myths, deities, and spirits.

The valley of the verdant Punjab, Haryana—India's granary—attracted large-scale migrations from ancient times. Rajasthan and parts of Kutch are in the Thar Desert, while the oldest mountain range, the Aravalli, runs from Gujarat and Rajasthan to the open spaces of the Delhi ridge, which conservationists are desperately trying to save. The desert was inhabited by nomads from Central Asia who created fiefdoms in Gujarat and Rajasthan in the seventh century C.E. These princes had their own chivalrous traditions and legends, which bards have kept alive in their ballads into the early twenty-first century. Dress and jewelry were elaborate, and festive celebrations occurred among both the rich and the poor. Saurashtra, in Gujarat, had nearly two hundred principalities, and Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh together had innumerable small and large estates, all of which were laws unto themselves. Each state would try to outdo the others in the opulence of their dress, courtly life, and celebrations.

The Vindhya Range divides northern from southern India. The central section consists of the Deccan Plateau and its two rivers, the Godavari and the Krishna, while the Eastern and Western Ghats are the small hills that edge the coastal areas. The Deccan Plateau, which rolls down to the sea, is the land of the Dravidian people. The original inhabitants of this area were Stone Age cave dwellers whose traces have been found by archaeologists. Some descendants of these ancient people still cling to their age-old matrilineal social structure.

The country's varying geoclimatic conditions have resulted in a range of textiles and manners of dress. Cultural milieu,

the rich ethnic mix, and changing allegiances have also had a huge influence. Furthermore, while peoples from Central Asia brought a range of textile designs and modes of dress with them, the strongest tradition (as in practically every traditional society), for women as well as men, is the draping and wrapping of cloth, for uncut, unstitched fabric is considered pure, sacred, and powerful.

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

Harappan statues, which have been dated to approximately 3000 B.C.E., depict the garments worn by the most ancient Indians. A priestlike bearded man is shown wearing a togalike robe that leaves the right shoulder and arm bare; on his forearm is an armband, and on his head is a coronet with a central circular decoration. The robe appears to be printed or, more likely, embroidered or appliquéd in a trefoil pattern. The trefoil motifs have holes at the centers of the three circles, suggesting that stone or colored faience may have been embedded there. Harappan female figures are scantily clad. A naked female with heavy bangles on one arm, thought to represent a dancer, could have been a votive figure that would have been dressed (also in a togalike garment, leaving the decorated arm uncovered) for ritual use, a custom observed throughout India in the early twenty-first century. Other excavated female figurines wear miniskirts, necklaces, and elaborate headdresses. The skirts are fastened either by sashes or beaded girdles, which continued to be used in later times. One figure wears a short cloak leaving the breasts bare. A fan-shaped headdress is seen on statues of both sexes. Male figures appear to wear a neck scarf that may be an early *angavastram*, a traditional scarf still used in the early twenty-first century. However, the Harappan scarves are shown held by a brooch and could be signs of office.

The Vedic period has traditionally been associated with the Aryans and their entry into India around 2000 B.C.E., though this date has been disputed, as it has been learned that Central Asian tribes had been moving into northern India and beyond from very early times. The Vedic hymns refer to the Indus Valley's famous cotton and Gandhara's wool and dyed fabrics. The *kambala*, or blanket, appears to have been used by both men and women as a wrapper. The earliest Vedic hymn, the *Rig Veda* (ca. 2000 B.C.E.), refers to garments as *vasas*. A number of words are used for cloth, thus indicating a consciousness of clothing styles. *Suvasas* meant "well-dressed," and *suvasana* described a person arrayed in splendid garments. The word *surabi* meant "well-fitting," which denotes stitched garments. The god Pusan is called a "weaver of garments," *vaso vaya*, for it was he who fashioned different forms. A mystical quality is associated with apparel. An undressed man could not offer sacrifices to the gods—an essential aspect of Vedic life—for he would be complete only when properly dressed.

The common mode of dress during the Vedic period was draping. The most important item was the *nivi*, which was wrapped around the waist according to the wearer's status and tradition. Worn over this was the *vasas*, which could be a drape, a wrap, or a jacket (known as *drapi* or *atka*). The *uttariya* was a draped upper garment. The *pratidhi*, or breast cover, was either wrapped around the breasts, as is still done in Tripura, or tied at the back. The *atka*, worn by men, was a long, close-fitting coat often

described as being embroidered with gold thread. *Peasa* was a gold-embroidered or woven cloth used for making pleated skirts. It is interesting that many of these words continue to be used in slightly different forms. *Atka* may be *achkan*, a long, close-fitting coat worn by men, while *peashwa* may be the root of *peshwaz*, the term for a long, flowing dress joining skirt and upper garment and worn by women at the Rajput courts; it was also adopted by dancers. Different turban styles are mentioned and appear also to have been worn by women to denote status.

There are references in the Vedas to mantles embroidered with gold thread, and proof (in a description of borders running the length of a cloth and of two borders across its width) that the *dhoti*, the lower wrapped garment, had already emerged during this period. The all-around border indicates that such cloth was used as a veil, a shawl, or an *odhni* for the upper part of the body.

THE EARLY HISTORICAL PERIOD

Buddhist and Jain literature, especially the Jataka tales, provides details about life between 642 and 320 B.C.E. Descriptions of garments and fabrics forbidden to monks and mendicants are indicators of what was worn by laypersons. Cloth of bark, *balkala*; fabric made from human hair, *kesa-kembala*; and owl feathers and deerskin were forbidden to monks, as were patterned and dyed garments. What is interesting is that the *kanchuka*, the stitched jacket, was also prohibited for monks and mendicants, which suggests that they could not wear stitched cloths; this is still the case among some sects in the early twenty-first century. Nuns, however, were allowed the use of bodices.

The apparel worn by laypersons consisted of the *antarvasuka*, or loincloth; the *uttarasanga*, a mantle for covering the upper body; and the *usnisa*, or turban. Tunics or jackets were worn by both men and women. All items appear to have been mostly unstitched, but the style of draping varied according to status, region, and taste. The *dhoti* could be pleated to fall in front like an elephant's trunk or like a fan to form a sort of fish tail, as is still done by some dancers in South India. The sash known as *kamar-band* was also intricately knotted and draped. Shoes and sandals with linings and of varying shapes, materials, and colors are also mentioned, as are padded shoes with pointed ends like scorpion stings, still made in Punjab.

A study of sculptures from the Mauryan and Sunga periods (321–72 B.C.E.) provides a greater wealth of detail. Alongside a graphic description by the Greek ambassador to the Mauryan court of flowing garments worn by both men and women, and printed and woven with gold, dyed in multiple colors, and draped in a number of ways, the elaborate stone carvings at Barhut, Sanchi, and Pitalkhora in the Deccan give a good idea of dress forms. The *antariya* (lower-body wrap) was tied either in the middle at the waist or below the navel, and was tucked between the legs and taken to the back. Members of the upper class wore it ankle length, while the working class and peasantry wore it knee length. The *antariya* was fastened by a sash, varying from a short one tied at the waist to an elaborate one draped in many different ways. The *uttariya*, or upper garment, was worn in a range of styles, from an elegant drape to a casual wrap. At Barhut, a representation of one of the earliest stitched garments can be seen; it has a round neck tied with tassels and also ties at the waist.

Women wore the *antariya* either tucked in back or as a pleated, unstitched skirt, and they also used a sash. The *uttariyas*



An embroidered backless blouse from the nomadic people of Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, India, 1994. Photograph by Jasleen Dhamija.

of aristocratic women appear to have been very fine, with embroidered patterns and borders, and seem to have been used to cover the head. Sculpted figures wear elaborate earrings, as well as necklaces, armlets, bracelets, and belts. The *kantha* was worn close to the neck, while the larger *lambanam* carried chains, beads, and amulets. Men wore long necklaces adorned with animal heads. Girdles, armlets, and bangles were sported by women, along with rings and anklets in different forms. Some fine Mauryan jewelry made with the granulation technique was discovered in Taxila.

Dating from the time of the powerful Satavahana Empire (200 B.C.E.–250 C.E.) in southern India, the Amaravati caves, some of the caves at Ajanta, and remains at Nagarjunakonda contribute to an understanding of the dress and ornamentation of this period. The Satavahanas came to power as the Mauryan Empire was on the wane; the Mauryans had spread from the north to the Deccan, as well as to the east, influencing culture and traditions as they went. In addition, a mix of ethnic groups including Parthians, Scythians, and Greeks intermingled with the local Dravidians. Trade with Rome brought new ideas and materials and increased the level of prosperity.

Stitched garments were worn by men in the form of tunics, while lower garments consisted of a range of dhotis worn in

numerous ways, tucked between the legs, knee length, and tied with decorative sashes, or in a more elaborate ankle-length fashion. Stitched tunics with round or V-necks were unembellished except for a folded sash, which appears to have been worn in a range of ways and added a sense of style to these ensembles.

Women do not appear to have worn stitched clothes. Their antariyas were knotted either in the center or at the side and tightly wrapped; they appear to have been practically transparent, clearly outlining the limbs. Women did not wear turbans but dressed their hair in several styles: braided, in a chignon above the forehead (as in Kerala in the early twenty-first century), or in a bun at the nape of the neck.

Jewelry, in the form of numerous bangles, long necklaces, jeweled belts, and anklets, was elaborate. Women wore a range of jewels on their heads such as the *chudmani*, a lotus form still worn in southern India by brides and traditional dancers. Elaborate earrings were also common.

Royalty had emblems to distinguish them from commoners, including umbrellas, which were large; richly decorated with silk, gold embroidery, and appliqué; and open rather than folding as in Europe. The *chowrie*, or flywhisk, was used only for royalty or the gods. Royal standards and swords were also symbols of power, and thonged sandals appear to have been the king's prerogative. According to tradition, in the absence of the king, his sword and sandals represented him.

The Kushans (50–185 C.E.) ruled from the Gangetic Plain to Bactria in Central Asia. Part of the Yuezhi tribe that originally had come from China, they united five tribes under their chief Kujula Khadphises. The most powerful Kushan ruler was Kanishka (78–144 C.E.), a stone figure of whom, wearing elaborate stitched garments, can be seen at Mathura. His tunic extends below his knees with a girdle at the waist. Beneath the tunic he wears a pair of pants; over it is a heavy coat with out-turned lapels. His pants are tucked into heavy boots, and he appears to be wearing spurs.

Dress of this period exhibits certain stylistic transformations. The indigenous working people wore a simple, short *langot*, a knee-length wrapper tucked between the legs, with a short shoulder cloth, similar to the *gamcha*, which had multiple functions: as a turban to protect from the sun, as a towel, and as a sack for carrying goods. Foreign attendants at court, entertainers, and soldiers wore stitched clothes, as did traders. Nomadic influence can be seen in the adoption of the long-sleeved, knee-length tunic and of a knee-length coat, *choga*, worn over the tunic and tied with a girdle or a buckled belt. Pants were tucked into boots, and a pointed cap was worn, apparently made of felt and of a type still used by the Kirghiz people of Central Asia.

Women are shown in sculptures from Gandhara wearing a sari-like garment that appears to have derived from the Greco-Roman tradition of drapery. Worn tucked at the back and draped over the left shoulder, this style is seen in the sculptures at Mathura and resembles sari draping in the early twenty-first century. Some Gandharan figures also have an *uttariya*, draped over their shoulder like the *shalu*, worn in the early twenty-first century over the sari outside the home or for some ceremonies. In some cases the sculptured figures wear blouses underneath their draped antariya.

THE GUPTA PERIOD

The Gupta Empire was a golden period of creative expression. This empire stretched across most of the north, extending to

Balkh in the northeast, from 400 to the mid-eighth century C.E. Stitched garments were common, and regional differences began to emerge. The fact that the Kushan leaders, as well as the Sakas and the Scythians, who ruled in Gujarat in western India for two hundred years, sometimes wore stitched garments indicates that such clothing was associated with royalty and high officials. Thus, it became highly prestigious.

The late murals from the Ajanta caves provide details of colors, patterns, and drapery. Rulers depicted in court scenes appear to be wearing transparent, floating wraps and scarves, fine jewelry, and elaborate crowns and headdresses. Stitched garments are also seen. Gold coins, some of the most exquisite artifacts from this period, show men in full Kushan royal dress: coat, pants, and boots.

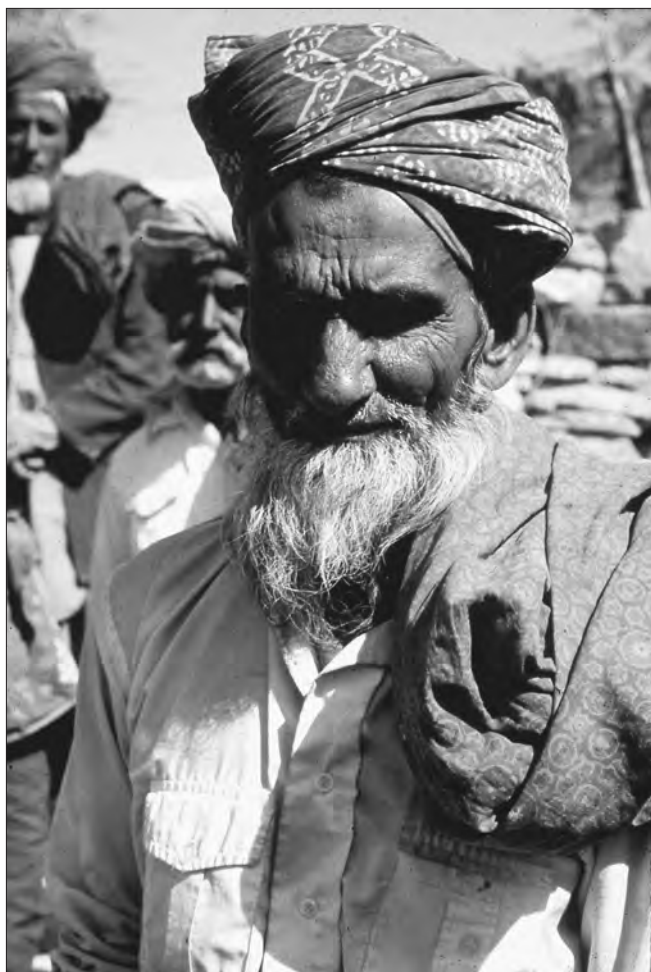
Women in the Gupta period wore the antariya in many different ways. The *kachcha* style of tucking it between the legs was not very common, and a different style of wrapped cloth, very short to ankle length, was worn. The wrap gave way to a stitched skirt with an *izar*, or tape, tied at the waist or below it with a sash. In some cases this skirt was worn like a sarong from armpit to mid-thigh. Ruling-class women wore longer skirts or ankle-length antariyas, while the working class wore shorter ones.

Perhaps due to Jain and Buddhist influences (nuns had been instructed to cover their breasts and wear loose garments to hide the curves of their bodies), different blouse shapes began to appear. A number of breast covers are mentioned in the literature, from bands, which raised the breasts, to *cholis* worn with the opening at the back and an apron to cover the stomach, or blouses tied in the front, which are still worn in the early twenty-first century.

Jewelry appears to have been finely worked in gold. Earrings were *kundalas*, hoops worn together with smaller pearl earrings at the top of the ear. The *karanphul*, or lotus flower, was another type, while the *kancala-kundalas*, tremulous earrings, swayed and twinkled with every movement. Women appear to have worn a quantity of pearls, including *muttavali*, a type of pearl necklace, or another magnificent necklace known as *vijayantika*, which combined pearls, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and sapphires. The *niksha*, coin necklace, was also popular and is still worn in the early twenty-first century. Armlets were used by men and women alike, sometimes in the form of a snake. Jeweled girdles suspended over the hips were provocatively draped and hung below the navel. Flowers, possibly fragrant, were used to decorate the hair and as garlands.

In the Deccan, the Vakatalias ruled in the fifth century B.C.E., to be succeeded by the powerful Chalukyan kings at Badami in Andhra. Further south were the Pallavas of Kanchipuram and the Pandyas of Madurai. The upper caste had absorbed Gupta influence, but in the interior people continued to follow traditional lifestyles. Royal men wore stitched tunics; sculptures from this time attest to the use of sleeved blouses among women. However, traditional draped and wrapped clothing for both men and women continued to be the norm. Turbans were worn by men, especially royalty, but never by women, nor are there depictions of women covering their heads. Even in the early twenty-first century, head covering by women in South India is associated with widowhood.

According to Moti Chandra, the lexica of the seventh century C.E. provide a range of information about dress of this period. In fact, the very existence of such sources is a sign that the terminology



A man wearing the traditional dress of the nomadic people of Kutch, featuring the type of printed cloth that was exported from the area from early times. Gujarat, India, 1982. Photograph by Jasleen Dhamija.

had become highly evolved. *Avarillam*, *ahornan*, and *uintarams* were all terms used to describe the *uttariya*. The head cover, *oddhanam* in Sanskrit, continued to be used in a modified form, called *odhni* or *odhana*, as did the *ghagharo*, which in the early twenty-first century is called *ghaghra* or *ghagri*. The jacket, tunic, or blouse was called *coula*, *kanchulka*, *kurpasaka*, *angoka*, and *kanchuka*, words that are still used in different parts of North India.

Jain sources are full of information on Indian garments used by both the clergy and the laity. The Cheda Sutras, which describe rules of conduct, are rich in material. Mention is made of jackets and quilted or draped tunics, as well as floor-length robes such as *aprapacina*. The shoemaker, *padukakrt* or *carmalet*, is mentioned as making a range of shoes. There are rules as to how often clothes are to be changed. The washing of garments is meticulously described, including hand-washing, *dhula*; calendering, *ghrstan* (that is, stretching cloth); starching, *mrsta*; and pleating and perfuming. There are also terms for sewing implements: needle, *suci* or *sevani*; and scissors, *kripani*, *kartari*, and *kalpani*.

THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM

It was only with the incursions of Mahmud of Ghazna in 997 C.E. that India's isolation ended. New influences from the Afghans

and Turks, as well as from the Arabs, led to the introduction of Islam. Along with these groups came Sufi mystics with their emphasis on egalitarianism. Because they reached out to the people, their influence spread widely. The urban centers of the Islamic world were closely interlinked, and the tradition of having ateliers attached to Islamic courts from Spain to Syria was continued in India, resulting in a major change in lifestyles and fashion.

With the founding of the Mamluk dynasty by Qutb-ud-din Aybak at Delhi in 1206, the Sultanate period began. In the early fourteenth century, Muhammad bin Tughlaq established the *dar al-tiraz*, court ateliers as described by the famous traveler Ibn Battuta. The historian Ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari (1301–1348) mentions that a *tiraz* factory employed four thousand silk weavers and four thousand brocade weavers, whose production was made into robes of honor, *khilats*, and robes, *kasawa*, for the sultan, his family, and his favorite courtiers. Amir Khusru Dehlavi, the great savant and poet, wrote that the clothing worn by kings and noblemen followed contemporary Persian fashion. Al-'Umari further observed that linen garments imported from Alexandria and "the land of Russians" were very fine and that only persons permitted by the ruler to do so could wear them. He also mentioned garments made in the style of Baghdad and described gold-embroidered robes. Sleeves were embroidered with *tiraz*. Thus there appears to have been a fair amount of mobility of fashion at this time.

A great deal of money seems to have been spent on special clothing. Firuz Shah Tughlaq is supposed to have worn an extremely valuable *kullah* cap over which a turban of fine material was tied. Four-cornered caps decorated with jewels were also worn. Men arranged their hair into locks or ringlets and added tassels. Learned men and judges wore long, striped gowns from Yemen.

Indian Muslim society was divided into four main groups: the secular and religious nobility, the traders, the artisans, and those who worked the land. The secular nobility was divided into *abl-i saif*, men of the sword, or warriors, and *abl-i qalam*, men of the pen; these groups were comprised of Turks, Afghans, Arabs, and Persians who tried to remain separate from the local population, whether Hindus or earlier Muslim converts. Turks and Afghans chose their wives from households that could trace their lineages back to their ancient tribes, thus maintaining their distinctive mode of dress and lifestyle. Dress divided the people. Muslims wore tailored clothes, while Hindus wore mostly unstitched garments, though Hindu men did wear jackets, which were tied at the side opposite of that worn by Muslim men. Hindu women wore a voluminous skirt or a sari, while Muslim women wore the *churidar pajama*, a tunic, and a *peshwa* with a veil.

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The next great change in lifestyle, thought, and administration came with the Mughals. Zahur-ud-din Muhammad Babur had made five forays into India, but it was not until 1526 that he was able to defeat Sultan Ibrahim and reach Delhi and Agra. In the four years that followed, he laid the foundation for an empire that lasted until the coming of the colonial powers from Europe. Babur, a poet, aesthete, and adventurous warrior, never really took to India; his first act was to establish a garden, since he longed for his homeland, the lush green valley of Fergana. It was his grandson, Akbar the Great, who tried to understand the rich culture

of the country over which he ruled and who realized the need to assimilate Hindu and Muslim culture.

The *Baburnama*, Babur's autobiography, gives a graphic description of the emperor's daily activities, also describing festivals and celebrations. It mentions the bestowing of robes of honor, but these are sable robes with buttons, more suitable for the cold of Central Asia. It also mentions the presentation to Babur's son Humayun of a *charqab*, possibly an elaborate Central Asian collar influenced by those worn by the Chinese. There is a further reference to the expensive hat worn by Humayun, known as *qulpaq*; he was also given a costly plume, which he probably wore on a cap or turban. Babur describes a *toshakhana*, a tent or storeroom where textiles and royal clothes were kept, including while on military campaigns, thus emphasizing the importance of dress even in camp. *Zunmar* was the dismissive term applied to clothing worn by non-Muslims.

Akbar's chronicler Abu'l Fazl recorded many of the changes introduced by the emperor in the area of court dress, including his interest in local traditions and his attempt to upgrade local skills by importing master craftsmen from many countries. These individuals were offered special grants of land, pensions, and so forth, and given Akbar's personal encouragement. He also introduced fine cotton and printed clothing as being suitable to the climate. The *chakdar jama* with pointed ends is typical of the age of Akbar and is seen being worn by men in miniature paintings of the time. Women wear veils, not caps, and appear to have used fine-quality cotton and worn multiple layers of fine cloth. Akbar also renamed garments using the Hindi language. *Jama* (coat) became *sarbgati*, "covering the entire body"; *izar* (pants) became *yar-piraban*, "the

companion of the coat"; *nimtana* (jacket) became *tanzeb*; *fauta* (belt) became *patgat*; *burqa* (veil) became *chitra gupta*; *kulab* (cap) became *sis sobha*; *muy-baf* (hair ribbon) became *hesghan*; *patka* (sash) became *katzeb*; *shal* (shawl) became *parmnarm*; and *pay-afzar* (shoes) became *charndharn*. Akbar realized that in order to intermingle the two cultures, strong racial associations with different lifestyles had to be overcome, and the combining of Hindu and Muslim dress was one important way to do this. Abu'l Fazl describes how the emperor took the *takauchiya*, an unlined Indian coat with a slit skirt and tied at the left, and had it made with a round skirt and tied at the right. It was typical of Akbar to alter the form of a garment that was identified with or acceptable to the Hindu community. He probably planned to make the *jama* acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims, though he was also conscious of the need to prevent misunderstandings. People could be recognized at a glance by the manner in which it was tied (to the left for Hindus and to the right for Muslims).

It had been compulsory during the Sultanate period, and continued to be so under the early Mughals, for local rajas, maharajas, and sardars to present themselves in the dress of the ruling court. This must have caused resentment. Akbar's aggressive attempts to assimilate Hindu dress into the courtly code led to a greater sense of acceptance. A study of miniatures from his time gives some indication of the changing styles. Special items were created by the emperors themselves. Just as Akbar designed the *dausbala*, a pair of shawls stitched together so that there was no wrong side, Jahangir (reigned 1605–1627) designed a special coat known as *nadiri*, which he mentions in his memoirs. Persian and Central Asian influences became far less important during this period.



Gracia Jat women in their traditional dress and jewelry. Kutch, Gujarat, India, 1982. Photograph by Jasleen Dhamija.

Akbar having married a Hindu princess, many Hindu traditions were introduced at court. Nur Jahan was known as a great designer in her own right and was responsible for a range of innovations. Toward the end of sixteenth century, the jama was being made of cloth so diaphanous as to allow the pants worn underneath it to be seen. This was a garment for summer wear.

Most Rajasthani men, both upper- and middle-class, wore the court styles, including a variety of jamas; the most common of these reached below the knee. Another type was almost long enough to cover the pants underneath it entirely. Sometimes the jama had full sleeves. Most women in northern India, however, were hesitant to copy exotic dress and continued to prefer the half-sleeved bodice (*choli*), the ankle-length skirt (*ghaghra*), and the head scarf (*odhni/odhani*). The upper garment was fully embroidered at the neck and on the sleeves and the tasseled ends of the transparent *odhni* were decorated with pom-poms of wool or silk. Pom-poms were also found on the strings tying armlets and bracelets and on shoes, at the ends of tassels, and they were also worn in the hair. Wives of noblemen and officials and high-ranking ladies, bewitched by the beauty of the Mughal style, adopted the jama with flowing skirt, tight pants, and *odhni*.

The emperor Jahangir, himself a painter, possessed a fine aesthetic sense. From the range of garments seen in miniatures from his reign, it is obvious that he was a fastidious dresser. He wore a colored turban with gold fringe at the top or a *serpech*, a jeweled, feathered turban. A pearl string encircled these turbans. His coats were invariably of brocaded silk. The *patkas* were woven with *butas*, a floral pattern.

The diaphanous jama went out of fashion around 1610, thought to be unfit for public wear and used only by entertainers. During this time beards also went out of fashion; Jahangir followed the example of his father and ordered his courtiers to shave. Nur Jahan, meanwhile, created her own dresses. The English diplomat Sir Thomas Roe was overwhelmed by the brilliance of the diamonds and pearls she wore.

Dress under Shah Jahan (reigned 1628–1658) became even more elegant and luxurious. The emperor's turban had, besides the Jahangiri string of pearls, a jeweled aigrette and a further border of jewels hanging from the sides. The turban itself was constructed from gold cloth. Shah Jahan's one surviving coat boasted extraordinary embroidery. His sash, *kamarband* or *patka*, and slippers were also lavishly decorated.

Aurangzeb (reigned 1658–1707) was a pious Muslim as well as an active, aggressive ruler. The overly luxurious life at court had fostered a certain laxity in government, which he tried to control, curbing opulence and reining in festive celebrations. Some historians have accused him of banning music and painting and prohibiting the wearing of silk at court. He could not have done so as he himself dressed magnificently. His turban was jeweled, his jama was elaborately patterned, and he wore pearl bracelets, armlets, precious necklaces, jeweled pendants, several rings, and a beautiful jade-handled dagger, which hung from a pendant clustered with pearls. During his reign, the skirt of the jama was widened and lengthened, and turbans became voluminous. Aurangzeb revived the beard but limited its size by ordering that no Muslim should wear one longer than the width of four fingers.

The eighteenth century saw the disintegration of the Mughal Empire under weak rulers who were unable to control court intrigues and unrest. Regional courts became more powerful and attracted artists, craftsmen, and traders. One court known for an

affluent but effete style was that of Oudh at Lucknow. Though the dress formula remained the same—jama, angarkha, *farshi pajama*—its style became a trifle exaggerated. Angarkhas became much wider and trailed on the ground. Women's churidar pajamas gave way to the *farshi pajama*, which was so voluminous that young pages were required to gather and carry them. The *kurta*, a loose tunic made of fine cotton with rich *chikan*, white-on-white embroidery, was introduced, as was the embroidered *topi*, or cap, often worn at a rakish angle. The story associated with the invention of the *topi* is that the innumerable women in the nawab's harem could attract his attention only by creating an unusual cap. The *sherwani*, a tight, calf-length coat, and *achkan*, a long, fitted coat for formal wear, became part of the dress of the Muslim elite. It continues to be worn in the early twenty-first century as formal wear by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims.

COLONIAL PERIOD

The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English arrived in India to ask for trading concessions from the Mughal rulers and were overwhelmed by their grandeur and wealth. According to Sir Thomas Roe, the English presented a sorry sight with their dull clothing, lack of entourage, and meager gifts, which they were afraid to present. Even the minor Indian princes were better equipped.

It is no wonder, then, that many foreign men who settled in India adopted local dress and even had local wives. However, all of this changed when the traders became colonizers and set up their own government to rule the country. The English wives who joined their men saw to it that distance was maintained between the natives and themselves, and dress played an important role in maintaining the image of the ruling elite. Thus, formal styles, dressing for dinner, and so forth became part of the colonial way of life. During the Great Delhi Durbar, the rulers of princely states and their entourages were instructed to wear traditional regional dress. When one of the *rajahs* did not conform, he was reprimanded. Thus, the English established a strict dress code, imitating the old Indian grand style, but giving it a European flavor.

The British established educational institutions and encouraged Indians who were going to work for colonial offices to adopt Western dress and habits. The European schools and colleges prescribed Western uniforms; princes and princesses were encouraged to hire English nannies, governesses, and tutors. A number of local officials sent out subtle messages to the gentry to adopt Western dress. If an important local *zamindar* came to see an English official and wore Western dress, he was offered a chair. If he wore European shoes, he was allowed to enter wearing them; if he wore Indian shoes, even if they were encrusted with pearls, he had to leave them outside. A number of princes adapted a mix-and-match style, wearing Indian regalia with a cloak displaying the decorations awarded them by the British. Clerks wore a strange combination of a *dhoti* with pumps, a shirt, a coat, a turban, and an umbrella. The younger generation took to Western dress, wearing Indian clothing only at home or for religious or festive occasions.

Indian women, when they ventured into European society, did not modify their dress, though they began to wear a petticoat underneath the *sari*, as well as a blouse that followed the Western fashions for puffed sleeves, collars, pleats, and so forth.



A young bride wearing a red sari as she collects holy water, India, 2002. Some researchers suggest that there are eighty-eight ways to tie, wrap, and wear a sari, although all garments of this name consist of a piece of cloth from four to nine yards (about four to eight meters) in length, draped around the body in a variety of styles. Photograph by Jasleen Dhamija.

The range of traditional male clothing became more restricted and was used only in princely homes. Even there, some men adopted the jodhpur coat (a short coat falling below the hips, with a closed neck—a shorter version of the achkan worn by North Indian men) and polo pants, which are still popular in the early twenty-first century as formal wear.

REGIONAL DRESS

Both men and women in North India traditionally wore the *salwar kamiz* (outfit consisting of a tunic and trousers), which originated in Central Asia. Over this women draped a *dupatta*, or veil, which covered the head and also the face in the presence of elderly men and outsiders. Men wore a turban and a *khes* or *chadar* as a wrapper. The *salwar* is not so common in the early twenty-first century; men wear the *tehmat* or *lacha*, a long cloth twisted tightly at the waist and tucked in at the sides. For special occasions they prefer gold-embroidered shoes made locally and a loose kurta. In the past the *lacha* was made of silk with a contrasting border.

Around their necks men sport gold pendants or charm boxes on multicolored and gold threads with tassels at the back. In the early twenty-first century, they might also wear a dark jacket.

Rajasthani women preferred voluminous skirts with *cholis*, backless blouses tied with strings. They wore wide veils that covered their backs and bare midriffs, and head-to-toe jewelry. Men wore a dhoti and tunic or jacket along with a turban. They also wore jewelry in the tops of their ears, as well as a *kanthi* around the neck, a *kardha* at the wrist, and heavy anklets. Royal males preferred rich angarkhas, dhotis, turbans, patkas, gold-brocaded *rumals* (towels), and rich jewelry, while women favored gold-embroidered silk skirts, *cholis*, and *kurti* (a short tunic), as well as *odhni* and heavy, gold-enameled jewelry studded with precious stones. Gujarat combined the *ghaghra*, the *jimi* (a gathered, unstitched skirt), and the sari. Over the *ghaghra* was worn a half sari known as *sadlo*, from which, according to some researchers, the Gujarati sari (where the *palluv*, or cross border, is worn at the front) originated.

Throughout the rest of India, except in the northeast, women wore the sari. Some scholars believe that there are eighty-eight different sari-tying styles; in fact, there may be more. As spoken dialects change every thirteen miles (twenty kilometers) throughout India, so do the variations in sari weaves, wrapping, tying, and draping. Many factors influence the way a sari is worn, including geoclimatic conditions, the sociocultural environment, and religious influences. In Bengal, for example, it is taken to the left, then to the back, then tucked in using the left hand; the right hand holds the other end of the border, taking it around to the back and tucking it in there. The effect is of fold upon fold, which allows air to move freely around the body and cool it. The sari also hides the erogenous zones and gives the woman wearing it a statuesque appearance. In public, women are seen as Ma, the Mother Goddess, no matter what their age. The manner in which the sari is made is suitable for this style of draping. The emphasis is on the border, woven without extra weft so both sides appear to be the right side. The *palluv* is not highly patterned; if it does carry a pattern, it is woven in *jamdani*, an inlay technique where the extra weft is absorbed into the fabric. The only sari from this region that has a very heavy cross border and floats (longer-than-normal satin stitches) is the Baluchar sari, which may have been introduced by rich Gujarati merchants who settled in the area. Saris may be four, five, six, eight, or nine yards (roughly three and a half, four and a half, five and a half, seven and a half, or eight meters) in length, depending on how they are to be worn and, in some cases, on the caste and class of the wearer and her economic situation. They have two borders that run their length and which, in the case of handwoven saris, are heavier than the body fabric. They also have two heavier cross borders running along their width. In most cases the inner cross border is striped and without an elaborate pattern. The cotton ikat Vachitrapuri saris of Bolangir in Orissa have broad, matching pallus on each side. If a sari becomes worn out on one side, it is turned over and used on the other side. Saris are considered a pure form of garment and are used for worship, unlike stitched clothing such as blouses and petticoats, which must be removed before performing rituals or *pujas* (religious rites).

The purest and most ancient garment type is the dhoti, the lower cloth generally worn by men in the early twenty-first century but in ancient times by both men and women. Sculptures show that women usually used a knotted, pleated lower garment,

which might have been tucked between the legs or draped together with an upper cloth. Women went about more or less topless; until recently in rural areas, the wearing of a blouse was considered vulgar as it attracted attention to the breasts. In Kerala until recent times, some communities wore the upper cloth more after marriage; young and older women wore only the lower cloth, *veshti*. Some researchers believe that the traditional method of wearing a dhoti was with a zigzag border along one side, as can be seen on sculptures at Barhut. This style evokes the appearance of Siva as Ardhanarishvara, half male and half female, whom Indian sages have recognized from ancient times as a complete being.

While northern and northeastern saris are generally five yards (four and a half meters) in length and have the pallu in the front, Oriya women wear theirs somewhat similarly to the Bengali style. Maharashtra boasts the kachcha sari. Meanwhile the modern style, nivi, has become very popular. Here the pleats of the roughly nine yards (eight meters) of fabric are made in the front and tucked in at the back, with the pallu thrown over the left shoulder. Dravidian saris vary according to caste. Married Brahmans, especially the Tamil Iyers and Ayyangars, wear roughly eight-yard (seven-meter) -long saris brought in between the legs and draped over the shoulder, while young girls wear skirts and blouses. The older generation wear silk saris and generally prefer not to wear blouses. There is also a range of tribal saris including the short kachcha style of the Marias, the Gond, and others.

Among the high-mountain peoples of Himachal Pradesh such as the Kinnauri and the Kulu, women wear a *dhoru*, a long woolen blanket with rich borders and a cross border reaching from the shoulder (where it is pinned with a silver pin, *digra*) to the ankles. They wear a sash, jacket, and woolen cap, with long decorations suspended from their hair and clusters of silver leaves framing their faces. Men wear a tight pajama with woven patterns and a coat.

In Kashmir, both men and women wear a loose, long *pheran* (tunic) with a salwar. Muslim women drape scarves on the backs of their heads. Hindu women wear a topi covered with a thin white scarf over their braided hair; this falls to the hips and is called *puchu*, "tail." Hindu men wear a pajama and, during the winter, multiple pherans to keep warm. Another way of staving off the cold involves carrying a *kangari*, a wicker basket containing a mud pot filled with ashes and burning embers, under the pheran. Married Hindu women wear distinctive jewelry, *athor*, in their ears; given to them at the time of marriage, these pendants are made up of three pieces of *dyjhorstole*, a beadlike form put in the ear with a *mouli*, an auspicious, tie-dyed cotton thread. After the bride visits her in-laws' house, the mouli is exchanged for a golden chain, *atah*, and the actual athor is added.

North of Kashmir, in the upper reaches of the Karakoram and Himalayas, lies the high plateau of Ladakh, which maintains Tibetan traditions of Lamaistic Buddhism. A number of tribes also inhabit the high, remote valleys, while a Muslim population mainly resides around Kargil.

The Ladakhi people have a highly evolved and distinctive style of dress. Known as traders, they traditionally received a range of materials from the plains and Central Asia, as well as having their own resources of pashmina wool, furs, and skins. The men's dress consists of a long woolen coat fastening on the left and a sash. A long-sleeved shirt is worn underneath along with leggings. For special occasions they wear brocaded robes.

Men as well as women wear the *tibe*, a tall hat with an upturned brim, richly embroidered for special occasions. Women wear a dress that falls below the knee; brocaded dresses for special occasions are ankle length. A blouse is worn underneath, and the dress is fastened with decorative belts. A sleeveless velvet jacket completes the ensemble. The *lokp* is worn at the back, suspended from the shoulder, and is generally made of sheepskin. On special occasions it is replaced by a brocade or richly embroidered *bok* (a shawl worn over the shoulders). For festivals, women wear pants or a salwar and replace the tibe with an extraordinary headdress, the *perak*, which curves over the head like a snake's hood and extends down the wearer's back. It is covered with large pieces of turquoise. Different ethnic groups vary these styles and details.

Sikkim's dress also shows influence from Tibet. Sikkimese men wear full-sleeved brocade dresses, *fo-khos*, held together by a sash, along with full-sleeved shirts, *yetasi*, underneath, and waistcoats. Caps with fur, embroidery, and brocade are added for special occasions. Women wear long, sleeveless dresses with long-sleeved blouses; the details change frequently, as Sikkimese women are very elegant. They sport striped aprons, *pangdens*, with brocaded corner pieces, as well as caps for special occasions. Traditional shoes are made of hand-sewn and embroidered cloth. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, urbanites wore elegant shoes. Sikkim's American queen, Hope, introduced an awareness of changing fashions in the West, though she herself wore traditional dress.

Another large group are the Lepcha. Lepcha men wear an unstitched, striped garment as a wrap over a shirt, *togo*, and a cotton pajama, *gyodo*. Their distinctive caps have red pom-poms in the middle. Women also wear a draped cloth, *dumbin*, pinned at the shoulder. Beneath that they wear a long-sleeved blouse and a sash.

Northeastern India exhibits a range of types of dress. People generally wear a sarong and a draped veil, though among tribal people the veil is not used. The Maiti, some of Manipur's most creative people, wear a *phaneq*, a striped sarong with embroidered borders at both ends. Originally they wore the phaneq from breast to calf with a finely woven veil, but in the early twenty-first century, it is worn from the waist with a blouse and veil. Some women prefer the sari; the finest ones, with inlaid patterns, are the *morangifi*, which were worn by the well-to-do and local royalty. Men wear a dhoti pleated in front and tucked in at the back, as well as a short shirt and turban. The dance costume specific to Manipur is distinctive and complements the style of dance. The large skirt stands out in a circle and is gathered at the waist; on top is a blouse with a veil surrounding the waist. The skirt prevents any jerky movements in the course of the *ras* dance, the religious celebration of the divine love of Radha Krishna that is performed in gentle circular movements. Manipur is home to a number of Naga tribes who, along with the Nagas of Nagaland, produce a range of textiles with distinctive patterns. Many of these signify the status of the wearer.

Tripura also has a number of tribes whose range of textiles plays an important part in their lives. A dominant tribe can punish a rebellious one by forbidding the use of color in their dress. In the case of the powerful Tipara, the breast cloth, *riha*, represents the souls of the women. A bride has to weave her own riha, and her groom is married to it in a ceremony before being married to her. Girls are told the most beautiful stories about their rihas, for example, about how a young orphan wove hers out of a



A girl from Kinnaur in her traditional dress and jewelry, upper valleys of Himachal Pradesh, India, 1969. Dress for women in this region includes a *dhoru*, a long woolen blanket with rich borders and a cross border, which is draped from the shoulders to the ankles and is secured with a silver pin, or *digra*. Photograph by Jasleen Dhamija.

thousand and one butterflies; when she wore it, they flew her to the land of fairies.

Women in Assam wear the *mekhla*, a *chador*, and a wrap-around skirt and veil. The most coveted mekhlas are made out of *muga*, the golden-colored indigenous silk, with patterns worked in colored threads or natural silk in shades of white. Mizoram's women also wear exquisitely woven sarongs, while Arunachal Pradesh has the most extraordinary dresses, from the elaborate

beadwork of the head-hunting Wanchus to the elaborately woven cloths of the Kameng and intricately woven black coats of Apantani men. The Shurdukpens wear beautifully woven coats, while the Tawang and Bombdila sport Tibetan-style dresses.

The eastern tribal people of Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa—the Santhals, Konds, Marias, and Mundas—wear a range of short saris with woven or embroidered pallavs. The Banjaras or Vanjaras, itinerant gypsies who traditionally carried goods from one

place to another, wore the most distinctive, bold, and colorful dress, comprising a skirt with a broad belt embellished with mirrors and appliqué; a choli with large mirrors, silver, and cowries; and an appliqué odhni. Another group that settled in Karnataka, the Vagadhis, wear their hair in a high peak and cover it with elaborately embroidered odhnis.

THE MODERN PERIOD

In the 1930s, Mahatma Gandhi's fight for freedom involved dress among other sociocultural issues. His call for people to think and live in the Indian way, known as Swadeshi, involved asking them to give up Western dress as well as imported clothes and fabrics. People throughout India consigned their Western clothes to the flames. Many upper-class Congress leaders—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Parsi—discarded their three-piece suits. India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had studied at Harrow and Eton and supposedly sent his suits to be dry-cleaned in England, took to wearing a churidar pajama, kurta, and jacket (which came to be known as the Nehru jacket), all made of *khadi* (hand-spun and handwoven cotton) with the Gandhi topi as his headgear. Khadi dress and the Gandhi topi became the livery of the freedom fighters. Different dress styles had traditionally separated India's peoples according to caste, class, and creed; with the introduction of khadi these differences were wiped out. The Gandhi topi was the greatest leveler, for the *pugree* (turban), was obsolete in the early twenty-first century. All people became equal in the struggle for independence.

The call to Swadeshi also created a respect for traditional creative expressions and products. Women who had given up wearing the sari for flimsy European georgette and chiffon began to seek out the traditional weaves of their country. Gandhiji urged that the All India Congress sessions should include exhibitions of Indian crafts. The newly formed All India Women's Conference, with its young secretary Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the pioneer in the revival of cultural traditions and crafts, made it imperative that each branch should encourage regional weavers.

In 1952, after India had gained its freedom, the government set up the All India Handicrafts and Handloom Board with Chattopadhyay as its chairperson and with the status of a senior minister. Thus she began her work of reviving traditional fabrics and saris. Exhibitions were organized, marketing outlets were opened, and publicity was developed to bring back native forms. Many traditions that had died out were revived, from *patan patola*, the double ikats of Gujarat, to Naopatna silks, to the single ikats of Pochampalli, to the *telia rumal* ikats of Andhra. Also revived were the jamdani inlay techniques of Tanda and Bengal, the intricate interlock weaves of the Paithans (revived at Paithan, Hyderabad, Kathakota, and Yeola), Varanasi brocades, and the silk weaves of South India, including those of Madurai, Kumbakonam, Kanchipuram, Molakalmuru, Arni, Narayanapet, and Gadwal. The Central Cottage Industries Emporium, Handloom House of Bombay, contributed a great deal to changing consumer tastes. The private firm Fabindia, established by an American, John Bissell, was the first retail outlet for Indian-style garments made from handwoven fabrics. It had a tremendous impact on reviving the use of traditional cloth worn by people throughout India.

Indians became fashion conscious. It was no longer the men or older women who bought cloth in bulk for the family; young women and men now decided what to wear. *Eve's Weekly*, films, and other magazines dictated trends. If maxi dresses were "in," the kamiz worn in the north plunged to the ankle; then it rose to just below the hips when miniskirts arrived. Saris came to be known by the names of the film stars who wore them.

Awareness of traditional dress led to the emergence of women designing their own outfits. When an elegant young student arrived at Delhi University in the early 1950s dressed in a long kamiz made from cotton prints worn by the villagers of Rajasthan, with a wild-silk salwar and an Assamese chador, she was nicknamed "walking talking Indian Art." The *tehmat* or *tamba* worn by the peasant women of Punjab became fashionable, while the Bengali elite began going to clubs wearing saris draped in Bengali style and without blouses.

In the late 1980s, the Government of India set up the National Institute of Fashion Technology in New Delhi in collaboration with the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. Traditionalists saw this as spelling the end of the sari and other traditional clothing, but they were mistaken. The Institute encouraged the study of Indian dress and textiles, sent students on field trips, and attached them to local manufacturers. Designers were trained and worked both in export houses and in boutiques they set up themselves. Many of them have emerged as household names in India and have been able to make their mark in the European market. Some students even won an Air France competition for the redesigning of crew uniforms.

In the early twenty-first century, the younger elite wear the universal Western jeans and T-shirts, but for special occasions, and as they grow older, they return to wearing traditional clothes. Many men and women are comfortable wearing both jeans and traditional dress, thus demonstrating their ease in the multinational world of the new millennium.

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See also Ladakh; Nagaland and Nagas of Manipur.