

**CASTE, CLASS AND CLOTHING:  
NORTH INDIA IN THE FIRST HALF of 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**DECLARATION**

I, Anupama, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Caste, Class and Clothing : North India in the First Half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** is an original work and that it has not been submitted in part or full, for any degree to this or any other university.

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**CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that the thesis may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*To*  
*Ma and Papa*

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## Glossary

<i>achoot</i>	untouchable
<i>adhunik</i>	modern
<i>ardhsikshita</i>	half educated female
<i>angharakha</i>	long sleeved long coat worn by men
<i>akarshak</i>	attractive
<i>asprishyata</i>	untouchability
<i>behne</i>	sisters
<i>bhartiya</i>	Indian
<i>bharatvarsh</i>	Indian subcontinent
<i>chapkan</i>	type of long tunic particularly popular among Muslim men
<i>charkha</i>	spinning wheel
<i>choli</i>	blouse, usually with a short body and short sleeves
<i>darji</i>	tailor
<i>dhoti</i>	men's waist cloth, worn by draping, folding and tucking
<i>kaliyug</i>	the fourth age of human history in Hindu mythology
<i>khadi</i>	hand woven cloth. The term was used by Gandhi.
<i>lajja</i>	sense of decency and modesty
<i>memsahib</i>	madam; often used for a European woman
<i>samaj</i>	society, organization
<i>sahib</i>	gentleman; often used for European man
<i>saundarya</i>	beauty
<i>swabhiman</i>	dignity

<i>swatantra</i>	independence
<i>swadeshi</i>	home produce, literally of own country
<i>swalamban</i>	without greed
<i>swaraj</i>	self - rule
<i>swasthya</i>	health
<i>vastra</i>	dress/cloth
<i>vyabhichar</i>	adultery
<i>vyaayam</i>	exercise
<i>Zenana</i>	women's quarter

## Abbreviations

AIWC	All India Women Conference
CNG	Ceylon National Congress
CWMG	Collected works of Mahatama Gandhi
<i>ILM</i>	<i>Indian Ladies Magazine</i>
NCWI	National Council of Women of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
SS	<i>Subaltern Studies</i>
<i>TOI</i>	<i>Times of India</i>
WIA	Women's Indian Association

## Introduction

What are clothes and why are they necessary? Only those are clothes, wearing which the body may be fully covered and which cover/prevent shame. It is known from reading the history of the most primitive stage of humanity that human kind then had no clothes to wear. Tree barks, leaves, animal fur or leather covered the bodies of different groups / peoples. The proof of this is to be found today among savage deep- forests near the Himalaya mountains. Initially they felt the need of clothes in order to prevent themselves from feeling the cold... But as humans became more civilized they always used their intelligence to fashion material fit for covering their bodies... And god has always given to women a love of beauty and a sense of modesty. <sup>1</sup>

This narrative of the evolution of clothes shows that the human body has to be understood as a vehicle which is capable of signifying a moral and historical stage of development. For the editor of the magazine *Antapur*, Hemantakumari Choudhury clothes are seen as a sign of progress and they marked cultural advancement, though differently for men and women.<sup>2</sup> The quote suggests that fashion is about bodies, and clothes are produced for, and donned by human bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters. Most importantly, clothing has been important in establishing, maintaining and altering the image of different social groups in the Indian subcontinent. While dress as a marker of class was somewhat flexible, caste markers had to be visible in the dress especially for those identified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes.

This work focuses on the history of fashion and clothing in the modern period with specific focus on the changes in the clothing trends in colonial India. I study this by analyzing a few influential overlapping and competing forces and their role in changing dressing styles and fashion. Nationalism, consumption patterns, modern technologies and sport were among the factors that were significant for understanding these transformations in India. Sartorial discourses were deeply embedded in class, social, religious and caste divisions, exposing tensions at the heart of nationalism. The period of

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<sup>1</sup>Himani Bannerji, 'Textile Prison: Discourse on Shame (lajja) in the Attire of the Gentlewoman(bhadramahila Colonial Bengal)', *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 2. 2009, pp. 169-193. The original source for this citation is HemantaKumariChoudhury, *Antahpur*, 4<sup>th</sup> year, No.6. (Bs Ashad 1308), 1901, pp.137-140.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p.175.

this study is 1900- 1940s. This study focuses on how dress is a medium which offered avenues for an exploration of the self, especially for Indian women from various classes. I focus on dress styles of the elite and middle class Hindu women in India during the first half of the twentieth century.

The late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century witnessed several political, social and economical changes in the Indian subcontinent. In this period, one of the crucial changes that took place was social reform aimed at improving the status of women. This arose due to the need to project an image of India which was superior to the western civilization. Indian women became the site of contest. The image that was projected was complicated as, on the one hand, women were to be modern and, on the other, Indian women had to be represented as superior to western women. The superiority of Indian women was proclaimed by asserting the virtues of modesty and chastity. Indian women became the bearers of tradition. One way this was accomplished was by reforming the way women dressed. A whole range of changes in education, law, notions of beauty, ideals of tradition and modernity got linked to changes in styles of clothing.

The drive of the British to ‘civilize’ Indian’s clothing affected the lives of men and women to a great extent. There were moral constraints in adopting something that was seen as western.<sup>3</sup> There was the need to maintain tradition. Existing studies show that men emulated western styles easily whereas Indian women’s adoption of the elements of western fashion was a slow process. What were the changes which made women and men experiment with new styles, and new fabric? What were the various styles of dressing which Indian people donned for various occasion? Did women’s entry in the public realm create the need for dress reform? A change in the position of woman was made possible due to several historical changes like the national movement, social movements, women’s movement, work opportunities and education. With the coming of print culture, photography, new technologies and a popularization of different activities like shopping, dancing, theatre going affected clothing styles of women to a large extent. This dissertation emphasizes how popular culture and different changes offered

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<sup>3</sup>Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.13.

opportunities to Indian men and women from various classes to explore themselves. These social transformations also made the entry of women in public arena possible and acceptable to some extent. The dress reform of women became the most important concern of social reformers and nationalists. New notions of taste and styles were also created by the market, as new styles of clothing were available for purchase and advertised widely, creating new desires, and new needs. Some Indian women incorporated only a few elements of western styles, whereas others were more open to new fashions. This work seeks to explore some of the ways in which market forces, new social, religious or political ideologies such as caste movements, religious or ethnic concerns, nationalism, and emerging conceptions of the (individuated or dignified self) affected and transformed styles of dressing while producing new tastes and recasting social relations.

This dissertation traces these aspects through a study of print media such as newspapers, journals, tracts and pamphlets. In addition, I look at family photo albums, studio photographs and advertisements which are an influential source for the study of sartorial changes in this period. During the early-twentieth century, there was a spread of print culture, and print became an important medium for the discussion of different issues. This dissertation analyzes the themes around dressing and fashion discussed in the English and the vernacular journals. The exploration of the differences in opinion expressed in different platforms, in different papers, complicates our understanding of social changes. Indian and European fashions were widely discussed in journals. Publicists and reformers argued passionately about how Indian women and men ought to dress, what styles of clothing were appropriate.

Most of the English print media used in the study targeted the Europeans, and educated middle class Indians, while the vernacular one's aimed at Hindi speaking belt. During the beginning of the twentieth century there was a large section of men and women who could read and write Hindi in North India. Vernacular tracts and pamphlets circulated in North India by caste organizations brought the 'untouchable' question too amidst the Indian readers. These discussions on dress and fashion connected Indian body with class by showing that the body of the rich, especially of females, was different from that of



laboring classes. This was seen in the way the writers were silent about the clothing choices of poor and working class women. The women from these classes obviously could not afford, socially or economically to adopt the clothing styles and expensive fabrics of garments as advertised through or discussed in newspapers. Dalit men and women in particular were rarely addressed in the mainstream journals. The journals did not intend to address any class or religion in particular, but there was a politics of inclusion. Most of the essays that appeared in these journals talked of the ideal dressing for an Indian woman, Parsee women and Hindu men and women. Muslims and Christians were not included in the discussion except few references.

Most existing works on clothing show how dress becomes an important aspect of identity formation and the presentation of self. Many of them suggest that sartorial conventions do not only represent individual identities but also express the behavior of groups. My study also seeks to explore how clothing helps to understand the nature of collective as well as individual identities.

### **On the Histories of Clothing in India**

In the Indian context, studies have largely focused on the symbolic dimension of clothing in the colonial period. One of the earliest to explore the symbolic meaning of clothing was Bernard Cohn.<sup>4</sup> He sees dress as part of a wider issue concerning the nature of the relationship between the British ruler and the Indian subjects. Amongst the many themes that Cohn explores in his famous essay ‘Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century’ is the controversy around the turban (headgear for Sikh community). Cohn argues that the Sikh turban became standardized and a fixed marker of Sikh identity as a result of the British attempt to classify Sikhs in the army. Prior to British rule this turban was not considered a necessary part of the Sikh costume. The author also focuses on how clothing was seen by the British as a marker of difference, as

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<sup>4</sup>Bernard Cohn, ‘Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism’, in edited by Annette and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

means of emphasizing separation and distinction.<sup>5</sup> He demonstrates that the British sought to reinforce their separateness from the Indian population by strictly adhering to British standards of dress and by encouraging Indians to dress in an Indian manner. This ‘Orientalisation of the clothes’ was to be seen in all spheres, like the army, the household, and the bureaucracy. As a consequence of this cultural politics of dress, the identity of Sikhs came to be inextricably associated with the turban

The link between clothing and identity, and the cultural clash over the question of clothing, has been the subject of K. N. Panikkar’s essay ‘The Great Shoe Question: Tradition, Legitimacy and Power in Colonial India.’<sup>6</sup> Through the study of shoe regulation of 1854 and the controversy that raged around, Panikkar shows how tradition too becomes a site of contest. In 1862 Manockjee Cowasjee, an assessor, was denied entry into a court by a judge of *Fauzdari Adalat*. He was asked to remove his shoes before entering the court since the judge assumed that taking off shoes was a part of Indian custom, a way of showing respect. Panikkar shows how the contest was not between a judge and an assessor but was between somebody who had authority and somebody who claimed his right to entry. The controversy led to a debate over how to interpret tradition, who had the knowledge of tradition, and which tradition was to be accepted as the authentic one. The controversy showed how the appropriation of indigenous tradition and the creation of cultural hegemony was a process marked by struggles over interpretation. This struggle often became intense since issues of clothing were linked not only with questions of identity but also of power and domination.

Similarly, C. A. Bayly explores symbols attached to the meaning of cloth in the pre-colonial India and how it was transformed in the colonial period.<sup>7</sup> He throws light on the role of cloth as transmitter of holiness, purity and pollution. He studies commodity in the context of its meaning as understood by the people in India. It is interesting to see the

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<sup>5</sup>Clothes were used for maintaining hierarchy in the Mughal period. Mughals, through their grandeur maintained the rank divisions in the society. They balanced power relations in the society by giving gifts and presents.

<sup>6</sup>K. N. Panikkar, ‘The Great Shoe Question: Tradition, Legitimacy and Power in Colonial India’, *Studies in History*, 14, 1, 1988, pp.21-26.

<sup>7</sup>C. A. Bayly: ‘The Origins of Swadeshi (home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society’, in edited by ArjunAppadurai *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

way Bayly establishes an inextricable link between cloth as a commodity and cloth as a powerful medium through which people convey emotions. He shows how the meaning of clothes changed to accommodate social and political changes.

In this light, the color or fabric of dress becomes crucial. It is seen as a transmitter of person's quality and sin and thereby suggests that clothes can be seen as a source of power. Bayly states that European textiles seeped into the Indian market due to different reasons. He sees such changes as a reflection of changes in Indian culture, and the desire of Indian rulers for novelties. However, in the colonial period the earlier symbolic function of the clothes - like protection and legitimacy - were used by the Indian nationalist to create awareness of *swadeshi* goods.

One of the recent works on clothing by Emma Tarlo discusses dress as an ideological sign at great length. Her book *Clothing Matters* traces various sartorial dilemmas in colonial India and contemporary Gujarat.<sup>8</sup> The book shows how clothing can be crucial to identity formation and how it can become a site of resistance.<sup>9</sup> Tarlo shows how in the early nineteenth century Indians reacted in many different ways in confronting new cultural norms. This can be seen in the way they made choices about how to dress. Driven by economic concerns and the desire to civilize, the British celebrated western modes of dressing. But Indians reacted to this in multiple ways. Considerations of caste and religious codes led some Indians to see the adoption of European clothes as a taboo. Others adopted what has been termed by Tarlo as the modern aesthetic approach to Indian dress. So in the nineteenth century we see many professional Indian men wearing western clothes to work while putting on Indian clothes at home. Gradually over time European fabrics began to be widely used by men and women, though by and large women tried to dress in 'traditional' Indian styles. Indians incorporated few elements of western clothing into Indian dress. Some Indians were ideologically influenced by the virtues of western dress imitated the colonizer. But the process of cultural confrontation

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<sup>8</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 76. Hansa Ben was a daughter in-law of a school teacher in a village in Gujarat. She was accused by him for immodesty for wearing a jacket sweater in front him. She had covered her face but the sight of the sweater worn over the sari invoked criticism from the elder members from the family. However in spite of the accusation she continues to wear it. This kind of show of resistance is compared with the nationalist use of cloth as a symbol of resistance.

was complicated. We see even women negotiating new attitudes and styles, imbibing new ideas of aesthetics, carving out spaces to wear European dress, even as they continued to publicly conform to traditional mores. Sometimes they added accessories like shoes, blouses, petticoats, jackets to their Indian dress, sometimes they wore seemingly traditional Indian clothes, but these were made in western fabrics, colors, and designs; they wore the distinctive sari but changed the way it was worn. In this way they incorporated the latest trends from Europe and gave them an Indian form, and conversely, retained Indian clothing but transformed their styles. In essence, the Indians in the colonial period sought to resolve the dilemmas of clothing and shaped their identity through a complex negotiation over clothing matters.

In the early- and mid-twentieth century the personal problem of ‘what to wear’ became public. Clothes also became part of the *Swadeshi* movement and a symbol of resistance to imperial power. Tarlo illuminates how earlier the problem of clothing was not central to the public political debates but Gandhi used clothing as a means to communicate with the people of India, and transformed clothing into an important site of struggle against colonialism. Overall, her work can be considered to be an important comparative analysis of clothing that focuses on people’s individual choices and the social constitution of clothing matters.

The logic of Gandhian politics of clothing is explored in Susan Bean’s important work, ‘Gandhi and Khadi; Fabric of Indian Independence’.<sup>10</sup> Bean suggests that Gandhi rediscovered the significance of clothes in Indian life. The need to revive Indian industry made Gandhi promote Indian goods and clothes. Gandhi encouraged occupations like hand spinning and weaving. He felt self-reliance was essential to fight against foreign exploitation and domination. The Gandhi cap represented a mode of challenge to British officials. It also provided a form of unity, symbolically tying people of different regions and belonging to different castes and creeds, into one unity. As the Gandhi cap became popular it came to signify a nationalist assertion against imperial power.

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<sup>10</sup>Susan Bean, ‘Gandhi and Khadi, Fabric of Indian Independence’ in Annette and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

The history of dress in the colonial context is not linked only to a history of resistance. Many within the colonial countries willingly adopted European styles, seeing this as a sign of status and modernity. This is a theme explored carefully in Nira Wickramasinghe's work *Dressing the Colonised Body*.<sup>11</sup> She focuses both on the question of resistance and domination, as well as adoption and emulation of dress codes.

At one level, dressing became a form of political rebellion and clothing was used as means to create identity and invoke pride. Dress reform in Ceylon was part of a programme to restore Sinhalese pride in their culture. Wickramasinghe shows the complexities within these attitudes. For instance, there was no celebration of any nationalist dress in the Independence Day celebrations. The first Prime Minister was clad, in fact, in a western hat and a tail coat. In Ceylon, dress was perhaps not seen as symbol of western domination. It created avenues for people to experiment with modernity.<sup>12</sup> Here the movement for national dress was not linked to a fully-fledged resistance to British dress. Some adopted the national dress where as others continued to dress according to convenience.<sup>13</sup> The Ceylon National Congress (CNG) encouragement to national dress was not because of resistance against the British.<sup>14</sup> CNG continued to use other European favors like honors but they still preached the benefits of a national dress.<sup>15</sup>

Wickramasinghe's book hopes to overcome the shortcomings in *Subaltern Studies* (SS). She suggests that SS in looking at nationalism ignores to study elements of material culture like clothing and food, and fails to show how material culture is produced by

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<sup>11</sup>Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, *Dressing the Colonised Body* is not only an account on changes in clothing and how transformation of self took place after Sri Lanka gained its independence. The author traces how modernity brings changes in rural Sri Lanka. For example, food habits underwent changes with the import of foreign products. One of the most prominent changes was the coming of sewing machine. The act of sewing itself was a break with the past. It was sold more as a status symbol than as necessity. The advertising strategy in the sale of these machines was an appeal to the housewives. The advertisement's target was to harp at the nationalistic sentiment of the people. Products were marked as patriotic products. In this way nationalist appeal paved the way for sale of goods.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup>Early nationalist invented a staid national dress for men a white sarong and shirt draped with white shawl and declared the kandayan or up country sari- the osariya to be the most adequate dress for women.

<sup>15</sup>Dress also played a very important role in defining political roles of Sinhalese women in the beginning of the twentieth century. It was felt that the foreign customs should be discarded by her.

human agency in the process of social interaction. Clothes need to be seen as critical to processes of classification, differentiation and distinction.

Another set of work looks at how clothes become an important mode of classification and serve to mark the distinction between wealthy and poor, high caste and low caste, man and woman, east and west, not just between the colonial masters and colonized subjects. The conflict around clothing and caste is discussed by Udaya Kumar and Hardgrave. Udaya Kumar's essay 'Self, Body and Inner Sense: Some Reflections on Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan' begins with a story in which women's feelings about clothing are described.<sup>16</sup> He narrates the story of a woman in the late-nineteenth century who first encounters the blouse. Seeing her in a blouse her mother in law ridicules her, calling her a slut. She is forced to conform to her mother-in-law's wishes in public, but she still wears the blouse in her own bedroom in the presence of her husband. The blouse was seen as a mark of westernization, a mark of loss of tradition.

Kumar explores how ideas of the body and the self are reconfigured in this period, and how notions of clothing were changing, along with notion that the body had to be a marker of caste. He studies this aspect in the light of the works of Sree Narayana Guru (reformer sage) and Kumaran Asan (disciple of Sree Narayana). Narayana Guru argued against caste distinction and stressed the opposition between true and false differentiation of the body of humanity. His works make a plea to free human body from markers like caste.

We get a different perspective from Hardgrave's work, 'The Breast Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore'.<sup>17</sup> Hardgrave shows how dress was critically linked to caste consciousness and social change in Southern Travancore. Here people of low caste were not permitted to approach places inhabited by high castes. A Nadar had to maintain a distance from a Nambudiri Brahmin and a Nair. The Nadar women were not permitted to carry water on their hips as was the custom

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<sup>16</sup>Udaya Kumar, 'Self Body and Inner Sense: Some Reflection on SreeNarayana Guru and KumaranAsan', *Studies in History*, 13, 2, 1997, pp. 247-240.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Hardgrave, 'The Breast Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol 5:2 June, 1968, pp. 171-87.

among high caste. They were not allowed to cover their upper part of body. Missionary activities in the region changed attitudes, and converted Nadars began to vest themselves with the attributes of higher status. This led to the breast - cloth controversy. The traditional dress of the converted Nadar women violated Christian notions of modesty. So the lower castes were allowed by the government of Travancore to cover their bodies with short bodice or jackets but the declaration did not refer them to dress like upper caste women. However, the short bodice did not satisfy the social aspiration of Nadar women. Thus, they began using the upper cloth as worn by upper caste.

This act led to trouble. The Nairs of south Travancore were furious and began to terrorize the Christian converts. Schools were interrupted, books were thrown and the women were beaten for wearing the upper cloth as a prolonged cultural battle ensued. These incidents clearly illustrate how cloth or dressing can be a mode of social aspiration and also a site of struggle to change ones caste markers. It also shows that how caste identity was sought to be made visible, how it was stamped on the appearance of a person. Hardgrave considered the breast - cloth controversy as critical to the constitution of community self - consciousness. His focus is not so much to understand clothing and dress as such, but to study how caste transformation takes place.

A few works which have studied the clothing of Indian women focus on the impact of colonialism. The sources that I have looked at, suggest that sartorial changes operated within the frame of colonial ideologies and also in opposition to the imperialism. The emergence of notion of market and consumption was new to the Indian context. This worked as a force which was independent of wider political, caste and religious ideologies. Thus, we need to look at a set of works which will help us understand consumption and fashion in the Indian context.

### **Fashion and Signs of Modernity**

Most studies on clothing in western countries focus on the subject of fashion. Mary Blanchard's essay 'Boundaries and the Victorian Body: Aesthetic Fashion in Gilded Age America' traces the history of the Aesthetic Movement in America and the shifts in

gender boundaries.<sup>18</sup> In the period from 1870 to 1880, women used their bodies as public art forms to defy the early moral conventions imposed on them and also to assume a cultural agency in society. The crucial change in this period was a shift in attitude towards women's fashion. By creating this new image of women as individual artists they changed the traditional concept of females being objects of artists.<sup>2</sup> This perception of the female as an artist experimenting with cultural boundaries was a part of the formation of gender identity.

The new aesthetics of fashion paved the way for women to express themselves and Victorian parlors were transformed into theatrical environments. To understand the complexity of this movement one has to study the aesthetic of dress. Aesthetic clothes was seen as an intimate wear exposed in public.<sup>3</sup> This essay argues that the single most important characteristic of the aesthetic was that it was worn in public and it brought an intimate dress into public view under the name of an artistic innovation. However this unconventional dress was criticized by the Victorian moralists, journalists and entrepreneurs.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this essay shows how artistic dress became more than a symbol of rejection of domestic confinement. It announced the creation of an aesthetic self. The women presented themselves to public gaze, for public viewing. Blanchard explores the notion of dress as a performance. In crossing the boundaries women became artists and used dress to create a new self. The significance of dress was realized in the act of wearing, in the performance of dressing.

Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams* adds much to the understanding of how fashion and dress fits into our complex society.<sup>19</sup> While it traces the history of fashion from twelfth century to twenty-first century, Wilson's central effort is to understand the idea of modernity. As I will argue in the next chapter, Wilson considered all significant changes in clothing as fashion. We need to point out that fashion has to be seen as an outcome of dominance of market, increase in mass production and styles, changes in the notion of taste etc. She argues that fashion is essential to the world of modernity. Growth of trade

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<sup>18</sup>Mary Blanchard, 'Boundaries and the Victorian Body: Aesthetic Fashion in Gilded Age America', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 1, Feb 1995, pp. 21-50.

<sup>19</sup>Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.



and capitalism had an impact on dress and it created a notion of fashion as changing clothing styles. Fashion came to be associated with the city. Crucial changes in the history of fashion came about in the nineteenth century with the industrial revolution. Along with this, new modes of entertainment like movies, fashion magazines, dancing, sports and photography influenced fashion in a phenomenal way. Everyday clothes, uniforms and sportswear became increasingly popular and gradually displaced the luxurious and laced dresses. Men seem to distance themselves from all pretensions to beauty, and desire for beauty came to be a reflection of femininity and effeminacy. Women also adopted styles without exaggerated hoops or panniers. Fashionable dress now hid sexuality as well displayed it. It sought to draw attention in an ambivalent way. Some part of the body had to be concealed and some part had to be revealed. Such changes in the aesthetics of fashion are explored in this volume. James Laver develops an argument of ‘shifting erogenous zones’, exploring why in different periods in history different portions of the female body comes to be seen as erogenous. Thus, in the process of exploring the relation of dress and sexuality, the relation of clothing and morality is outlined. In this context, fashion is seen as a continuous dialogue between the natural and the artificial.

Wilson suggests that in the twentieth century there was a marked change in attitudes. She also points out that as capitalism increased, people felt the need to display their social status. In this context, fashion acquired a new significance, as due to increased mass production class boundaries became lesser distinct (it was possible due to the imitation of expensive clothes). In this way the book traces how fashion and dress became an essential medium of status and distinction. Thus, it examines fashion from a cultural point of view rather than behavioral aspect.

*Seeing Through Clothes* offers a different view from Wilson. Hollander does not see clothes as a cultural by product or personal expression but links it to the tradition of image making.<sup>20</sup> This volume explores various ways in which clothing is represented in different art forms like sculpture, painting, theatre, movies etc. in western civilization.

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<sup>20</sup>Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, London: Avon Books, 1980.

The importance of clothing in art is analyzed in the context of real life clothing. The study attempts to answer such questions. For example, can we consider representations of clothing to reflect the sartorial trends of a particular period? It helps us to interpret forms of clothing in images. It also shows how clothing is portrayed in images and the considerations behind such portrayal. We see clothing does not provide an image to a person but actually becomes an image of a person's identity and personality. The book elucidates how different modes of art choose and alter the sartorial trends of society to justify their art. It shows how various aspects of clothing like, drapery, nudity dress is seen and interpreted in different epochs.

Hollander sees changes in fashion and dressing styles to be a reflection of the behavior of people. She shows how dress or the costumes of actors are not only a part of play. It is a way to attract the imagination of the audience. The dress worn by the actor was supposed to provide a public sense of clothing. Here the idea of making connection with the audience is celebrated. For her, the spectator of the dress becomes a crucial factor in the wearing of a particular dress. The impression imparted by a costume defines the choice of clothing. The author feels that the look of the cloth is important and says that it can be considered as one of the reason for change. For instance, she says that the transformation of jeans into the dominant mode of fashion was not because of the new appearance that it gave to the wearer, nor was it driven by the idea of comfort. Hollander notes that, "the actual reason was visual indigestion from and discontent with the mini skirt, combined with the general visual acceptance of blue jeans and other trousers on women."<sup>21</sup>

A certain image of dressing for women or man gets entrenched in everyone's clothing consciousness. In this context, questions of morality also get associated with clothing. Hollander shows how appropriate clothing had to be kept in mind by the artist of antiquity, the renaissance or the contemporary world. Her work also shows how the ideals of feminine beauty changes and how it gets represented in sculpture or paintings. Clothes in visual or literary images reflect the dressing trends of the period in which it is done, and it also reflects how the human body is seen at a particular time.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

This dissertation consists of five substantive chapters along with the introduction and the conclusion.

Drawing upon the arguments of Emma Tarlo, Susan Bean and Bernard Cohn, among others, Chapter I analyzes the influence of nationalism on clothing in India. The chapter focuses on how the ideology of nationalism affected dressing choices, how clothing practices were gendered, and how new notions of fashion were popularized. Dress reforms were linked to specific notions of modesty and tradition, and changes in clothing helped express new notions of self.

The culture of the market is analyzed in Chapter II. It explores the realm that, in many ways, existed beyond the influence of nationalism. I trace how consumption pattern affects styles of dressing and notions of beauty, and how advertisements and the market economy brought new notions of styles and taste into the realm of appearance. Consumption was an important means of identity formation and gave women an opportunity to challenge existing roles within the household. The gender disparities that appeared in the advertisements of this period can tell us a lot about the making of clothing and beauty cultures.

Chapter III focuses that the body and the clothing becomes a visible marker of caste. It especially focuses on the changes in the style of dress of Dalit community as signifiers of caste social subjectivities of the Dalit men and women. It looks at the aspects which influenced the clothing choices of the Dalits and shows that their clothing changes are influenced by reasons that are different from that of other caste and classes of the Indian subcontinent. The sartorial enterprise for the Dalits is assessed in terms of discourse of respect and dignity put forward by Dalits in the autobiographies as part of fashioning a new self. It focuses on the complex relationship between a Dalit identity, rules of untouchability and their dress.

Dress in everyday life and for various occasions is looked at in chapter IV. Most importantly, the role of camera and sewing machine is traced in changing dressing of everyday life and the importance of presentation of self in this act. The chapter focuses

on the introduction of camera and sewing machine in the first half of the twentieth century and the effects of these technologies on the changing styles of dress for women and men of all classes. The dress changes evolved over a period at different levels in various regions during the twentieth century.

Chapter V briefly explores the introduction of sport and appropriate costume defined for it in the colonial India. It shows that the focus of sport and exercise among the men was more than the women. The chapter explores the shift in the concerns of the vernacular journals to the health and exercise of middle class Indian women. Along with this, it explores the changes in clothing to meet needs of separate clothing for various sport, games and exercise. New taste in clothing for dress, which were comfortable and enabled mobility, necessitated changes in the existing style of Indian dress, especially women's clothing.

## Chapter 1

### Fashioning the Nation

In order to trace a longer history of clothing in India, I focus on crucial moments from about the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I chart the gradual emergence of a discourse on the fashion in India, largely through an analysis of fashion columns addressed to the white and indigenous elite women as they appeared in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian newspapers and magazines. The chapter also focuses on whether notions of fashion and dressing generated new ideas of the self, with particular reference to elite and middle class women.

#### **The Arrival of Fashion**

Fashion can be defined as a system of dressing and presenting oneself which is determined by a variety of factors such as the fluctuations of the market, the symbolic importance of status, the proliferation of designs, the availability of new materials and technologies, and perhaps most important, the possibility of mass production. Valerie Steele defined it, “most commonly, fashion can be defined as the prevailing style of dress or behavior at any given time, with the strong implication that fashion is characterized by change”.<sup>1</sup>

According to Wilson, there was a marked shift in sensibilities about dress in fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe, when it increasingly began to seem embarrassing to wear outdated clothes.<sup>2</sup> In Europe, it is argued that increased trade was one of the main reasons for the growth of fashion. Expansion of trade led to growth of cities which in turn was responsible for the breakdown of the hierarchical society of feudal times and the rise of the bourgeoisie. All these factors, taken together, resulted in the growth of cloth production and augmented international exchange which gave a new meaning to the concept of clothing. The Industrial revolution powerfully enhanced mass production.

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<sup>1</sup>Valerie Steele, *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, Volume II, London: Thomsan Gale, 2005, p.17.

<sup>2</sup>Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*.

Wilson opines that it was England, the centre of industrial revolution, where early seeds of fashion germinated and “everyday riding clothes - sports clothes - of woollen cloth in quite colours, evolved into the normal dress of modern man and quite ousted the brocade, lace and velvet that had once been *de rigueur* for the man of fashion about town...”<sup>3</sup> By the nineteenth century, women and men abandoned make up. The early nineteenth century saw a marked divergence in the social and economic roles of men and women. By the early nineteenth century, women’s role in society was narrowing and dress began to distinguish gender in more exaggerated ways. Now dress was not only seen as marker of beauty, but created femininity. By the time of the First World War, which offered women many opportunities to enter the public work domain of factories and businesses there was another shift towards increasing convenience and mobility for women.

Elizabeth Wilson has studied fashion as a cultural phenomenon. She regards all changes in ways of dressing as fashion and, thus, traces the origin of fashion back to fourteenth century. At the same time, her work elucidates how the arrival of mass production and its effects stimulated fashion. She shows how previously there was little variation in styles of clothing over a period of time but as capitalism expanded, the need for new markets for relentlessly new products led to a heightened interest in increasing levels of consumption through advertising, promoted and enhanced the ephemeral nature of fashion.<sup>4</sup> While mass production led to the blurring of class distinctions, the role played by fashion managed to lever some advantage by foregrounding questions of taste and distinction. Even so, the western world, fashion was not the same for all the classes and regions.

Gilles Lipovetsky, on the other hand, sees variations in clothing and attitudes of looking at the self as a democratisation of fashion. Fashion and its influence on the self are outlined in his work. It is pointed out that with fashion, human beings begin observing each other and appreciate each other’s looks.<sup>5</sup> Fashion has been seen as a medium to

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 27. The changes in clothing that follow this quote took place in England.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth Bindas, ‘Review’, *Adorned in Dreams* by Elizabeth Wilson, *The History Teacher*, 1990, pp. 127-128.

<sup>5</sup>Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing the Democracy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 29.

present oneself resulting in self - observation.<sup>6</sup> According to the author, as true elegance began to be determined with discretion and absence of show, fashion took on a democratic appearance.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most crucial changes in the 1920s was the simplification of the lines of clothes for women, and this change was christened the “era of democratic appearance” (a term used by Lipovetsky, and which was symbolized by fashion designers such as Coco Chanel).<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, new notions of consumption emerged and display of wealth in clothing was identified as a reflection of poor taste. Fashion decrees originated in Paris, the epicentre of haute couture, and its distinct style was followed by all up - to-date women around the world.<sup>9</sup> Thus, one can argue that the twentieth century was marked by a shift to individuality in clothing and new ways of looking at fashion.

This study focuses on locating similar themes in the Indian context. Indians experienced and effected transformations in the clothing from the nineteenth century, and experimented with fashion. Could fashion claim the same kind of success in the Indian setting? To what extent were trajectories traced by fashion in the west similar to those in the east? If not, what were the crucial points of departure? The search was on in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for an ideal Indian costume. The long experience of colonialism, and the deliberately fostered idea that everything western was superior was increasingly being challenged by Indian cultural nationalists. In addition, as I have already said in the introduction, cloth came to attain a symbolic status that it had never had in the past, through its link with movements for political freedom, and the end to British rule in India. Its symbolic presence in political movements was undeniable<sup>10</sup> and hand spun/hand - woven cloth created its own caste, gender and class hierarchies.<sup>11</sup>

However, there were also other important changes in Indian society that changed the way in which clothing was seen in this period. With the expansion of the supply of new

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Bernard Cohn, ‘Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism’, in edited by Annette and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

<sup>11</sup>Hardgrave, ‘The Breast Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore’.

designs, fabrics and styles, the consumption of clothing in India shared some features of the expanded consumption patterns in the west, though with significant differences, intersecting with concerns about proclaiming nationality, and defending tradition as well.<sup>12</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century in India, Indian newspapers and magazines began to carry regular columns on dress and clothing. These columns introduced notions of western fashion into the discussion of dress in the Indian setting. French and London fashion was also discussed in great detail. A more regular focus on Indian notions of dress began in the 1920s in some newspapers. One can say that the English newspapers began to address notions of fashion and taste to a more general audience from the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, in the case of *Indian Ladies Magazine* (henceforth *ILM*), Emma Tarlo suggests that, “through constant comparisons and suggestions, *ILM* processed the latest ideas from Europe into a new Indian form, providing continual reassurance that the Indian woman could be fashionable without sacrificing her traditional means.”<sup>13</sup> In these columns, “fashion” was always derived from the west, and uncritically disseminated, the vernacular journals in particular made “fashion” coterminous with the “west” as a pernicious influence on national culture, and was severely criticised. At the same time, there was a recognised need for modernising Indian dress styles particularly among women. The interest of Hindi journals was in the reform of dress styles of women without forsaking traditional norms of modesty in the new forms of clothing. The criticism of western clothing and ‘fashion’ was harsh in vernacular journals as compared to the English newspapers. One can say that, in the 1920s, there began a quest for an Indian dress alongside and opposed to the emphasis on European fashion in the English and in some vernacular journals.

Transformations of sartorial styles of Indian women, both within the private domain of the house and as women began entering public spaces, were visibly present in the early

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<sup>12</sup>Douglas Haynes, A. McGowen, T. Roy, and H. Yanagisawa, *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>13</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p.47.



twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, women in India sculpted new identities on such different registers as education via social reform movements, caste movements and nationalism.<sup>15</sup> Alongside this, new norms of conjugality, work opportunities, conversion movements and transformed sexualities offered women opportunities for exploring a sense of self and independence. For example, Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar locate the sense of self that was developed by turning to personal experiences of prominent women of twentieth century India.<sup>16</sup> Their study describes how women like Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Sailabala Das, Anasuya Sarabhai, Shakuntala Pranjpye explored notions of independence arising from new social and political opportunities, such as access to education, the emergence of new ideals of married life and work opportunities. These changes allowed the entry of some women into the public arena. However, the changes also posed a threat to the existing social order and the presence of women outside the realm of the home met with criticism and disapproval.

An analysis of different reactions towards women's entry into the public sphere reveals that there were sharp critiques of the educated women in particular, which led to the surveillance and scrutiny of how women presented themselves in public. Those who were perceived as fashionable and imitated western culture were singled out for attention and critique. They were often caricatured as irresponsible, destructive of the home and morally suspect. There was an association of the westernized woman with female liberty, unbridled sexuality, and forms of independence that were unsuitable to family life. However, these caricatures were countered by advocates of western education and by women themselves.

What were the changes that came about in the clothing of educated women? In particular, I would like to see considerations that lay behind the choice of clothing. Several arguments were made for directing societal change and redefining roles of women within

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<sup>14</sup>Malavika Karlekar, *Revisioning the Past: Early Photography in Bengal-1875-1915*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>15</sup>Satyadev Vidyalankar, 'Mahilaon ki jagriti – parda kaise choda' in *Parda*, Calcutta: Adarsh Hindi Pustakalaya, 1936, pp. 141-205.

<sup>16</sup>Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words: Women's Life Experiences from Western and Eastern India*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2008.

the rubric of broader westernization. The westernisation of Indian clothing was severely discouraged by some sections, such as the nationalists and the reformers. Although the changes in clothing were not same for women from all classes, regions and castes, they attracted different kinds of attention and critique.

What elements of modesty, conservatism and national identity were produced through sartorial choices and styles? Clearly, dressing for participation in political movements and for the home altered the styles of women's clothing and began to convey a new sense of character in this period. Although new aesthetics of dressing was definitely generated by the compulsions of asserting national identity, anti-colonialism and modesty, the history of fashion and clothing in the Indian setting has been somewhat overwhelmed by a focus on nationalism alone. What other kinds of influences and trends have therefore been eclipsed? For instance, what scope was there for the emergence of fashion which implies ideas such as individuality, choice and taste in opposition to collective, ascribed identities and roles? Where clothes and styles of dress, and bearing might have signified caste, community or gendered status and identity, the new styles of clothing freed dress from such strict connotations, and anchored it in new meanings and choices of individual making.

### **Austerity, Renunciation and the Culture of *Khadi***

Without doubt, the most important political influence from the late nineteenth century was the nationalist movement and its attempt to build a new unity of Indian people. Cloth and clothing were central symbols in the Indian struggle to define a national identity, and women were important bearers of this identity. In this discourse, the emphasis was on *khadi*, austerity, renunciation of expensive and foreign cloth and resistance to western styles.<sup>17</sup> Roles were defined for the Indian women and by the Indian women both within the space of home and in the public arena. The woman's role as a mother, wife and daughter was emphasized as a way of fulfilling duties to the family as well as nation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, pp. 22-61

<sup>18</sup>Karthyayani Ammal, 'The Ideal of Indian Womanhood in Home, Social and National life', *Indian Ladies Magazine*, Volume XVI, Number 4, February, 1917, pp.111-118

Some of the earliest attempts to redefine Indian/national dress emerged in Calcutta. Tarlo points out that the Tagore family was prominent in the search for both a new Indian aesthetic and a new Indian dress.<sup>19</sup> She describes how Jyotirindranath Tagore, brother of Rabindranath Tagore attempted to combine the Indian and European dress elements without giving more importance to either one of them in the 1870s.<sup>20</sup> He tried to invent a national dress which would combine both Indian and European features within a single garment.<sup>21</sup> He submitted a design of trousers which was decorated with the addition of a false dhoti fold in front and behind.<sup>22</sup> However, his invention did not meet with great success. Yet he could be considered as one of the first to realise the importance of dress in stating or foregrounding a new national identity. In early 1905, Rabindranath Tagore found a different solution to the problem of defining national dress. He tried to prove that *chapkan* which was often considered as Muslim dress, was in fact a combination of Hindu - Muslim dress elements, and thus could represent a composite Indian dress.<sup>23</sup> This attempt also failed as it was primarily associated with Hindus.

Malavika Karlekar looks at the issue of new dress styles through a study of various studio and family photographs.<sup>24</sup> She points out that in the nineteenth century; a need was felt for designing an appropriate dress of women.<sup>25</sup> This need arose as the figure of the companionate wife was most desirable among westernised men of Bengali society.<sup>26</sup> So, just as reformers advocated education for women others also took up the task of reforming women's attire.

Karlekar states that "the women from the Tagore family, in particular Jnanadanandini Debi, daughter in law of Debendranath Tagore, were instrumental in bringing about innovative sartorial changes, some of which combined elements of western styles with

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<sup>19</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Jyotirindranath Tagore was not satisfied with combination of European and Indian garments or opting either Indian or European dress thus, he sought to invent such dress.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 59. He did not consider dhoti to be appropriate for business and found trousers to be too foreign.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Karlekar, *Revisioning the Past*.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p.93.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

the indigenous sari.”<sup>27</sup> Jnanadanandini, wife of Satyendra Nath Tagore, advised women in an article in *Bambabodhini Patrika* that dress could be adopted on the basis of English, Muslim, and Bengali traditions but still one could retain Bengali traditions.<sup>28</sup> She gave her own example as someone who wore shoes, stockings, bodice, (*angiya cachli*), blouse (*jama*), and a short skirt like petticoat with a sari draped over it.

Sarala Devi also describes the introduction of a new way of wearing the sari by her *mejomami* (second aunt) in her autobiography.<sup>29</sup> She remembers that her *mejomami* (Jnanadanandini Debi) was credited for innovating the *Takurbari sari /Brahmika sari* which was slightly modelled on the Parsi *garo* and Gujrati way of draping sari. However, she retained the mode of wearing the loose end of the sari in traditional Bengali fashion. Some of the studio photographs showed that women wore blouses which were modelled on current practices from west. One can also see new accessories being used by these women such as buttoned shoes,<sup>30</sup> western gowns<sup>31</sup> etc. In this context Karlekar points out that the blouses were elaborate, modelled on current styles of gowns and blouses prevalent in the west: thus high collars with ribbons, frills, jabots and brooches were popular from the 1870s till the turn of century and a few women also wore mutton chop sleeves, peaked at the shoulder.<sup>32</sup> Along with these, shawls, closed shoes and brooches completed the ritual of westernised elite female dress. The new style of wearing the sari with blouse and chador was known as the ‘Brahmika sari.’<sup>33</sup>

These examples reflect the change in dress styles that took place in Bengali families in the nineteenth century. It also indicates the favourable attitude of Bengali reformists to western ideals. The Brahmika sari had gained immense popularity and was considered as

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>29</sup>Ray, *The Many World of Sarala Devi*, pp. 75 - 76. Sarala Devi says that the second evolution in the Bengali way of wearing sari took place after the Delhi Durbar. The Maharani of Cooch behar Suniti Devi and the Maharani of Maurbhanj Sucharu Devi, who were also present at the Durbar influenced the new way of wearing the sari in conformity with the other princely ladies.

<sup>30</sup>Karlekar, *Revisioning the Past*, p. 103, One image probably of a couple belonging to Brahma Samaj suggested by Karlekar, shows wife in a sari draped in Parsi style, blouse and buttoned shoes.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99, According to Karlekar, Photographs of Sarala Devi Chaudharani and Sushma Sen shows them to be wearing elaborate blouses that were modelled on the upper half of a western gown.

<sup>32</sup>Malavika Karlekar, *The Tagores and the Sartorial Styles: A Photo Essay*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010.

<sup>33</sup>Karlekar, *Revisioning the Past*, p. 95.

appropriate wear for Bengali women both inside the home and in public. These were partial attempts at reforming clothing styles, and it was really only Gandhi who enabled a larger mass shift to *khadi* and to spinning.

Any discussion of clothing in colonial India must begin with the nationalist fetish about *khadi*. The discourses of khaddar were also woven around the roles of women within the emerging nation. The adoption of *khadi* made a way of participating in political life and it also enabled women to participate in public struggles and agitations.<sup>34</sup> Yet there was no singular or uniform adoption of *khadi*: rather, most of the women involved in the national movement experimented with *khadi*. Sometimes they used it to create an appearance that was national in character and identity. They were also women who did not accept *khadi* in spite of being nationalist. While *khadi* suggested simplicity and a certain lack of aesthetic value in dressing, attempts were made to introduce such elements and alter the meanings imposed from above or elsewhere. There were, on the other hand, several constraints in the adoption of *khadi* for the Indian woman.

Emma Tarlo's work suggests that in India the *khadi* sari and simplicity of dress were also identified with widowhood, and posed a further threat of pushing husbands towards other well dressed women.<sup>35</sup> This probably discouraged some women from wearing *khadi*. Political leaders like Sarala Devi Chaudhrani, women from the Nehru family and a few other elite women observed *Swadeshi* and wore *khadi* sarees (an image from *Chand* shows. Swarup Nehru, wife of Motilal Nehru, protesting in front of a foreign cloth market). Sarala Devi Chaudhrani showed that *khadi* can be made attractive and be fashionable.<sup>36</sup> Yet, there were a few exceptional women as well, who did not maintain

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<sup>34</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, According to Gandhi, *khadi* was a suitable means of enabling women to enter the public political sphere without appearing sexually provocative or immodest, p.110.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words*, p.2. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani was the first women political leader in this Indian freedom movement and belonged to a Hindu - Brahmo community, which had played a leading role in the nineteenth century reform movement in Bengal. Her mother was the daughter of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore. Sarala's father Janakinath Ghoshal was a nationalist.

simplicity in their clothing such as Sarojini Naidu and Kamla Nehru (Jawaharlal Nehru's wife) who retained some form of decoration in their saris.<sup>37</sup>

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani's experiments with clothing throw light on the problems presented by what was appropriate to wear in a public space. She solved the problem by adopting simplicity in dress and adhering to *khadi* for which she was appreciated by all, including Gandhi. He said approvingly:

Thanks to Sarala Devi, she has shown that it is possible to make saris out of khaddar. She thought that she could best express herself during the National Week by wearing Khaddar sari and Khaddar blouse. And she did it. She attended parties in her khaddar sari. Friends thought it was impossible. They thought that a woman who had never worn anything but the finest silk or the finest Dacca muslin could not possibly bear the weight of heavy khaddar. She falsified all fears and was no less active or less elegant in her khaddar sari than in her finished silk saris.<sup>38</sup>

He pointed out that her example showed that a new aesthetic could also be fashioned out of khaddar. Sarala Devi's successful experiment with *khadi* is significant as it represented her choice to identify with nationalist ideals. Gandhi's words of praise made Sarala Devi the exemplar for other Indian women, an elite woman who had abandoned her luxurious life and adopted simplicity. The idea was to increase the appeal of *khadi* dress. Gandhi achieved this aim by presenting *khadi* dress as aesthetic, light enough to be worn by any women (accustomed to light weight saris) elegant and fit for all occasions from parties to political events.<sup>39</sup> This addressed some of the concerns faced by some political women. Gandhi saw Sarala Devi with admiration and love. When he came to Lahore and stayed at Sarala Devi's house as a family guest, a close friendship grew between both of them.<sup>40</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi's biography of his grandfather suggests that they even

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p.111. Tarlo points out in her work that despite playing a major role in the nationalist movement, Sarojini Naidu refused to sacrifice her feminine dress for plain coarse *khadi*. She wore rich Indian silks except at times of grave political crisis and even beautified her *khadi* by dyeing it. She believed in the economic benefits of *khadi* but not aesthetic merits or in the benefits of austerity. One cannot agree that *khadi* was inherently unfeminine. Sarala Devi's experiment showed that *khadi* too could be feminised and had the potential of being beautiful. Tarlo here is operating with a certain pre-given notion of what constitutes feminine clothing.

<sup>38</sup>'The uses of Khaddar', *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 20 March 1920- June, 1920, pp.250-51

<sup>39</sup>One of the reasons for the encouragement of *khadi clothes* was the economical loss that India was facing due to consumption of foreign clothes. Thus, Gandhi and the nationalist adopted means of *khadi* as a solution and it also became symbol of a resistance against the colonial rule.

<sup>40</sup>Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words*, p. XIV.

contemplated marriage but this relationship was brought to an end by pressure from close relatives.<sup>41</sup> Sarala Devi and other members of Tagore family set the standards of beauty and fashion in this period. Sarala Devi's autobiography *Jeevaner Jharapata* (translated by Sukhendu Ray as '*The Many Worlds of Sarala Devi*') shows how new notions of fashion can be constructed. She narrates:

My clothes, made entirely from Indian materials that I regularly wore even on special occasions like weddings or Maghotsav festival started getting noticed. Women came to realise that one could be equally fashionable or trendy without a stitch of imported material. I recall that at one stage my friend could not stand my Indian *nagara* shoes, being accustomed to foreign made high heel footwear. However the day came soon when those who were most hostile to my *nagras* rapidly converted to *Swadeshi* mode and they would have nothing other than *nagras* to adorn their feet.<sup>42</sup>

Sarala Devi's experiments with *khadi* and Indian cloth were represented as a good resolution of the dilemmas of maintaining national identity as well as aesthetic value. Her experiments with Indian clothing led to new ways of looking at Indian materials. She showed that fashion and style can be displayed even in Indian dress and without using elements of west. Her experiments showed that it was possible to redefine the idea of beauty. Wearing *khadi* could be seen as a sign of high fashion if it was imbued with symbolic value. Here, we notice that wearing *khadi* and using Indian material did not always lead to the presentation of the self in ascetic clothing. It had the potential of creating a fashionable appearance, and it was accepted as such by a few people.

Similar constraints were also faced by ordinary women as the nationalist reformers appealed to them to renounce expensive clothing or foreign cloth for the good of the nation.<sup>43</sup> Thus, one can say that dress became a means for some women to fashion a political persona in the national movement. It became a way to exercise power for the good of the nation. *Khadi* was also adopted by many ordinary women who became active in the national movement. By and large rural women were reluctant to adopt white

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid. For more details on Sarala Devi's and Gandhi's relationship please refer, Rajmohan Gandhi's, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire*. New Delhi: Viking, 2006.

<sup>42</sup>Sukhendu Ray, *The Many World of Sarala Devi: A Diary*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010.p.163.

<sup>43</sup>Gopi Krishna Mehta, 'Marwari auraton ki vesh bhusha', (Dressing Style of Marwari Women), *Chand*, volume 1, July 1931, pp. 314-319.

*khadi* and could not afford the elaborate *khadi* worn by the small urban elite.<sup>44</sup> *Khadi* was accepted wholeheartedly by some nationalist women whereas others like Sarojini Naidu and Sailbala Das, wore it occasionally.

Sailabala Das was the adopted daughter of Uriya nationalist Madhusudan Das. We get to know from her autobiography that she rejected Gandhi's offer to take up the charkha.<sup>45</sup> She did not believe in the economic values of *khadi* and argued with Gandhi. She said, "No, the charkha will never bring salvation to India or solve its economic problems. But it is good for cultivators. They can grow cotton in their own fields and can make their own dhotis, saris, and *gamcha* (hand spun towels). But the middle and rich classes will never take to it." Sailbala's rejection was primarily against taking up charkha and popularising it. She did not have reservations against wearing *khadi* when this argument with Gandhi took place. She did not believe in the spiritual and economic value of *khadi*, and thus did not agree to be associated with the *swadeshi* movement.

Gandhi presented *khadi* as a form of cloth which was spiritual as well as good for the nation. It is interesting to note the benefits of *khadi* which were outlined in *Stri Darpan*. A female writer in article '*khadi aur hamari behene*'<sup>46</sup> commented:

1. *Khadi hamare desh ka vastra hai.* (Khadi is the dress of our nation).
2. *Khadi mein svabhiman chipa hain. Hum ise pehen kar ek svatantra yavu mandal mein vicharne lagte hain* (In *khadi* lies our dignity. It gives us the feeling as if we are roaming in a clean and open environment.)
3. *Garibo se sahyog hota hai, log sadgi sikhtehain, nagaro ke vishale fashion se door rehet hain. Aapadgrast ablaon ka sahas khadi veshvalo se jaldi padta hai.* (It supports the poor, people learn simplicity. It keeps people away from the poisonous fashions of the city. It increases the confidence of destitute and helpless women.)
4. *Khadi adhik tikau hoti hai. Charke se abroo bachati hain.* (Khadi is more durable. It saves our pride.)

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<sup>44</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 111.

<sup>45</sup>Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words*, p.24.

<sup>46</sup>Kumari Rajrani Devi Vidushi, '*khadi aur hamari behene*', *Stri Darpan*, volume 41, No 4, October 1928, pp.158-168.



5. *Khaddar swalamb sikhata hai.*<sup>47</sup> (Khaddar teaches self - respect.)

This article presented various advantages of *khadi*. One of the interesting things to note is that *khadi* is presented as the means by which the modesty of women may be protected. In journals like *Stri Darpan* and *Chand*, *khadi* is seen as de - eroticising the body and encouraging simplicity. The emphasis on *khadi* as a form of protection was linked with its association to a de-erotised body. In most of these vernacular journals it was largely considered to be national dress. In these discussions, *swadeshi* and *khadi* signified simplicity and austerity.

*Bharat varsha mein poshak sambandhi se naya fashion hain Gandhi cap, khadi ka kurta, khadi ki dhoti, aur chaapal mardon ke lie, aur khadi ki sari. khadi ka jumper aur chappal striyon ke lie...fashion ab jayega nahi rahega. Hum use bhagane ki avashyakta nahi vah hamre lie videshi nahi, apne sharir ko sunder aur akarshak banana aur is prakar ki poshak dharan karna ki uske bhitari se vah adhik sunder jaan pade, vayakti aur rasta ke liye hitkari hain.*<sup>48</sup>

(Among Indian clothes *khadi* is the newest fashion, for men the options are Gandhi cap, *khadi* kurta, *khadi* dhoti, *khadi* chappals and for women *khadi* sari, *khadi* jumper, and chappals are available. Fashion is here to stay. There is no need to be apprehensive, it is not alien to us, and such attire makes one look good and attractive, and brings the best out of the person. It is good for both the people and the nation.)

We get a different kind of argument in *Sudha* where *khadi* is seen as inaugurating new forms of fashion and this becomes the basis for using clothes popularised by Gandhi.<sup>49</sup> The author points out that the Gandhi cap, *kurta*, *dhoti* and sari made of *khadi* were among the new items of fashion. He further says that, orthodox people used to discourage new fashions because they used foreign and fine cloth. Initially confused by Gandhi's espousal of pure, *swadeshi* and coarse cloth, these orthodox critics of fashion realised that *khadi* could be attractive and remain beneficial to both nation and person.

Although *khadi* was praised in this article, it also discussed the question of properly presenting oneself. *Khadi* use is discussed as combining elements of beauty with several

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp.158-159.

<sup>48</sup>Thakur Shrinath Singh, 'fashion rahe ya jaye', *Sudha*, volume 1, No 1, August 1934, pp. 46-49.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

practical benefits. *Khadi* wearing did not necessarily mean renunciation of the fashion. At the same time, fashion is made synonymous with western clothing, and this collapsing of two different categories was common in the vernacular press in particular. However, Gandhi was considered single handedly responsible for bringing the power of clothing into the nationalist realm, as noted by several scholars such as Susan Bean, Bernard Cohn and Christopher Bayly.<sup>50</sup> Gandhi was also responsible for outlining a special role for Indian women which they could play from even within the sphere of the home. This appeal to the Indian women was linked to the larger movement of *swadeshi* and the need to revive the Indian clothing industry. The ideas of Gandhi on the national role of women in supporting *swadeshi*, are evident in the following lines from a speech delivered at Bombay in 1919.

All I mean is that it is essential that women make their contribution to the developments taking place in the country. Women work in their home is well enough. The *swadeshi* vow too cannot be kept fully if women do not help. Male alone will be able to do nothing in this matter. They have no control over children; that is women's sphere. To look after children, to dress them, is the mother's duty and therefore, it is necessary that women should be filled with the spirit of *swadeshi*. So long as that doesn't happen men will not be in a position to take the vow... (CWMG Vol.18: 23)<sup>51</sup>

Gandhi's here spells out a role for the ordinary women who remains confined to the home. This meant upholding the moral order of society by educating children and preparing them for the nation. He separated the work of the husband and wife and allocated different roles by treating them as equals.<sup>52</sup> For Gandhi, the women's sphere was the home and he defined their work in the realms of the household. He also talked that women could save money by sacrificing well into the cloth. However, he held men responsible for the women who were influenced by western fashion. He said that it was men who were responsible for the idea that women must have English cloth, as they suggested that English cloth was good to wear. He offered a solution for such act by saying that men's opinion had given the women their wrong idea, but we must correct it now. Later in his career, he also emphasised the entry of women into public political

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<sup>50</sup>Cohn, 'Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism', and Bayly, 'The Origin of *Swadeshi* (home industry): Clothes and Indian Society, 1700 - 1930'.

<sup>51</sup>'Speech at Women's Meeting, Bombay', *CWMG*, (Volume 18:23), 8 May, 1919.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, *CWMG*.

practice, and enabled the entry of large numbers into the non - cooperation and civil disobedience movements.<sup>53</sup>

Writers like Vina Majumdar, Geraldine Forbes and Devaki Jain have recognised Gandhi's contribution towards transforming the status of women.<sup>54</sup> However, his ideas on women are critiqued by writers like Madhu Kishwar. Sujata Patel attempts to incorporate notions and ideas of Gandhi on women and the changing ideas about gender roles which shaped Gandhi's attitude to women and nationalism over four decades. Patel notes that his first statement on the role of women in nation building appeared around 1916 during the time he toured India and asked wives, mothers and sisters to involve their men in military service to serve during the First World War.<sup>55</sup> She also points out that his ideas on women crystallized between 1917 and 1922.<sup>56</sup> Gandhi began by placing women in the family as a creative subject and then he emphasised their role in national resurgence. One of the important realms in which such resurgence could begin was through the adoption of *khadi* which combined economic independence with redefined ideals of women as a mother, wife and daughter.

However, one cannot say that all women were influenced by ideals of Gandhi.<sup>57</sup> Sujata Patel notes in her work that only women from middle class families or those whose male members were involved in the nationalist movement were influenced by these ideals.<sup>58</sup> Some women remained unaffected by the *swadeshi* movement in this period. Some were influenced by western fashion, some were ignorant, some were conservative and others were defining new lives for themselves under the influence of other movements.

The nationalistic discourse on clothing encouraged women to generally observe simplicity in dress and renounce expensive and foreign clothing. One such view put

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<sup>53</sup>Sujata Patel, Construction and Reconstruction of women in Gandhi' in E. Thorner and M. Krishnaraj ed., *Ideals, Images and Real Lives: Women in Literature and History*, Mumbai, 2000. For more information, please refer this article.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p.297.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 290. *Khadi* was adopted by large number of women out of their love for 'bapu', and as a duty towards the nation. We cannot say however, that all women of India adopted *khadi* and observed *swadeshi*. Some adopted *khadi* clothes following pressure from their husbands. All Congress women volunteers had to stick to khaddar throughout their political life.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.,p. 290.

forward by *Chand* in the 1920's was that women should sacrifice their luxurious life and their desire to adorn themselves.<sup>59</sup> It highlighted women's contribution to the nation by featuring those women who had never stepped out of their homes, but who were now helping their husbands and sons in the national movement by giving up the luxurious life. The essay pointed that the women who had always worn silk clothes and expensive ornaments and were accustomed to an easy life, now sacrificed all worldly happiness and worked for the Non-Cooperation movement.<sup>60</sup> These were held up as examples for other Indian women to follow. Similarly other articles in *Chand* also echoed these themes. Women were ridiculed against imitation of western fashion. The expenditure in the foreign clothing was seen as detrimental to the nation. One of the ways by which women were expected to contribute to the nation building was through spinning.

Pratapchandra Jain accused women who adopted western fashion by saying, "women of our country are imitating western women and trying to make themselves fashionable. They don't like their old clothing but like new gaudy clothes. They don't wear either the sari or *odhni*."<sup>61</sup> Here sari and *odhni* were presented as symbols of modesty and simple and cheap clothing. This statement becomes clear from Savitri Devi Viyani's account.<sup>62</sup> She was the wife of Brijlal Viyani who was an active member of congress committee. She narrates that when she got involved in the national movement, she discarded her traditional Marwari *ghagara* and adopted sari and *odhni*. Jain believed that Indians wasted money on foreign clothing and believed that those were responsible for following fickle fashions (his criticism is against imperial countries) wanted to make India hungry and dependent. The author pointed out that the zamindars, merchants and their servants were worried as a big part of their income went on women's adornment. As a result, they couldn't save money for the education and health of their children.<sup>63</sup> The writer advised women to discard gaudy clothes if they wanted the good of their family and nation. They were urged to spin cotton and wear home spun *khadi* and clothe their husbands and

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<sup>59</sup>*Chand* was a monthly journal and was published in Allahabad. Some of the editors of *Chand* were Ramrakh Singh Sahgal, ShriNand Kishore Tiwari and Munshi Navjadik LalShrivastava.

<sup>60</sup>'bhartiya mahilaon ke karya', *Chand*, January 1923, p. 206

<sup>61</sup>Pratapchandra Jain, 'bhartiya mahilayen aur fashion', *Chand*, pt 1 No 4, September 1926, p. 581

<sup>62</sup>Vidyalankar, *Parda*, p. 153.

<sup>63</sup>This adornment could also refer to gold ornaments, which were hardly part of western fashion but in this article there is a clear reference to western influence as responsible for women's spending habits.

children in it. Giving up fashion and gaudy clothes was necessary if one were to be a good mother, wife, or nationalist.

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, tracts were circulated in North India which were meant to educate women in household affairs<sup>64</sup>, on right behavior to be observed, the importance of exercise, importance of education, cleanliness<sup>65</sup>, beauty tips and other issues. These textbooks also criticized women for spending money on clothing and adornment. Several writers concurred that the recent trends in fashion were distracting women from their traditional duties as good mothers and wives and making them self-indulgent while encouraging a life of laziness. Suruchi Thapar points out that accompanying the critique of western ways was a critique of social habits in Indian society. She says that if fashion was regarded as western and bad, then Indian women were also held responsible for adopting it.<sup>66</sup> Habits borrowed from the west were criticised:

*Is nayi roshni ki maya ne stri samaj mein kayi avgun paida kar diye hain . unme ek vilasata hain. Ajkal striya apne balo ki tarah tarah se swarne, din bhar nayi nayi pshake badalne, sajdhaj kar hawa khane jane, cinema theatre aadi mein baithne ke lie , jitni utawali dikhayi deti hain utni kisi aur baat mein dilchaspi nahi leti. Unki tadak bhadak cham chum ko dekh kar aur striya bhi unhe adhik saubhgyashali samajhti hain aur unka anukaran karne ke lie pagal ho uthi hain.*<sup>67</sup>

(This western influence has corrupted our women folk. It is lavishness. It is astonishing to see the kind of interest they take in dressing their hair, trying new apparels, hanging out, and going to the movies in theatres etc. Their lifestyle tempts other women as they see them to be fortunate.)

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<sup>64</sup>Shrimati Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Striyon ko kya jannachahiye*, (What Women Should Know) Prayag: Sahitya Mandir, 1934. This book carries chapters on: need of women education, household work, right behaviour, clothing, beauty, stitching, health and exercise.

<sup>65</sup>Chaturvedi Dwaraka Prasad Sharma, *Mahila hitaishini*, (Well - Wisher of Women) Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1924. This work gave women suggestion to improve clothing, keep home and self, clean, importance of education for women and health.

<sup>66</sup>Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006, p. 237.

<sup>67</sup>Pundit Chandradeep Narayan Tripathi, *Stri siksha sar*, (Summery of Women's Education) Calcutta: Hindi Book Agency, 1934, p.232.

The emphasis of these discussions was on the susceptibility of women, who were easy targets of western lifestyles. They were not criticised so much for adorning themselves but for spending money on items of clothing and beauty. We see that the criticism of women is exaggerated in these texts. Women were represented as obsessed with matters of their clothing and jewellery, and addicted to going out and entertaining themselves. There was thus a critique of those who were spendthrifts and squanderers, and a celebration of women who renounced luxury and riches to live simply. The home in a sense was seen as homologous with the nation. This opinion of women being responsible for saving the national income and tradition by clothing themselves and family was similar to Gandhi's discussions about the role played by women in nation building.<sup>68</sup> However, suggestions were made to help women dress in a simple and aesthetic manner. We see how in the process of defining clothes for the Indian women, nationalist discourse harped on the models of the ideal women. The iconic image of women as fulfilling duties towards nation and family was reiterated in these debates. These images were put forward to retain and glorify a distinct Indian identity. However, women who did not conform to such an image were criticised and perceived as a threat by the nationalist and the orthodox section.

Although Indian men who wore either western clothes or clothes made from foreign fabrics were also mocked, the focus of most discussions was women. Writers used fashion as a tool to raise questions about women's independence, choice and taste in clothing, control over finances and role in family and nation making. These concerns reflected standard nationalist and patriarchal concerns. Indian women belonging to different communities became targets of this critique such as Marwari women<sup>69</sup> and Punjabi women.<sup>70</sup> Thapar points out that, fashion was discussed as not only about western ideas, but also a form of colonial exploitation. Western goods such as high heels

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<sup>68</sup>Gandhi also spoke about the wealth going into foreign hands. He said that, "India has to part with 60 crores (annually) to foreign countries. Four crores are wasted in this manner on silk and the remaining 56 crores on cotton fabrics. Formerly our mothers and sisters used to spin in the homes and that helped preserve India's self-respect and honor. That work is taken over by mills. Outside the Bombay Presidency, women are now observing the *swadeshi* vow. In Madras, Bengal and other parts, cloth for women is made by the Indian Mills. Here, however, women generally use expensive foreign clothing." *CWMG*, (Vol 18:23), 8 May 1919.

<sup>69</sup>Gopi Krishna Mehta, 'Marwari auraton ki veshbhusha', *Chand*, 1 July 1931, p. 314.

<sup>70</sup> Prof. Jagadish Chandra Shastri, 'Punjab ka mahila samaj', *Chand*, 5 January 1934, p. 377.

were replacing Indian goods.<sup>71</sup> Thus, contributors encouraged the use of indigenous goods like the *khadi* saris and derided the consumption of colonial goods that further drained the Indian economy.

The discussion on austerity, renunciation and *khadi* emphasised on three different issues: first, the question of wearing foreign cloth versus hand spun cloth, second, wearing fashionable clothes versus wearing simple clothing, third, being lavish, spending lot of money versus saving money. These issues are not synonymous. As I have already pointed out, the biggest criticism was blind imitation of western civilisation and western fashion. Clothing was merely one aspect of this larger critique.

### **The Perils of Imitation**

In the Indian subcontinent, debates around clothing were marked by a rigid resistance to western clothing among those who were either traditionalists or nationalists. However, we need to point that there is difference between foreign clothing and western fashion. Discarding foreign clothing would mean boycotting cloth manufactured by the British. Western fashion related to fashion trends in Western countries like Britain, France and America which could influence styles of dressing elsewhere. Often, articles in magazines and the newspapers blurred the distinction between western cultural influence and western fashion and often used them interchangeably. At the same time criticism was directed against the adoption of European clothes and against westernization of Indian clothing. But as Tarlo points out, “the westernisation of Indian garments was a gradual and subtle process, far less controversial than the actual adoption of European garments themselves”.<sup>72</sup>

Being dressed in European clothes was not only a matter of self - representation but it was also a means by which one was judged by others. There were undoubtedly privileges

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<sup>71</sup>Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, pp. 238 - 239.

<sup>72</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, pp. 47-48, She pointed out further, that for Indian men it was a means of looking respectable without having to desert one's Indian identity. She also says that the British admired this type of Indian professional dress since it was smart and decent without being too close to their own dress. Women also used European fabrics, colours and designs but retained Indian sari and thus, incorporated latest trends from Europe by giving them a new Indian form.

in dressing like the proverbial English gentleman or English lady. However, it was resisted on many grounds. The major driving force to reject western fashion was the need to preserve national identity and tradition, and women were perceived to be the bearers of that tradition. It would be necessary to talk about the criticism of men in western clothes: was it as virulent as in the case of women?

From the nineteenth century, a great deal of cultural criticism was expended on the imitators. The initial designations for the figure of excess mimicry were *nakal pasands* and imitators. Afsaneh Najmabadi shows that in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran, emulation of Europeans was seen with fear of effeminacy, and it was the men who were criticised.<sup>73</sup> Similar caricatures of men as the *firangi' ma'ab* (European in thought and appearance) were part of the modernist critique. However, in colonial India, both men and women were criticised, but the prime figure of modernity's excess was the female. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was the figure of the westernised, educated women who was severely mocked. Most often they were described as women who had observed only European manners, fashion and half-baked education (*Ardha siksha*). Critical satire and cartoons in journals and popular art form such as Battala prints exaggerated the excesses of men and women through a series of commodities like the European apparel, shoes, walking sticks and umbrella.<sup>74</sup> The critique of women presented them to be neglecting home and family. They were ridiculed for new habits such as reading, listening to songs, travelling in open coaches etc. However, the critique of superficiality and empty mimicry was very harsh especially for women and occupied space among conservative as well as modernist discourse. A focus on clothing because the means to promoting of nationalist concerns. One of the reasons cited for denouncing western clothing was the specific climatic condition of India. An essay in *Chand* pointed out that western clothing clearly did not suit Indian climatic conditions and therefore Indians should not adopt clothing style that would affect health adversely. 'vastron ka swasthya par prabhav' (Effects of Clothes on

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<sup>73</sup>Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards*, England: University of California Press, 2005.

<sup>74</sup>*Chand* carried cartoons which criticized the westernized, half educated women and they were represented as neglecting housework, child care and husband. The images also depicted women to be going for movies, busy in their academic work and ignoring the ill child. In such caricatures the image of man was the passive recipient of the women's wishes and often shown to be taking care of child or doing house work. These cartoons denoted the threat of reversal of gender roles.



Health) pointed out that people in the west kept many clothes for different occasions.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Indians also tried to follow them and acquire many clothes. While people living in cold climates needed more clothes, Indians did not since the country was warm, and clothes made from materials like fur or leather were unnecessary. He called Indians lovers of imitation, ‘nakal pasand’ and criticized them for adopting foreign made items. Later, in the article the author also attacked Indian men and their taste for waist coats, tailored suits etc. He suggested that Indians needed a *dhoti* only (men’s waist cloth, worn by draping and tucking), a *bandi* and one *angharkha* (long sleeved long coat worn by men). While it is unlikely that many Indians wore such clothing, the exaggerated criticism was aimed at the elites who had taken to wearing western clothes.

*Bharat ko hi dekhiye yah ek garam desh hain. Yahan par fur, un chamde aadi dvara bane huye kapdo ki kitni bhi avayashyakta nahi fir bhi ‘nakal pasand’ log khabhi nahi manenge. Fashion ki cheese man karte hi videsh se mangva kar istemal mein layenge. Hum bharatvasiyo ko keval dhoti, bandi kurta aur angrakha ki avashyakta hain.*<sup>76</sup>

(India is a tropical country; and there is no requirement of clothes that are made up of fur, wool and leather, but these ‘copycat’ people will not mend their ways. Considering them as fashionable, they will import them from the west, dhoti, kurta and anhrakha is all we Indians need.)

Similar concerns were also raised by another journal *Chaturvedi* which was noted for its nationalistic and conservative content.<sup>77</sup> Once more, western fashion and imitation were criticised:

*Purushon ne bhi sahib banne ki khub nakal ki hain. Sir se pair tak sab bhesh European ka ho gaya hain kahan toh yeh garam desh kahan toh sheet pradhan desh ki poshish. Coat patloon tak toh ganeemat thi par hat ne sab gud gobad kar diya hain. Kyunki halka rang badalna in bhale admiyon ke hanth mein hain nahi, jo ki pakki nakal kar sake, tab log inko sesi sa samajh sakte hain...*<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Dr. Ravi Pratap Srinate, ‘wasrto ka swasthya par prabhav’, *Chand*, December 1933, p. 291.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>*Chaturvedi* was Hindi journal published from Agra, Kanpur and Lucknow. Some of the editors were Radha Krishna Chaturvedi and Visveswar Dayal Mishra. It was a community journal in which most of the writers came from *Chaturvedi* caste probably high caste. Even women writers in this magazine were from the same community and most of the times relatives of some male writer. This journal can be marked for its nationalist and orthodox tones.

<sup>78</sup>Shri Baijnath Chaturvedi, ‘vayasano ki bharmar’, *Chaturvedi*, November 1924, pp. 32.

(Men too are trying to imitate the ‘sahibs’. From head to toe, they all are dressed up as Europeans. However, they forget that there is no need for such clothes in a tropical country like India. It was fine as long as they were wearing coat and pants but the introduction of the hat has spoiled everything. Since it is impossible for these wise men to change the colour of their skin, they camouflage themselves as Indian Christians.)

The satirical tone of the statement made the ridicule stronger. The ‘hat’ became the symbol of mimicry of the European. The criticism of those who adopted western style clothes was also a veiled critique of Indian Christians, whose wholesale shift to suits and hats had been made in. Yet hat was one item of clothing that was not adopted despite its appropriateness in hot country.

As already pointed out, we need to take into consideration that not many men wore western dress in their daily life. Some men retained Indian clothing at home and wore western dress at work place.<sup>79</sup> Emma Tarlo has called this choice of mixing English and Indian styles of dress as a ‘moral aesthetic approach’ adopted by the Indian men.<sup>80</sup> This kind of solution was not met by criticism compared to the overall renunciation of traditional clothing by some Indians. Kamta Prasad Guru, one of the writers of the journal *Madhuri* cited government services as reason why a few Indian men wore western clothing. He did not deny the overwhelming influence of western dress in the world but he said that it would be difficult for Indians to leave it immediately. So, he suggested that Indians could at least wear a protective sign of caste: also, since the tie was a religious sign (chinh) of Christians, Indians Hindu should abandon it. He said that, for Indians who have already taken to foreign clothing, it is not easy to make them relinquish such clothes. Nonetheless, in clothing, they still can retain a mark of their caste. To English people, tie symbolises a personal totem i.e. cross and for this particular reason Hindu Indians must abandon it. Just leaving the tie from their attire will not do any harm to their salary and will not deprive them from high posts. At the same time, when the requirement

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<sup>79</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 53.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 9. It was also used when a significant proportion of the Indian population were buying English made clothes. According to the writer, the moral aesthetic approach was therefore linked to the more general idea that Indian textiles and crafts were under ‘threat’ and required ‘revival’.

comes they would be able to mark themselves as different from the English and Indian Christians wearing tie.

According to the writer, this would retain modes of distinction between religions.<sup>81</sup> Though Guru was critical in his writing, he advocated steps which could mark the distinction between European and Indian identity as well as difference in religious identity. He argued for Indian clothing and Indian culture. The focus of his article was to suggest a way of retaining a critical distance not just from the west, but from Christianity itself, and thereby remain distinct from other groups in India, such as the British or Indian Christians.

In the process of locating and defining dress for Indian men and women, the reformers published articles on the difference between east and west, and Indian fashion and western fashion. In some cases, men as well as women who adopted elements of western fashion in their dress were criticised. However, in the case of women the criticism was more scathing. Men were often exempted from sharp mockery due to the purported necessity of wearing western dress at the work place. Women were, however, caricatured as following the whims of western fashion.

Another section of writers opposed all changes and transformations that threatened to democratize gender relations. Educated women were more strongly criticized than others. Education was held responsible for exposing women to fashion and to the corrupting influence of western culture. *Chand* did not support education for women if an addiction to fashion and western culture was the outcome. This was reflected in the text and also some of the images in *Chand*. In these representations of educated western women, the high heeled sandals became the emblematic sign of what was wrong with fashion, a metaphor of the corrupting influence of western fashion. This issue can be linked to the larger debate on reasons that were given as to why Indian women should not be educated. They were caricatured as immoral, uncaring and spendthrift. In a cartoon published in *Chand*, the caption said:

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<sup>81</sup>Kamta Prasad Guru, 'vesh bhusha mein shistachar', *Madhuri*, volume 3, No 3, November 1924, pp. 502-506.

*Ardh sikshita madam, 'devi ji raat ko Mr. Champak ke saath theatre dekhne gayi thi, is samay srimati ji couch par shayan kar rahi hain aur bechare pati devta bibi sahib ki agyanusar 'gulabi jutiyon ' par polish kar rahe hain, man hi man kah reh hain jo meri halat ko dekhkar hanse parmatma kare who bhi is halat mein fanse.'*<sup>82</sup>

(Half educated madam went to theatre with Mr. Champat Rai last night and is taking rest on the couch. The poor husband is polishing his wife's pink sandals as per her orders and is cursing his destiny).

Caricatures of educated women as irresponsible and neglectful of home and family were prevalent in nineteenth century Bengal. Ania Loomba points out that the image of the woman who overstepped her bounds or misused her education was taken from *memsahibs* or Englishwoman who neglected her home and husband.<sup>83</sup>

A similar opinion was reflected in one editorial in *Chand* which commented that, women who were born in the cradle of fashion, western civilisation and luxury, were obstructions in the progress of women's *samaj* (community).<sup>84</sup> According to the writer, these were responsible for blocking the campaign for woman's education. It further pointed that girls who came out of schools learned only two things, fashion and English culture. Indian dressing was being moulded according to western concepts, and according to the journal, fashion was akin to adultery (*vyabhichar*). The pernicious western influence made parents hesitate before sending their daughters to schools. Even the *Madras Mail*, an English daily newspaper from Madras, and a serious advocate of fashion commented: "Indian women on the whole are more conservative than their western sisters but it is the more enlightened and educated women who impetuously imitate and ape foreign custom..."<sup>85</sup>

We see how educated women became the objects of mockery and suspicion. The new habits adopted by the educated, such as watching movies, shopping, and reading, travelling for work or pleasure, came in for criticism. It was felt by some sections that these activities made women neglect their family and household. Freedom in every sphere of life was seen as good as long as it did not adhere to western assumptions. All

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<sup>82</sup>'Ardhasikshita madam', *Chand*, July, 1926.

<sup>83</sup>Ania Loomba, 'The Long and Saggy Sari', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8:3, 1997, pp. 278 - 292.

<sup>84</sup>Editorial, 'sampadakiya vichar', *Chand*, 1926, p. 336.

<sup>85</sup>Indian women, 'An Informal Talk', *Madras Mail*, 1 September 1931, p. 11.

Indian educated women became objects of criticism. C.P. Kalyani Amma reacted to such criticism and said that: “Mr. Menon is of the opinion that all our ills stem from English education. If all the books were burnt, if all the *ravukkas* (blouses) and jackets were dumped in the canal, if the older ornaments found favour with us again and *Kalyani Kalavani* served once more as our major past time, Mr.Menon’s anger towards us may subside a bit...”<sup>86</sup>

Women writings in the early twentieth century showed emergence of sense of self and individuality. Voices emerged to argue for women’s education and independence. However, it can be said that the limited women’s activism that operated in this period raised questions of education, health and independence but at the same time did not challenge the patriarchal set up. Kalyani Amma response was against Mr. Menon, a writer who accused women of imitating the western woman, spending too much and not respecting the husband.<sup>87</sup> In the context of adoption of clothes, she says that they have been adopted in accordance with changing times.<sup>88</sup>

The critique of the educated women needs to be located in the general fear of the decline of a moral order. The public space was considered to be unsafe for women’s chastity. In this discourse, while the stress was on protection of women, one can say that it raised questions about woman’s independence and mobility and thus, attempted to forbid women from tasting outside freedoms. Another argument made in this context was that Indian women adorned themselves for public spaces such as fairs and railways, and dressing had become a way of showing off wealth. Such worries were reflected in regular columns on fashion such as the suggestions of Sister Susie in *ILM*.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>C.P. Kalyani Amma, ‘The Craze for Imitation’, in J.Devika’s *Her Self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*. Kolkata: Stree, 2005, pp. 37 - 40.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.* Puttezhattu Raman Menon was a prominent intellectual and public figure in early twentieth century Cochin(Kochi).In this article he launched a vitriolic attack on modern minded young women as the chief perpetrators of a shallow and superficial modernity. He perceived the major resources of this modernity to derive from blind imitation of western dress, habits, manners, language, attitudes and tastes. Response to this criticism came from Kalayani Amma in the next issue of journal *Lakshmibhayi*.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>89</sup>Sister Susie was probably Cornelia Sorabji. Her younger sister’s name was Susie Sorabji who was actively involved in school work. Probably, Cornelia used her sister’s name as Susie. However, there is no direct information on her identity as in all articles the name ‘Sister Susie’ had been used. I have made this link on the basis of internet searches. I got this information by typing sister Susie and got to know that she

When however, we, Indian women, begin to study the fashions of the western world and try to imitate them in detail, then I think it will be time for us to hang our heads in shame. Why should we imitate what is western? When Western fashions do not sometimes suit Western people, how can they suit us? May I be allowed to enumerate some of the fashions that we do not want? These are only suggestions...<sup>90</sup>

Sister Susie pointed to a different reason for not wearing western clothes. She focused on the idea of suitability and said that western clothes sometimes did not even suit western people. As a solution, she criticised both short and sweeping skirts, as she found them to be unhygienic and uncomfortable.<sup>91</sup> The second suggestion was that there was no need for the saris to be too tightly twisted or folded around the body. According to her, this way of wearing sari was 'Un-Indian and exotic'. Instead, she preferred an elegant and simple way of draping the sari, to produce a beautiful effect.

Sister Susie's suggestions can also be understood as a fear of westernised modernity. They reflected a certain kind of standard patriarchal and nationalist anxiety which was against the use of cosmetics and western fashion. This kind of emphasis on retaining modesty in clothing was linked to the dress reform of the early twentieth century. The women's movement in India emerged in the 1920's. It was responsible for consolidating changes that had been initiated by social reforms and challenging the range and variety of roles women could play in the society.<sup>92</sup> The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) played a crucial role in the development of the women's movement since the time it was founded 1927.<sup>93</sup> Members of the AIWC focussed the issues like women's education, child marriage, age of consent, purdah and right to vote. Their efforts facilitated women's development to some extent. The demands of AIWC also gained support from popular nationalists like Gandhi and Nehru. These movements ushered in new consciousness around looking at women's issues. By the mid - 1920s imparting education to women had

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was actively involved in social work and a school was named after her in Poona. Corenelia Sorabji's family was also known for their contribution in social work. The primary sources also mentioned Corenelia Sorabji's name as one of the writers in *ILM*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelia\\_Sorabji](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelia_Sorabji), Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2009.

<sup>90</sup>Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 2, No 8, March 1929, pp. 434-435.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Shahida lateef, *Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities 1890-1980s*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990.

<sup>93</sup>Aparna Basu and Bharti Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-2002*, New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 1990.

become an important concern, especially as when politicised women and even ordinary women began participating in the national movement.

In the 1930s, there were two kinds of notions that prevailed about modern Indian women. One of the views that emerged in *ILM* was that she had forgotten her duties in the process of fighting for her rights. Another view which emerged was that those modern women who were educated and still fulfilled their duties should be given credit.<sup>94</sup> These views were markedly different from the writings of the 1920s when educated women were blamed for being blind followers of fashion. This change can be traced over a period of time in the essays written by women journalists. Welcoming the changed scenario, Manjari Krishnan commented:

The Indian woman is no more the shy housewife that she used to be, nor she has become a thoroughly westernised one blindly and indiscriminately imitating all that comes out of the west by way of fashion or recreation. The most outstanding feature of the modern development of women's movement in India is that with gradual infiltration and absorption of the foreign education into their lives, they have begun to think and work towards the betterment of their position and the breaking up of a system that has kept them bound in unjustifiable limitations.<sup>95</sup>

The editor of the magazine also appreciated the modern woman and her qualities.<sup>96</sup> According to her, modern woman was not shy and her dressing could not be blamed for being immodest as her dressing sense was sensible. Modern woman was credited with qualities that would make life more tender and refined. K. Sathianandhan praised modern woman for having a beautiful mind, clear expression, sympathetic nature, gentle wit and described her as having 'a lily in her soul, a rose in her heart and the song of the thrush'.<sup>97</sup>

This kind of argument countered the approach which saw educated women as a threat to societal order. The appreciation of modern woman was based on a belief in her commitment towards her work, balanced behaviour, sensible dressing and several other qualities. The women's movement was responsible for bringing about this change, and as the author explained, facilitated the breakup of old systems and unjust traditions. A

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<sup>94</sup>Manjari R Krishnan, 'The Womanhood of India', *ILM*, volume 5, No 9, May June, 1932, p. 400.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>K. Sathianandhan, 'Who is the Ideal woman?', *ILM*, volume 1, No11, June 1928, pp. 367 - 369.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

woman was seen as possessed of a rational intellect which enabled her to make the right choices. The woman was thus praised for qualities which she acquired due to education. She could combine efficient home making and a career at the same time. As Suruchi Thapar has argued that a modern woman was expected to bridge the existing gulf between the educated man and his uneducated counterpart without challenging gender specific roles.<sup>98</sup>

Western civilisation and fashion were therefore not always criticised. By the mid twentieth century, newspapers and journals increasingly gave suggestions about improving one's clothing style by incorporating elements of western fashion. How then were elements of fashion combined with apparently contradictory ideals like tradition, nationality and modesty?

### **The Contradictory Influences of Fashion**

Fashion by definition emphasizes individuality, choice, and taste as opposed to clothes satisfying the dictates of community, status or tradition. If we look at the discourse on fashion in the nineteenth century we see a familiar negotiation, an effort to answer a set of questions. How to be modern without being western? How could one change tastes and styles without renouncing Indianans, without rupturing the relationship to tradition? What did being Indian mean? Did it mean that western fashion had to be abjured? We have different people giving different answers to such questions. Furthermore, what scope existed for the emergence of fashion in opposition to collective identities like nation and region? How were modesty and nationality produced through sartorial choices?

Clothing could thus not be entirely delinked from its former role of signifying community status, hierarchy etc., but had to incorporate the new demands exerted by the need for mobility, convenience, and new notions of modesty in the public sphere as well. Ania Loomba has suggested that the body of the gentlewoman was implicated in the construction of an ideal woman.<sup>99</sup> In this the notions of refinement and modesty are culled

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<sup>98</sup>Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 229.

<sup>99</sup>Loomba, 'The Saggy Sari', p. 283. She pointed out that the debates revolved around the way sari was draped to look like a dress or in a way blouses were pleated and in adoption of accessories like pins and brooches which would make the sari more efficient or give it a different aesthetic an through shoes.



from both western and Indian discourses. She notes Indian woman was moulded in explicit opposition to the spectre of the western virago and the ideal woman was imagined in Indian clothing. According to her, such clothing became a site for various debates about modernisation, tradition and class identities. Western woman was seen as the erotic woman, they were seen to embody sensuousness in the way they walked, talked, dressed, and interacted with males. Thapar points out that the Bengali and Hindi tracts presented the image of *kulastree* (calm, covers up body, dresses simply) and distinguished from the *baishya* (seeks male company, parts of body, dresses simply) which was often used for the European women.<sup>100</sup> It was argued (journal *Maharathi*, 1927) that Indian woman can look modern and attractive without projecting themselves as sex objects as Western women do. This suggests that the notion of modesty in the Indian context was seen as a presentation of self as de-eroticised body. Modesty was implicated in the notions of *lajja*, (Shame) modest behaviour, concealing skin and shyness.

To begin with, it was pointed out in *Madras Mail* that Indian women had some inbuilt advantages over her western counterparts:

Indian women are now seen in public: may they be an example to all our Indian women, so that our land may soon be able to boast of her charmingly dressed daughters. A simple artistic effect is all that is needed, for we need not, like our western sisters, trouble about the cut of our dress or about changing fashion.<sup>101</sup>

The garment that was draped rather than cut, namely the sari, permitted the Indian woman to be timeless and beyond fashion, rather than a slave to it. Women's entry into the public sphere was made possible and celebrated because Indian fashion was constant, and less of a preoccupation.

Not many women wore western clothing, so these comments were aimed at elite and middle class educated women who were influenced by western fashion. The newspapers and journals in which fashion discussions appeared were generally in English. So, we may presume that the readers of these journals were Europeans, Indian elites and the educated middle class. The *Madras Mail* which had largely British readership did not talk

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<sup>100</sup>Thapar, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 240.

<sup>101</sup>L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 4, May 1929, p.23.

of nationalist themes and modesty so much as other contemporary journals and magazines. On the contrary, the Indian journals such as *ILM* and *Times of India* emphasised notions of modesty, set up ideals of beauty that were subordinated to duty, whether to nation, community or family.

There is a need to analyse different print cultures, and the spaces they provided for different classes of people; in English, educating people to new tastes and habits, and in Indian/vernacular press, educating people to perform their duties to the nation. In what ways could fashion be defined in the Indian context? We have seen that a constant comparison was made between western and Indian discourses on fashion, with the latter always defined in opposition to the former. However, the discussion on fashion was linked to the question of creating demand and taste for new kinds of clothing via the market as opposed to fashioning new ideals of womanhood subservient to the nation.

Loyalty to one's ascribed culture was to be maintained in styles of dress, though the burden of such loyalty fell largely on women. The necessity of preserving/creating a national spirit derived from tradition was emphasized in Indian clothing,<sup>102</sup> but Indian women were above all expected to remain formally traditional in their clothing choices. The differences between western and eastern cultures were also cited as reasons for condemning fashion. Yet these distinctions were mapped on to the notion of suitability, in other words within the discourse of fashion itself, though what was upheld was a conservative ideal of cultural modesty. For example, sleeveless blouses were rejected on the ground that it was not appropriate for Indian women, especially those who had brown skin.<sup>103</sup> Sleeveless clothes were seen as an imitation of modern western customs. Another reason for disapproving sleeveless fashion was given by the writer for the *Madras Mail* is captured as; "to go without sleeves is an imitation of the modern western custom of appearance as much in nature's garments as it is permissible to do. Why imitate a custom which is so much against our traditions?"<sup>104</sup> Thus, western custom was rejected on the grounds of tradition. The specific concern expressed was about what parts of the female

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<sup>102</sup>Indian Women, 'The Foreign Spirit among Indians', *Madras Mail*, 9 April 1928, p. 9.

<sup>103</sup>L.P.S, 'Fashion notes for Indian women- Sleeveless styles condemned,' *Madras Mail*, 4 May 1929, p. 23.

<sup>104</sup>'Foreign Spirit Among Indians', p. 9.

body were to be revealed and what concealed. How furthermore was culture to be expressed through covering, rather than uncovering the limbs?

An article in *Madras Mail* purportedly by an Indian woman said that the much talked about preservation of national spirit seemed to be more in theory than practice and that there was a tendency towards Anglicization in almost everything.<sup>105</sup> She pointed further, that there were many currents of thought and that it was difficult to choose one to follow. She offered a solution for it and said that if one was Indian at heart then one would eventually be an Indian in manner.<sup>106</sup>

The presentation of a clear nationality in dress had to be learned through a refashioning of the self. This was in turn linked to the individuality of a person. In *ILM*, individuality was determined by two factors. One was the method of wearing clothes<sup>107</sup>, and the second was deportment and carriage<sup>108</sup> which would set off the garment. In *Madras Mail*, women were said to be responsible for maintaining individuality while being true to nationality.<sup>109</sup> At one level this is a contradiction: since one is a reflection of a community identity while the other is a notion of self-delinked from other, primordial identities. These ideas were expressed in different ways:

Therefore, the only thing we can do is to be true to our individuality basing it on our nationality. Here it is that the women of India can score; for they have been living in the backwaters of life and with their more plastic and emotional natures, they have been storing up the impressions of the outside world as men never can, in a vast and unchanging treasure house of experiences and idealities. It is from them therefore that we must call the traditions for our maxima and precepts of life, on which to base the onward march, for we must not forget that mere conservatism will not do, leading as it generally leads to stagnation.<sup>110</sup>

According to the writer, conservatism alone led to stagnation, but an obligation to reflect national identity was the woman's, since she absorbed, without being absorbed herself, the tides of fashion and change. The responsibility of Indian women towards national

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, volume 5, No 12, November, December 1932, p. 575.

<sup>108</sup>'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 3, May June 1935, p. 93.

<sup>109</sup>'Foreign Spirit Among Indians', p. 9.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

identity was through a new notion of individuality. Another argument considered Indian women's nature to be conservative and so traditional clothing was suggested for them.<sup>111</sup>

In a different article, *Madras Mail* presented Indian women as conservative in nature and suggested that Indian women keep to their saris as European clothes were unbecoming, it discussed in the context of new style of hair bobbing, shingling, cropping and so on.<sup>112</sup>

The focal point of the discussion in the fashion columns in *Madras Mail* about French and London fashion was the importance of dressing according to individual attributes. So it is crucial to compare the categories to see if they were similar or different in India and elsewhere. French and London fashion discussions focussed more on themes related to style, elegance, current fashion, cut of the dress, and design. Discussions of Indian fashion were buttressed by ideas of modesty, shame, nationality and tradition. In some cases European fashion was discussed in terms of nationality and modesty but the burden of retaining these did not fall so much on European women as it did on Indian women.

Ideals of modesty, shame and culture were emphasized by the vernacular journals. Discussions around fashion also questioned male attitudes. Thapar pointed out that in the Hindi journals, it was argued that the youth, under the influence of modern ideals were depriving the women of her natural talents and making them objects of display.<sup>113</sup> Women were presented as adorning themselves for the men. Writer of *Chaturvedi* magazine commented:

*Isme koi sandeh nahi ki aajkal ke balak balikao ko fashion wali banmane ka aurodh karte hain ve apni striyon ko apni mitron se milne julne aur apni mandali sadasyon ke saath hansni karne ityadi hi ko sabhyata samajhte hain parantu laaj mein sabhyata hain jisse humko kisi dassha mein hanth se na jane dena chahiye..*<sup>114</sup>

(There is no doubt that men are persuading their women folk to be fashionable, they think that only by meeting their friends and cracking jokes with them will make them

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<sup>111</sup>An Observer, 'Indian Women - An Informal Talk', *Madars Mail*, September 1931, p.14.

<sup>112</sup>'Foreign Spirits Among Indians- Coiffure', p. 9.

<sup>113</sup>Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 253.

<sup>114</sup>Shrimati Poorna Deviji, translated by Leeladhar Chaturvedi, 'hamari kuprathayein', *Mahilaank, Chaturvedi*, volume 16, No 1,2, April May 1930, p.31.

progressive. But modest behaviour is the mark of our tradition and we should not abandon it under any circumstances.)

In this article by Shrimati Poorna Devi titled 'hamari kuprathayein' (our evil systems), it is suggested that men should be held responsible and not women. However, the burden of saving tradition fell upon women's shoulders. New norms of conjugality were not supported by some sections. Men who went abroad to study were often seen as influencing their wives and modelling their married lives on Victorian examples. The Victorian model of marriage emphasised companionship. However, this kind of change in the institution of marriage and place of women within the home met with considerable criticism. Appearance of women in public and their mixing freely with men other than family members were considered to be European lifestyle and tradition. The writer appealed women to retain modesty and shame against insistence from men of their family. Thus, again the burden of upholding morals of tradition fell upon women. Similarly, images of fashionable woman were used as examples of those who had been corrupted by influences from the west.

Figure 1 shows an Indian woman falling off from the high pedestal of Indian tradition/culture in attempt to catch fashion. The caption below the image '*Paschim ki hava mein nayi sabhyata ka rangin gubbara*' (colourful balloon of new civilization brought by the winds of west) caricatures the follower of fashion. The woman is represented as someone who is unaware of the consequences of her action, since she does not pay attention to the fact that she is falling. Instead, she is happily trying to catch the balloon which is a symbol of fashion. Although she is represented as chasing fashion, she is not entirely western in appearance. However, use of shoes and lack of veil indicates the influence of the west.

Western fashion was also seen as incongruous for Indian women. *Madras Mail* cautioned Indian women against attempting any kind of standardization of fashion since dressing was based on individual taste. So, the resolution of combining elements of Indian and western in dressing was rejected by the author, "Therefore, I hope, I may be pardoned, when I say, how incongruous is the style with the fashion of the sari. It is bad enough to see cropped head over topping English frocks, irrespective of whether they adorn old or

young. How much worse it is to see them with the graceful Indian drapery?"<sup>115</sup> Many writers thus discouraged western dress and hair. To make their appeal stronger the writers emphasized that fashion of short/bob hair did not even suit European women. Thus, such hairstyles were not suited to Indian saris.

Columns in the *Madras Mail* commented sharply on the weak points of Indian dressing and suggested ways to improve it. These were alternatives to westernized dress forms which brought out the uniqueness of the Indian sari, which was presented as the most graceful dress if some things were kept in mind. In the process of suggesting ways of dressing, *Madras Mail* also defined new codes against show of wealth and westernization:

They do not seem to realize that the object of dressing is not to show people that they are rich and can afford to buy expensive clothes but to dress in such a way that they may produce a pleasing effect, and give an impression of taste and beauty to all those who may chance to look at them. We do not wish to become westernized in our habits; it will do us no harm to dress more prettily at night than we do during the day.<sup>116</sup>

The above excerpt taken from *Madras Mail* indicates that dress was a means for the presentation of a person's taste and not wealth. It also pointed out that Indian women were not aware of the potential of dress as a means of creating a pleasing appearance and that it could be a medium for displaying one's beauty and taste rather than just an indication of westernization.

Indeed, the display of wealth in dress could result in a lack of artistic effect in overall appearance which the majority of Indian women did not produce in their clothing.<sup>117</sup> Though they bought expensive saris and wore jewels studded with sparkling gems and they were unable to create an overall impression on the critical eye.

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 15 June 1929, p.28.

<sup>117</sup>L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 4 May 1929, p. 23.



**Figure 1: Woman and influence of the West (“Colourful balloon of new civilization brought by winds of the west”)**

*Source: Kamla (1932)*

Fashion columns pointed out that Indian woman’s clothes were an inappropriate combination of colours for the sari, blouse and footwear.<sup>118</sup> However, the author reminded the readers that the skill of overall appearance was not because of lack of artistic taste but carelessness about producing a general effect. In the end, the sari was represented as the most graceful dress if worn properly.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

Harmony had to be observed in overall dressing to achieve the desired effect. Therefore the lack of harmony between blouse and sari was discussed along with suggestions about what kinds of blouses Indian women should wear. For instance, it was suggested that “the blouse need not be of the same colour, but the colour scheme can be made to match and if the wearer does not possess a coloured blouse which will not match a particular sari, a simple white blouse will look extremely pretty.”<sup>120</sup> More suggestions were given for Indian women to follow: for instance, it was brought out in the article that a simple Magyar blouse with loose comfortable sleeves cut a little above the elbow and a V neck which is not too low but at the same time not too high, gives a cool charming effect.<sup>121</sup>

Though the columns of the *Madras Mail* offered some criticism of European fashion, and questioned its appropriateness, it suggested and even encouraged westernization of Indian clothing to a limited extent, in the style of blouse design, or in hair style and footwear. The fashion columns in *Madras Mail* on French and London fashion discussed different types of dresses like evening long gowns and dresses for day wear; these were new concepts adapted to the Indian context.

Even the *Indian Ladies Magazine* suggested ways of improving clothing, though it was more conservative than *Madras Mail*. It reiterated cultural nationalist sentiments by looking deeper into the Indian traditions. It is important to place *ILM* on a different register, as its writers were mostly female. Some of the prominent women associated with this journal were Kamla Saththyanadhan (editor), Cornelia Sorabji, Sarojini Naidu, and Annie Besant.<sup>122</sup> It was highly praised and acclaimed as it was written by Indian women, and thus, promoted education of women. The magazine was probably read by a large number of educated, European and South Indian women. Until the 1920s this magazine glorified the ancient Indian ideals of womanhood. The writers encouraged women to be of a sweet gentle nature, with a commitment towards home and family, chastity etc. But

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>The Saththyanadhan families were exceptionally distinguished in terms of their contribution to the growth of Anglican Church in South India and to the development of education in India especially for women to the policy making of Indian National Congress and the first government after Independence, <http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/electronic-books/articles/jackson--caste-culture-conversion.pdf>, Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2009.



from the 1920s, the new roles of women in the home, and in social, political and national life were stressed in the articles.

In the context of fashion, writers were against blind imitation of western fashion. Most of the fashion suggestions were written by Sister Susie. For Sister Susie, beauty was not a simple matter but made up of different factors like perfect dressing, fine figure and features, attractive manners and liveliness of expression. She stressed that the greatest thing was to know oneself.<sup>123</sup> Importance of thoughts and actions in the creation of self was highlighted. Sister Susie believed that the real personality could be hidden under prejudiced thoughts, ignorance, moral cowardice and sentimentalism. Her columns gave equal importance to the personality of the person along with dressing. It was reflected in the way hairstyle<sup>124</sup>, makeup, footwear<sup>125</sup>, and ways of walking, manners and attitude was discussed. In an article Elizabeth Craig (writer of magazine *Dress and Beauty*) women were supposed to pay attention in matters of hair, the shape of the head, balance of features, and the formation of figures. Suggestions were given in this direction. However, the idea was to prepare oneself for the gaze of the man. She quotes an impresario who gave his views of what makes woman really attractive:

Perfection of form and feature, and faultlessness in style and technique are not enough for him, he says, when he chooses the chorus girls for his revues. He needs something more, viz. some individuality of charm or genius, 'which can so irradiate women, that even plain and ugly actresses can, within a few minutes of their entrance, persuade us that they are among the most beautiful women in the world. The first thing he looks for natural poise and balance of manner. This means a fine deportment and quite an easy walk when in movement and a beautiful repose when in rest; one of the most important points of the latter being a graceful handling of the hands and feet. The figure also can always be made shapely in approximate proportion to the size, so long as there are no foolish ideas to special requirements, which may not be suitable...<sup>126</sup>

These qualities were searched for in women for the purpose of a performance on the stage by the impresario. But as it appears in the column of 'Fashion Suggestions' in this journals it seems this kind of discussion was aimed at Indian women. The idea of grace is celebrated here. Here the strict control of gestures signifies distinction from the rest of

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<sup>123</sup> Sister Susie, 'Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 4, July and August 1935, pp. 135-137.

<sup>124</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, February, 1932, p. 330.

<sup>125</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions - Our Footwear Suggestions', *ILM*, January 1929, pp. 320-321.

<sup>126</sup> 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 8, No 3, May June 1935, pp.93-94.

woman. It becomes a marker of authority. *A Cultural History of Gestures: From Antiquity to the Present Day* by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg helps us to understand the cultural politics of presentation of self beyond the notions of dress and fashion.<sup>127</sup> Gesture has been defined as a significant movement of limb or body or use of such movements as expression of feelings or rhetorical device.<sup>128</sup> The book analyses how the body served as a location of self - identification and demonstration of authority. Gestures were transmitters of political and religious power in medieval society. They were markers of social distinction. Gestures can convey different messages, emotions, reactions and expression of a person. In this volume gestures are seen as a product of the needs of society to maintain separation, impose domination etc.

Thus, this magazine contributed to setting trends to be followed by women and produced new norms for the fashion conscious. Bodily practice itself was altered to suit the dictates of elegance and fashion. It specified the right way of walking, the careful position of the hands while sitting and talking and a certain notion of the body shape.<sup>129</sup> In an attempt to redefine women's behaviour, it restricted her manners by setting strict trends in woman's personal area. The *Times of India* also carried columns on western fashion especially from Paris and London and ways of improving Indian dress styles. The *Times of India* was the most outspoken newspaper which emphasised ideals like tradition and nationality, presenting Indian culture and civilisation to be superior than west. One of the crucial themes that were foregrounded in this newspaper was the superiority and gracefulness of the Indian sari.

The sari was glorified for different reasons and writers constantly debated its popularity in the 1930s. It was even debated whether the sari could be worn by European women, with one columnist Safi, suggesting that European women could wear it as an evening dress.<sup>130</sup> Writers for *Times of India* differed from the other newspapers/journals discussed so far, since they emphasised an exchange of ideas about fashion from both sides. One

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<sup>127</sup>Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1991.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>129</sup>Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 1, No 6, November December 1934, pp. 247-248.

<sup>130</sup>Safi, 'Dress Reform in India: Could European Women Wear the Sari?' *The Times of India*, 13 April 1937, p. 14.

columnist, Mina, even expressed the hope that the “evening dress of Europe would resemble the sari in the years to come and frocks will become a thing of past.”<sup>131</sup> She also pointed out that most Indian women clung to the traditional sari in spite of outside influences. She was in favour of abandoning the nine yard sari for the more manageable six yard one. But, there were other authors who opened options for women by confining women to strict regulations. Joan Williams commented:

Fashions in India do not undergo the same changes as in England, America or France; here women of the east are much more staple and conservative in their ideas of dress. Almost every caste and creed has its own orthodox ideas on the dress problem, and the method of wearing dress and jewellery marks the social rank and the caste of the wearer. So long as a woman keeps within the recognized regulations of the dress customs of her class, she may indulge in the matter of colour, design, or material all of which offers an extensive range of variety.<sup>132</sup>

On the one hand, these authors attempted to posit the superiority of east over west. On the other they advised women to leave conservatism behind but retain traditional dress. Joan William’s argument was aimed at addressing problems associated in different caste (as it has been mentioned in the article that every caste and creed has its own dress problems).

The sari was praised for other reasons too. It was represented as a costume which reflected continuity with ancient dress. In this context Sally commented, “sari as a costume has stood the test of ages. It has survived the whims and fancies of Indian womanhood through several centuries and still retains its original form and simplicity.”<sup>133</sup> This article also pointed out that in spite of the uniformity of the sari it was worn in different manners in different regions of India.<sup>134</sup> The Punjabis, the Bengalis, the Marathis, the Tamils, the Coorgs, and the Parsis all wore the sari in distinct ways. R. Hurry considered the dress of Marwari women to be most attractive, if it was judged by western standards.<sup>135</sup> According to the author, the tight fitting bodice, gaudy and multi

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<sup>131</sup>Mina, ‘The Beauty of the Sari: Already Affecting Western Design’, *The Times of India*, 7 May 1936, p.15.

<sup>132</sup>Joan Williams, ‘The Fascination of the Eastern Sari: Simplicity and Symmetry of Line of Classic Styles of Ancient Greece’ *The Times of India*, 12 September 1932, p.13.

<sup>133</sup>Sally, ‘Beauty of the Sari: Has Stood the Test of Time’, *The Times of India*, 22 October 1935, p.13.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

<sup>135</sup>R. Hurry, ‘Ancient Origins of Modern Fashion: Dress of Indian Women’, *The Times of India*, 25 October 1932, p. 11.

coloured skirt and a flimsy cloth thrown over their shoulder gave them appeal which was unmatched by any other Indian costume.

However, there were dissenting voices in this discourse which focussed on the inconveniences of wearing the sari. Despite presenting the sari to be the best dress, a few authors did not consider it fit for the working woman or sports woman. According to Mina, it hindered growth and so it was uncomfortable for business women and professional women like nurses.<sup>136</sup> The author of 'The Conquering Sari' stressed that the sari was unfit for tramping the hills, climbing fences in cross country walks, playing tennis, running on the sands, climbing two steps of a bus with an overcoat over one arm, a bag and an umbrella in the other etc.<sup>137</sup> The Sari was also considered to be dangerous in the domestic sphere, when it came in the way of cooking. A similar argument for not wearing sari was given by Hemanta Kumari Chaudhuri (1868 - 1953). The choice of western dress was made over sari as gown was considered convenient. She describes in 1900 in her book *Antahpur* that why few Bengali women opted for western gowns.<sup>138</sup> She notes:

As a result of the advent of the English race to this country and through intermingling with them, it is not only the case that our husbands, sons and brothers learnt to wear coats and trousers. We too began to use various kinds of chemises, petticoats, bodices and jackets. Prior to this we had no national dress for women, the wearing of which would preserve one's self - respect. Perhaps because of this, many Indian women wore the clothes of the English ladies. Many abandon the sari to wear the gown for the sake of convenience in moving out of doors...<sup>139</sup>

The personal account shows the consideration behind donning such items which were seen to be the result of western influence. The lack of a national dress and comfort in clothing is cited as the reason by Chaudhuri. It suggests that the process of emulation was started by men and was followed by women. The sari was also seen to be hampering mobility. If some columnists in the *Times of India* wrote that the sari was the most

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<sup>136</sup>Mina, 'The Beauty of the Sari: Already Affecting Western Design' *The Times of India*, 7 May 1936, p. 15.

<sup>137</sup>'The Conquering Sari - Most Graceful Dress in the World', *The Times of India*, 30 January 1936, p.13.

<sup>138</sup>Hemant Kumari Chaudhuri, 'Women's Dress', Malini Bhattacharaya and Abhijit Sen's edited *Talking of Power: Early Writings of Bengali Women from the Mid Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*. Kolkata: Stree, 2003. pp. 88 - 93.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, p.91.

graceful dress and presented as the ideal costume for Indian women, there were others who preferred clothes that gave women freedom of movement.

Almost all fashion columns in these English newspaper and journals discussed clothing in the public realm or in the context of activities home. The discourse of clothing took place in context of what should be worn at a meeting, a party, sports events, at college, to fairs, etc. The distinction between private clothing and public clothing did not appear at all. It seemed as if new types of clothes and western clothes were adopted by women only in the public space. There was no discussion about what should be worn within the household except when the dangers of cooking were discussed. One can also say that with the entry of women into public space, it was felt crucial to improve her appearance in public and that's why dress reform aimed at spaces outside the home.

The readership of vernacular journals was no doubt larger than English journals as they were circulated over many regions in North India and Bengal. There were more men and women who could read Hindi during this period.

We have already discussed that *Chand* presented nationalist and patriarchal worries prevalent during that time. Though it aimed to educate women and make them aware of national and international news, it also redefined codes of conduct for women. *Mahila* welcomed the changes in women's dressing.<sup>140</sup> According to its authors, the new fashion of wearing jacket or blouses without sleeves was much better in covering body than the old custom of wearing sari without blouse or inner clothing.<sup>141</sup> They believed that one should not be concerned about issues of modesty as any new form of cloth did not defy norms of modesty compared to the custom of women bathing in the transparent sari.<sup>142</sup> One of the female writers did not mock women who followed western fashion.<sup>143</sup> Instead, she criticised men for their preference for educated and fashionable women. According to the writer, it was such attitude of men which compelled women to adopt fashion. This

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<sup>140</sup>*Mahila* was a monthly magazine in Hindi which was published in Calcutta. Its editor was Sita Devi.

<sup>141</sup>Shri Mohan Lal Nehru, 'fashionable', *Kamla*, July 1940, pp. 9-11.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Shrimati Kiranmayi, 'mahilaon ko fashion kisne sikhaya', *Kamla*, May 1941, pp. 6-8.

theme was also pointed by other writers in the magazine *Kamla*.<sup>144</sup> *Kamla* acknowledged the spread of fashion and also justified the new form of clothing due to new needs. Savitri Devi Shukla suggested new ways of dressing as necessary for women who worked.<sup>145</sup> However, she emphasized ideals like ‘*shistachar*’ (etiquette) in the new kind of dressing. Articles that were published in journals like *Mathur Vaishya Hitaishi*, *Manorama*, *Stri Darpan*, *Kamlini* reflected anxiety about women following western fashion and culture advertised in English papers and journals. While *Sudha* carried articles promoting fashion, most of the articles focussed on upholding traditions. Indian women were asked to retain modesty and a sense of shame in their behaviour.

## Conclusion

This chapter looked at the arrival of ideas of fashion and convenience women’s clothing and the attention it drew from nationalist and more assertive sections of Indian society. Women who were considered the embodiment of the virtues of modesty and shame were, however, defining new women through dressing choices whether imitative of western styles or original of the nationalist ideology on clothing of men and women, with a special focus on women’s dress reform. Nationalism was a dominant influence on the clothing choices of Indian men and women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gender differences were very significant in this process since men were more easily corrupted, and women bore the disproportionate burden of being the bearers of nationalist virtue and tradition via the refashioned sari. The discourse on nationalism focused on a criticism of west. It also emphasized ideals like simplicity, austerity, modesty and nationality.

Later, the focus shifted to themes like individuality that was asserted through one’s dress. What were the chances of fashion, as it was promoted in English columns, succeeding in finding an audience? The presentation and definition of the Indian body was crucial in this movement. In this context, everything related to woman was a focus of attention, from items of clothing, behaviour, footwear, hairstyle and mannerisms. Newspapers and

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<sup>144</sup> *Kamla* was published in Benaras. Some of the editors were Shri Jagganath Prasad (Founder), Shri Babu Rao Vishnu Paradkar and Shri Shanti Priya Dwivedi from 1939 to 1941.

<sup>145</sup> Savitri Devi Shukla, ‘naya aur purana pehanava’, *Kamla*, April 1939, pp. 44-45.

journals during this period emerged as significant sites for popularising or criticising dress reform and fashion, and the adoption of these styles by women.

The discourse on clothing was also marked by a constant search for ‘an ideal Indian costume’. The iconic costume for Indian women was supposed to fulfil all the requirements in the dress. It was supposed to represent nationality, tradition, modesty. Along with these ideals, it was also expected that such costumes should reflect a person’s taste and aesthetic skills. The sari emerged as the most popular choice for the Indian women which fulfilled all these criteria. It’s crucial to note that in almost all the journals it was the ‘Indian woman’ who was the centre of discussions. No distinction was made on the basis of different caste, class or community except in one or two articles. This chapter also located the discussions on dress in the context of the fear, anxiety and apprehension towards women’s entry into the public sphere. The debates reflected predictable worries of the nationalist, reformers, orthodox sections about the loss of control over women. However, such criticisms were countered by advocates of women’s independence and education. The voices favouring women’s independence could not be considered as feminist as this freedom was to be exercised within some limitations. The freedom which women enjoyed in increased mobility and in experiments with clothing were over determined by nationalist ideology and insistence on women as the bearers of the reformed Indian identity.

The market drew some converts too, though largely from the upper echelons of society. By looking at the notion of beauty combined with body and clothing, the next section traces the role of market, consumption and changes in the politics of appearances.

## Chapter 2

### Selling Beauty

Most men ask  
"Is she pretty?"  
not "Is she clever?"

*Prudence, Charm—the attainment of a Skin More Prudent than Friendship or Cleverness—do you wish it? Then for One Week Follow the Single Beauty Method which has brought to Thousands*

*Often we marvel at how—the girl whose only merit is her beauty. She knows so little and says so little, yet usually attracts attention to her side. You often see clear oval skin in a million places.*

*Beauty or beauty?—but why discuss? Consider beauty with clearness, charm with wisdom. Develop your beauty to bring out the maximum of your personality. That's what thousands of girls have done—and found new happiness as a result.*

*The means are simple. Have a pretty skin—remember, one can't do too little. Beauty treatments are simple—yet the daily use of palm and olive oils as embodied in Palmolive.*

*It is worth noting that this cream thousands have the clear skin and are proud to use week after week the change.*

*The powder and rouge if you wish, but never leave them on your night. They will be washed away.*

*Wash your face with soapless Palmolive. Then massage with the same skin-cream thoroughly. Then never look at a mirror and study. Apply much of the cream—over the hair.*

*Guaranteed free from animal fat.*

THE PALMOLIVE CORPORATION, 245 Broadway, Chicago, U.S.A.  
Manufactured by Palmolive Soap Co., Ltd., London, England  
Wholesale and Retail Dealers in India and Ceylon  
Sole Agents: Messrs. S. S. & Co., Ltd., 100, The Arcade, Madras.



*Do this regularly, and particularly in the evening.*

*The world's most simple Beauty treatment*

*That is a simple matter, without even the fuss of a lipstick tube found beauty, charm and youth prolonged.*

*No make-up is necessary. You remove the day's accumulation of dirt and oil and perspiration, cleanse the pores, and Nature will be kind to you. Your skin will be of her own. Your color will be good. Wrinkles will not be your problem in the years ahead.*

*Avoid the mistake*

*Do not use ordinary soaps in the treatment given above. Do not think any green soap, represented as made of palm and olive oils, is the same as Palmolive. Palmolive is a skin treatment in soap form.*

*Palmolive is a pure vegetable soap. Guaranteed not to contain a trace of animal fat or any harmful ingredients.*

*Never unwrap the name and wrapper. Palmolive long in service will outlast you.*



**Figure 2: Advertisement for Palmolive Soap**

Source: *The Times of India*, 12 April 1925, p.9.



By early decades of the twentieth century, Indian newspapers and journals carried advertisements such as the above in abundance. This print media, both in English and vernacular languages offered a platform for discussion on themes focused on clothing, overall personality, beauty and appearance during this period. They opened up avenues for an analysis of beauty and showed how clothing and appearance are linked to each other. The advertisements which appeared in the print media reveal the strategy of advertisers in yoking nationalism, modernity or good taste to the idea of beauty to sell their products such as cosmetics or clothing. These advertisements were therefore the vehicles of new tastes and desires but also shaped ideas of the self and self worth. We see that the above advertisement of Palmolive soap creates a desire for good looks and appearance.<sup>1</sup> The caption in the above advertisement that ‘**Most men ask is she pretty? not is she clever**’, strengthens the belief beauty as an individual trait is more desirable than intelligence for women. The advertisement plays on the stereotypes that the women’s beauty is more to do with good looks and does not include the overall personality. The reader who is the target is presented with the option of merging her into a faceless collectivity, or adopting measures that will mark her out from others.

In these journals and newspapers which discussed the idea of beauty and personality, the terms related to appearance, fashion and clothing were interchangeably used.<sup>2</sup> The advertisements which appeared in the newspapers and journals echoed similar themes. In chapter 1, I argued that during the early twentieth century the newspapers and the journals were an important platform for the discussion of Indian and western dressing. During the twentieth century, appearance, and self presentation was particularly important. The theme of appearance was visually organized through the clothing of the body. Here, I will argue that ideals of beauty were now subordinated to the culture of appearance and clothing in the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup>Manjulika Srivastava, *Brand New: Advertising through The Times of India*, (Ad for Palmolive soap, 12 April 1925, p.9.), *The Times of India*, 1989.

<sup>2</sup>I have looked at newspapers such as *Times of India* (Delhi), *Madras Mail* (Madras) and *Bombay Chronicle* (Bombay). The English journal I have consulted is *Indian Ladies Magazine* (Madras). The Hindi journals consulted for this chapter were published and circulated in North India. The issues are selected from the year 1900-1950.

The history of clothing in India during the early twentieth century suggests the influence of the market to a very great extent. The process of consuming goods which marked status was adopted by men and women, reflecting new cultural roles. Fashion provided a realm of freedom to women, by allowing them to challenge old norms and rules. The freedom offered by the market was limited, as it created patriarchal anxieties which were visible from the 1920s. This was a period which was marked by other changes, giving more power to women and helping them to carve new identities. In this, the act of shopping became a crucial female activity too. The advertisements aimed at women's clothing and body generated gendered attitudes about products which were meant for enhancing fitness and for beautifying the body. The commodities for women as well as her choice for the particular products were criticized.

My argument is based on the analysis of advertisements which appeared in the daily newspapers and journals during the same period. Modern Indian advertising can be traced back to the late 1920s and early 1930s when the English companies, J. Walter Thompson and D. J. Keymer's, laid the foundations of professional advertising in India.<sup>3</sup> Advertisements had started to appear in English journals/newspapers much before the vernacular ones. The Hindi journals which were published and circulated in North India during this period started to carry advertisements only by the 1930s. The history of beauty in colonial India has not received serious scholarly attention. By focusing ideas about beauty, personality and appearance that were an integral part of overall dressing in the first half of twentieth century in India, I will take a few inaugural steps towards outlining a history of beauty.

Umberto Eco's volume aids our understanding of beauty in the western world.<sup>4</sup> Eco reconstructs the ideals of beauty through different genres of art from as paintings, sculpture to literature and even advertisements etc. Eco shows us that ideals of beauty are continually transformed and do not remain constant. Even in the same era, different ideals of body are portrayed in different art forms. Literature and sculpture celebrate different ideals of beauty in the same era. The modern world of mass media does not

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<sup>3</sup>Javed Masood, 'Catering to Indian and British Tastes: Gender in Early Indian Print Advertisements', Tasveer Ghar, *available* at [www.tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/96/index.html](http://www.tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/96/index.html), p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Umberto Eco, *On Beauty*, London: Secker and Warburg, 2004.

represent any unified model or any single ideal of beauty.<sup>5</sup> For example; Eco shows that in the Ancient Greece, beauty was exemplified by the qualities of soul and personality. However, this idea underwent a change in the Middle Ages and gave way to clarity and splendor as characteristics of beauty. Gradually, for the Renaissance man and the woman, symmetry of the body no longer confirmed the ideals of beauty. As these tastes changed by the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a search for original styles which simultaneously redefined beauty.

Interestingly, in the beginning of the nineteenth century in the West, dramatic changes were taking place with industrialization tied to the expansion cities of the appearance of historically new classes, the development of new machines, and increasing roles for markets and freedom of press. According to Eco, these changes compelled to define new forms of beauty and distinction. The desire to create an original look and break away from conventional norms was compelling. By the late nineteenth century there was an end to the capacities of the middle classes to represent themselves in various fields such as trade, colonial conquest and especially in everyday life, moral outlook and good sense.

Thus, Eco's work is crucial for our understanding of beauty and analysis of 'being beautiful' in a particular time period. As pointed out by Eco, beauty is both what we see and what we want to possess. We need to locate the history of beauty in colonial India and analyze how the discourse on beauty was anchored in the appearance of women. However, the focus is on the ideology of consumption and its influence on practices of clothing the body and its beautification.

The representation of the self took the foreground in the early twentieth century. In the industrializing world, the market played a large role in the creation of distinctive looks and appearances. So, I also examine the ways new and unnamed tastes and new consumption cultures were created in colonial India. It focuses on how advertisements and writers show that beauty and clothing were crucial markers in the process of making of alternative identities of self as well as for the entire community. Alongside, there was a rise of new middle class by the late nineteenth century which developed of colonial

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-14. The following paragraph has been taken from this book.

modernity, and the advertisements tapped the needs of the new community. For example, in Bombay during the same period, there were culture of growing material expectations and a new life style.<sup>6</sup> This new life style had become a marker of difference amongst the middle class in Bombay and it gradually led to a change of clothing and appearance. Equally important is the culture of consumption which gives rise to new identities by creating new tastes. While the factor of class emerged as a crucial theme in the representations of advertisements, the categories of caste seem to be absent. As a result, the advertisements created new notions of style and taste and simultaneously displaced conventional markers such as the nationalism and caste.

In addition, the chapter outlines the emerging ideals of beautiful bodies and the factors that influenced this notion during this period. In colonial India, capitalism and consumption were restricted developments and shaped by the nationalist ideology to some extent. At the same time, there is a need to look at the spaces which allowed cultures of beauty, individuation and cultures to develop and possibly challenge our understanding of how nationalism defined ideals of beauty and consumption to develop in ways which complicates our understanding of nationalism.

### **The Sacred and the Divine Body**

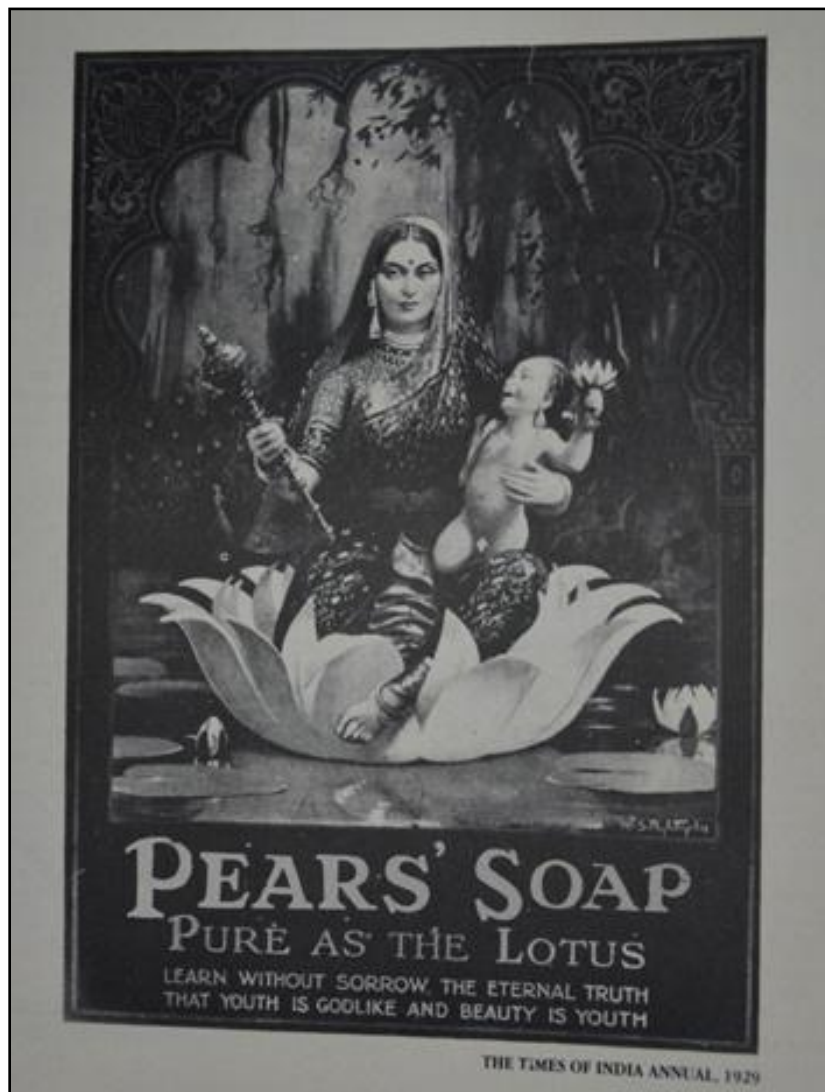
This section looks at how a set of advertisements popularized the notion of a sacred and divine female body. The idea of beauty which was popularized by the advertisements invoked qualities of sacrality and divinity. Through the use of images of gods and goddesses which appeared in the popular art of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the advertisers sold their products. As Sabina Gadihoke argues, the gods and the goddesses were the first model for the soap advertisements.<sup>7</sup> They were influential in yoking beauty to ideas of the sacred and pure.

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<sup>6</sup>Haynes, *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, This work on consumption examines consumption patterns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Authors argue that there consumption patterns and attitudes played an important role in the process of creating an Indian middle class.

<sup>7</sup>Sabeena Gadihoke, 'Selling Soap and Stardom: The Story of Lux', Tasveer Ghar, *available* at [www.tasveergar.net/cmsdesk/essay/96/index.html](http://www.tasveergar.net/cmsdesk/essay/96/index.html). We see Lord Krishna for instance in a 1932 calendar endorsing Sunlight, the first Levers soap in India. Of course transnational companies used more secular kinds of iconography as well, often drawn from their international markets.p.2.

One of the crucial features in the making of the body as sacred and pure was that it led to the objectification of women. It took earliest shape in the representation of goddesses in different societies. For example, in the images of mother Mary in the Christian tradition, or Hindu goddesses such as Lakshmi or Saraswati, were imbued with a 'pure', notion of perfection, which often had to do with symmetry of form, color, and figure.<sup>8</sup> The advertisers took up the notion of beauty as a symbol of 'goodness' and inculcated and strengthened it among the female consumers. The advertisement of the Pears soap illustrates this argument further (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: An Advertisement for Pears Soap**

**Source: *The Times of India*, 24 December 1925, p.94.**

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<sup>8</sup>V. Geetha, *Gender*, Calcutta: Stree, 2002, p. 107.

The Pears advertisement envisions a body which is divine and sacred. The product, soap has the capacity, to endow its user with such qualities. The Pears advertisement (Figure 3) proclaimed, **‘pure as the lotus: learn without sorrow the eternal truth that youth is godlike and beauty is youth’**.<sup>9</sup> The privileged notions of purity that emerged from the unclear/ impure as the lotus did. The image of the goddess Lakshmi is used to strengthen the product appeal. The ad represents a woman clad in traditional attire and jewellery. Her face is attractive and serene. Yet, despite the invocation of “beauty” as youthfulness and vice versa, the figure of Lakshmi is materialized as shown by the baby she hold, itself a symbol of purity. The woman’s beauty, enhanced by the use of the soap, is thus safely anchored in role as a mother.

The attributes of the goddess Lakshmi, particularly her physical attributes are attainable through the use of the soap and works for the baby as well. Goodness and virtue as well as physical purity are thus simultaneously invoked by this image.

Let us look at the strategy of the advertisers behind this product and the claims it makes. The promise of the advertisement is purity and youth and eventually merges it with beauty. According to Geoffrey Jones the most significant aspect of Barratt’s advertising was its content.<sup>10</sup> According to his work, this change could be attributed to a British entrepreneur Thomas J. Barratt.<sup>11</sup> It is pointed out that Pears brand was promoted as an aid to health and beauty, primarily for women in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Barratt employed both expert testimonials and celebrities to build the brand. He secured endorsements from leading medical professors and doctors for his soap. He started to promote Pears with the use of testimonials of a leading actress Lillie Langtry.<sup>12</sup> The promise to women that the right product could not only transform their complexion but also their entire lives proved hugely successful. The product turned into a tool for ‘self transformation’. In the 1880’s he launched a successful advertising campaign in the United States by pursuing Henry

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<sup>9</sup>Srivastava , *Brand New*, Advertisement for Pears Soap, 24 December 1925, p.94.

<sup>10</sup>Geoffrey Jones, *Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, Earlier soaps were promoted as products for washing clothes. However, later the potential of soap was enhanced as it promised beauty. Jones elucidates that Thomas J. Barratt British entrepreneur, became a key figure in this development.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p.81. In 1864 Barratt joined the small firm of A. & F. Pears, which had originated in 1789 and was already noted for an expensive transparent soap and catered to the wealthy.

Ward Breecher a prominent American Congregationalist clergyman, social reformer, and abolitionist, to provide a testimonial. Breecher appeared in an advertisement saying, ‘if cleanliness is next to godliness, soap must be considered as a means if grace and a clergyman who recommends moral things should be willing to recommend soap’.<sup>13</sup> This example was reflective of one of the few strategies used by the manufacturers to attract consumers and validate their product promise by using testimonials. The Pears advertisement uses the similar idea of the theme of cleanliness being close to godliness. Javed Masood pointed out that most of the advertisements which appeared in India were directly copied from the ones which appeared in Britain. So, one can trace the origin of the Pears advertisement from the 1920’s back to the 1880’s when this strategy was used to create a desire for cleanliness and godliness was launched by Barratt. However, the advertisement needs to be read differently in the Indian context even if it used the same claim.

We may note here that beauty is coterminous with godliness and youth, while attributes of cleanliness are also evident. Here, in the above advertisement the idea of purity is free from identities such as caste but nonetheless it promises purity, youth, and cleanliness. All these attributes leads to god like beauty.

These images were also crucial in imagining how the ordinary Indian woman should be during this period. Sandria Freitag argues that the circulation of calendar images by the 1930’s helped in constructing an alternative identity of the Indian middle class housewives. The representation of woman engaged in consumption and using new technologies to improve their life styles attributed new roles to the Indian woman. One of the crucial factors in this new identity making was, as pointed out by Freitag, was that connections made between images of benign goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, the new middle class housewife in the nationalist nuclear family, and Bharat Mata. The image of the goddesses cited above is an example of the representations which were used by the sponsoring firms or the consumers to remake the identity of Indian middle class

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p.81.

housewife. Simultaneously, it promotes an ideal of beauty for the Indian woman who is sacred, divine but desexualised.

According to Niharika Dinkar, one sees a transition from heavier statuesque forms for women popularized by Ravi Varma to delicate, slender shapes favored by the *Swadeshi* artists, which is remarkable given the widely accepted scriptural sanctions of ideals of beauty based on heavier models.<sup>14</sup> This leads to the next section which will look at the idea of beauty and body popularized by the nationalist leaders and advertisers who exploited the popularity of such widely circulating images.

### **The Nationalised Body**

Some journals publicized *Swadeshi* politics and provided a space for a nationwide conversation in the 1920's and the 1930's. Lisa Trivedi shows how printed materials familiarised a larger reading public with the places where *khadi* was being produced and sold, and in this way they associated the material goods of the Swadeshi movement with specific places that were defined as locations within the nation.<sup>15</sup> However, the advertisers appropriated nationalism to a consumerist agenda to gain larger popularity among the consumers as well. Thus, the advertisements emphasised representations of Swadeshi goods using nationalist icons like Bharat Mata emblazoned on the Indian map. In this image the Indian woman also acquired a new role, which had been already redefined in literature and nationalist writing.<sup>16</sup>

The representations of Bharat Mata which appeared in the advertisements were inspired by the images of the painters and artists of the twentieth century. The image of the Bharat Mata originated with the famous painting of Abanindranath Tagore in the 1905 during

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<sup>14</sup>Niharika Dinkar, 'Masculine Regeneration and the Attenuated Body in the Early Works of Nandalal Bose', Art Faculty Publications and Presentations, 6-1-2010, Boise State University Scholar Works. Accessed from [http://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=art\\_facpubs](http://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=art_facpubs) on 10 March 2015. She says further that, this was evident as early as 1899 when Balendranath Tagore declared a preference for Shakuntala as a slender nymph rather than Ravi Varma's 'well nourished harem' maiden.

<sup>15</sup>Lisa Trivedi, 'Visually Mapping the Nation: *Swadeshi* Politics in Nationalist India, 1920-1930', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 62, No.1 February, 2003, pp. 11 - 41.

<sup>16</sup>Tapati Guha Thakurta, 'Women as 'Calendar Art' Icons: Emergence of Pictorial Stereotype in Colonial India', *Economic Political Weekly*, and 26 October, 1991, p.95.



the climax of *Swadeshi* movement.<sup>17</sup> He belonged to the Bengal School of painting and his paintings are often mentioned in the discourse regarding nationalism and painting in Bengal. His work offers a contrast to Ravi Varma's imagery of feminine beauty.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, the forms favored by the *Swadeshi* artists of the Bengal school sported a much more slender ideal – women are wispy and delicate and even the male body is slight, devoid of the musculature of Ravi Varma's men.<sup>19</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy,<sup>20</sup> and later generations of informed art historians, considered Abanindranath's art as "nationalist". This work, which was originally conceived as a representation of the regional linguistic community of Bengal as *Banga Mata* (Mother Bengal), is considered now as an emblematic symbol of the *Swadeshi* movement as a symbolic image of Mother India. While *Bharat Mata* was and still remains the most avowedly political painting in Abanindranath's oeuvre, and possibly the only one used in political action.

Popularization of nationalistic ideals through the use of the sacred was reflected in the advertisements issued by Congress. This advertisement for Congress hair oil (Figure 4) draws heavily on nationalist hopes.<sup>21</sup> Trivedi describes how Congress volunteers used the exhibition and lantern tours to popularise *Swadeshi* movement.<sup>22</sup> She focuses on the importance of visual culture in the rise of nationalist politics in India. Trivedi points out that the spinning wheel and the *Swadeshi* movement were presented as concrete solutions that anyone could adopt in times of national crisis. One can argue that similar mechanisms were used by the advertisers to exploit the popular mood. The image of the Bharat Mata is the central theme. It has been pointed out by Trivedi that, 'choosing to take up *Swadeshi* politics was both a personal, local choice and a national one'.<sup>23</sup> We see

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<sup>17</sup>Cohen, Jasmin, 'Nationalism and Painting in Colonial Bengal', *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. Paper 1646. 2012, [http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/1646](http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1646), Accessed on 14 March 2014, p.62.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Dinker, p.2.

<sup>20</sup>Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'Indian Images with Many Arms', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Volume: 22, Number: 118, January, 1913, pp. 189-96. Sri Aurobindo, 'Indian Art' *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram: Pondicherry, 1971), pp. 196-254. This article shows that reclaiming the body as a product of indigenous ideas and discourses formed an essential aspect of the nationalist effort to contest colonial power.

<sup>21</sup>Advertisement of Hair oil, *Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Archive*, Ad Issued by Congress, 1930.

<sup>22</sup>Trivedi, 'Visually Mapping the Nation', p. 13.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

in such advertising how audiences were expected to imagine themselves to be a part of a new community defined by the kinds of products they consumed.



Figure 4: Advertisement of Congress Hair oil

Source: *Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Archive*,  
Ad Issued by Congress (1930's)

The image of the mother helped to establish the nationalist credentials of such firms. Bharat Mata holds bottles of oil in one hand and a national flag in the other. She is clad in traditional Indian sari. It's interesting to take note of the yellow halo or crown like object at behind head of the Bharat Mata. One can suggest similarity with the image of Queen Victoria. Probably, advertisers used British imagery to legitimize and increase the product value. However, this probability complicates our understanding of the ad as an agent of nationalism. The advertisement suggests that the woman is an object of desire as well as the 'congress oil' product itself. Indeed the flowing tresses are not as dominant as the oil in the left hand and the flag in the right. The degree of covering and un/covering becomes crucial in this context. This advertisement reflects the obvious use of the image of the Bharatmata to sell the product and promote nationalism simultaneously. It drew from the groundswell of nationalist sentiment.

However, Bharat Mata and other *Swadeshi* images were not only used by the Congress to fulfill the nationalist and consumerist needs but by many Indian manufacturers who were not necessarily nationalist but used the image for advertising their product. Sumathi Ramaswamy shows that Indian manufacturers of all manner of commodities ranging from matches and country cigarettes (*beedi*) to consumables and cloth used *Swadeshi* imagery.<sup>24</sup> She says that in this process, the map of India which was the proud artifact of a colonizing regime was domesticated as one's own, *Swadeshi*. In particular, from the 1920s, especially with the Gandhian emphasis on *Khadi* (home spun), cloth mills and manufacturers made extensive use of the cartographic image of Mother India to induce Indians to buy locally made cloth rather than the products of Manchester and Lancashire.<sup>25</sup>

These advertisements revealed the use of nationalism as a selling strategy. The Bharat Mata, the Indian flag and *Swadeshi* icons were used in the representations of the ads to attract larger audience. However, these examples show the advertising strategy to sell idea of nationalism or the product. As we see simultaneously, they produced images of

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<sup>24</sup>Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Artful Mapping in Bazaar India: cartographic Reflections on the Priya Paul Collection', 1 March 2011, Tasveer Ghar, *available* at [www.tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/96/index.html](http://www.tasveerghar.net/cmsdesk/essay/96/index.html), p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

ideal beauty and a national body. For example; in the process of representation of mother India in traditional attire and a traditional role, she emerged as a role model for the other Indian woman to follow. Within the frame of nationalism, some authors and writers of the journals sold idea of beauty. Although, these authors did not harp on the image of the Bharat Mata, their articles emphasised an anti west, use of Swadeshi goods and anti fashion.

Debates about clothing were marked by a rigid resistance to western clothing among those who were either traditionalists or nationalists.<sup>26</sup> These English Indian newspapers and vernacular journals carried regular columns on dressing, makeup and beauty. They columns introduced notions of western fashion into discussion of appearance and looks in the Indian setting. Chapter 1 traced some of the changes and the discussion was extended to the notion of beauty and the idea of “beautiful body”. A regular focus on Indian notion of beauty began in the 1920s in some of the printed literature. In the columns on beauty and dress, “fashion” was always derived from the west, and uncritically disseminated, the vernacular journals in particular made “fashion” coterminous with the “west” as a pernicious influence on national culture, and was severely criticized.

The Indian newspaper and journals discussion on beauty and dressing offer a contrast to the politics of representation of advertisement with the nationalist framework itself. Nationalist voices in the journals presented another argument on selling beauty. The audience of the advertisements and journals were also different and so were crucial and significant in determining the influence.

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<sup>26</sup>These works can be referred to understand how the nationalists and the traditionalist leaders and writers opposed westernization in clothing and how clothing emerged as a powerful symbol in the anti colonial discourse. Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.13. Bernard Cohn, ‘Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism’, in edited by Annette and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. C. A Bayly: ‘The Origins of Swadeshi (home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society’, in edited by Arjun Appadurai *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, Susan Bean, ‘Gandhi and Khadi, Fabric of Indian Independence’ in Annette and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

We saw earlier how clothing and body became the central symbols in the national struggle to define a national identity and in this debate Indian woman had become important bearers of this national identity. As already shown above, the emphasis was on *Khadi*, austerity and renunciation of expensive and foreign cloth and resistance to western style. The discourses on beauty invoked similar themes too. The ideal Indian woman was advised to adopt khadi products, homemade items, renounce expensive and foreign cosmetics and resist western styles in order to attain beauty.

One of the constraints of nationalism on the culture of appearance was that it gave rise to the problem of maintaining style and a fashionable look within Indian dressing. The nationalist writers and leaders experimented to solve this problem of association with simple and plain look. For example; Initially, Khadi clothes were often associated with simplicity and sometimes were discarded for fear of having no aesthetic value. Most of the nationalist came up with solutions to overcome the plainness of the Indian clothing. In this context, Sarala Devi's experiments with *khadi* and Indian cloth were represented as a good resolution of the dilemmas of maintaining national identity as well as aesthetic value. She was one of the first to show through her experiments, that fashions and style can be displayed by Indian dress and without using elements of the west. Her experiments are crucial in understanding an alternative idea of beauty which was national, traditional and 'desexualised'. 'Khaddar' material was redefined as a symbol of fashion and style. Later by the 1920's Khadi cloth was projected as aesthetic while maintaining the value of *swadeshi* at the same time. The ideology of Swadeshi incorporated the products for beauty and skin enhancement within its fold too and so foreign makeup products were criticized.

It is interesting to see how women became prime targets of this campaign by the late 1920's and the female readers of various journals were encouraged to renounce foreign goods. They were advised to use traditional indigenous beauty aids and *Swadeshi* items. One essay in *Sudha* emphasized the use of a natural face pack, *chandrprabha ubtan*, *gulbadan ubtan*, milk of roses and glycerine. The writer instructed women to make and

use *Swadeshi* face cream and *Swadeshi* powder.<sup>27</sup> A similar view against foreign products was put forward by *Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandhu* in the year 1939 men and women should resist use of foreign cosmetics in order to remain beautiful. It highlighted that because of the adverse influence of beauty advertisements educated Indian women are spending crores of Indian money and it does not even guarantee beauty.<sup>28</sup> The essay pointed out that greedy men and women are blindly influenced in their quest for beauty by these advertisements and without applying reason they preferred cosmetics. These marketed cosmetics should be used with caution as they could have adverse effects on different skins. As an alternative, the article glorified the use of natural remedies prepared at home. The use of steam, face pack of mustard oil and dried orange peel, sandal powder, exercise for a slim waist etc was encouraged, as was other articles in *Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandhu* also echoed these themes. Urban women in particular were ridiculed for using foreign cosmetics. Importance of exercise was emphasized and women were expected to follow traditions in the pursuit of beauty in contrast to the western methods.

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Devkinandan Vibhav accused the community for their emulation of western fashion and western work styles. His essay advised women to imbibe values of sacrifice and respect.<sup>30</sup> According to the writer, women should dress up in clean clothes and their dressing should incorporate notions of simple and artistic beauty. Linking his distaste for the modern woman and her aspirations with ideals of traditional beauty, he said:

*Mein unhe lipstick aur unchi edi ke joote mein nahi dekhna chahta . Bhartiya mahila samaj ka adarsh, fashionable cinema aur opera house ki titlio ka nahi hain, B.A aur M. A ki khokhli shikhsa mujhe chakachound paida nahi kar sakti. Mujhe yeh vanchaniya nahi hain ki ve amerika ki tarah din bhar daftar mein aur rat bhar nach gharo mein adarsh vyavtit kare. unki vastrabhusha surubhipurna, saaf, svach, swasthya prad aur sadagi ke liye huye hona chahiye aur usme kala aur saundarya ko bhi sthan milna chahiye...*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Cited from Stri Samaj, 'Saundarya aur Shringar', *Sudha*, February, 1929, Volume 2, Number 1, pp. 59-60.

<sup>28</sup>Kumari Indumati Gupt, Kota, 'saundarya kaise rah sakta hain?', *Khandelwal Sabha Bandhu*, December, 1939, pp.36-39.

<sup>29</sup>Shrimati Premkanta, Alwar, 'Striyon ke liye vyayam', *Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandhu*, *Mahilaank*, December, 1939, p. 151.

<sup>30</sup>Devakinandan 'Vibhav' Agara, 'Hamara Mahila Samaj Kidhar', *Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandhu*, December, 1939, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

(I don't want to see them wearing lipstick and high heeled shoes. The ideal of Indian women is not defined by cinema and opera house going fashionable models. I will not be blinded by the fake glamour of educational degrees. It is not tolerable to me that their ideal should be defined by working day time in offices and dancing in clubs like the Americans. Their clothes should be clean and imbibe health and simplicity at same time keeping it artistic and beautiful.)

The emphasis of these discussions was on the susceptibility of women, as consumers of beauty products, to the adoption of western lifestyles. The ridicule was strongest in condemning 'lipstick' and the 'high heeled sandal' wearing women, a symbol of weakly succumbing to the vanities of the west. Educated women were similarly ridiculed for blindly following the west adopting fashion norms. Instead, beauty was redefined to include simplicity and embody the ideals of sacrifice and love. The author emphasized that the beauty and cleanliness of women's clothing should be for health and simplicity rather than sustaining vanity through new forms of cosmetic consumption.

In the early 20th century, there was a hyper visibility to the westernized, educated women who was severely mocked. A small section of urban consumers apart from very few Indian women actually use western beauty aids, cosmetics and powders.<sup>32</sup> Most of the women patronize indigenous beauty cultures and traditional beauty aids.

Use of clean clothes was emphasised in opposition to such vanities, health and exercise began to be emphasised in discussions of beauty. Ideas of cleanliness were used in different contexts and to serve different purposes. The obsession association of soap with cleanliness and therefore beauty was contrasted with the transformative power of healthy bodies.

*Haddiyon ko saboon se dhone aur chatak matakdar kapde pahane se koi stri sundari nahi ho sakti jabki garib striya jo nitya saboon nahi lagati, chatak matakdar kapde nahi pehenti, clip se balon ko nahi sajati, keval swasthya hone ke karan hi ve sundari samajhi jati hain...*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Unknown author, 'Sixteen crores for beauty: cost of Indian cosmetics', *Times of India*, March 23, 1935, p.20.

<sup>33</sup>Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Stri aur Saundarya, Cult of Beauty, East and West*. Prayag: Chatrahitkarini Pustak Mala, 1933.pp. 56.

(No woman can become beautiful only by washing bones with soap and wearing gaudy clothes, poor women who don't use soap every day, don't wear gaudy clothes, don't use clip to adorn their hair, are considered to be beautiful only because they enjoy good health.)

The author stressed health as over other notions of beauty. By romanticizing the poor women's "health" a new critique of the needless consumption by middle class women was inaugurated. Health was projected as a virtue which surpassed the mere consumption of commodities. For the writer, beauty no longer remained the prerogative of the higher classes; the poor too could stake a claim to beauty. This is also a critique of the women who used flashy clothes and fashionable accessories. Significantly, Jyotirmayi Thakur's '*Stri aur Saundarya*' focused on the importance of health over such attributes as a good figure or fair skin color.

The question of good health as a sign of beauty was emphasised in the vernacular journals. The English journals in contrast discussed themes such as taste, choice and style that contributed to beauty. The question of health was discussed too in the English newspapers and journals. However, the theme of health was not stressed in the context of beauty products.<sup>34</sup> Comfort and health were themes invoked in the advertisements especially for woollen clothes and undergarments. For example; Advertisements of Lal Imli wools claimed to protect adults and children from severe chills.<sup>35</sup> By introducing notions of western ways of makeup especially London and French fashion the newspapers argued for the use of a sensible knowledge of cosmetics. At the same time, the authors of the newspapers cautioned the readers against blind imitation of others. These columns also introduced the notion of judicious expenditure. Early twentieth century was marked with the criticism of women for spending too much and in this clothing, jewellery and makeup items were target of the expenditure. We have seen that these criticisms were often based on male and patriarchal anxieties which were a response to women's visibility in public spaces and newly acquired shopping habits.

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<sup>34</sup> Fashion Notes, 'Short Cuts to Health and Beauty', *ILM*, January 1932, p.288, By Sables D'or, 'Clothing and Health: A Doctor's Advice', *Times of India*, 23 March 1926, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Lal Imli, 'What to Wear', *Times of India*, 3 March 1908, p. 12.



In addition, similarity can be drawn between the selling strategy of the writers of English journals (Europeans and Educated elite Indians) on one hand and advertisers on the other hand. All these platforms exploited the ideology of nationalism, but sometimes invoked idea of beauty which was not framed in the nationalistic language. Instead, these beauty columns and advertisements of cosmetics introduced the idea of taste, choice, health and style within and sometimes in opposition to the culture of Swadeshi.

This leads to the next section which will discuss the idea of an erotic body and focus on themes of attraction, seduction and male gaze. At the same time it will trace the culture of beauty advised for the male audience.

### **The Erotic Body**

This section examines the idea of the erotic body through a study of advertisements and paintings. What becomes erotic and how is this erotic defined? It also looks at how the association of beauty with youth became entrenched in discussions in the advertisements and journals in contrast to the nationalist and traditionalist in vocation of beauty as cleanliness, virtue or good health and austerity, a powerful counter development was the appeal of the erotic and sensuous.

One of the popular examples of visual culture, where the theme of eroticism was used are the kalighat paintings which emerged in Calcutta in the late nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Here, within the frame of nationalism an alternative imagery of the female and male body was visualized. The icon of the female body which was celebrated in these images was the voluptuous body of the women. At that time, Calcutta – or Kolkata – was the capital of British India. Close association with the west, the spread of English education and Bengal Renaissance brought noticeable changes in the minds and attitudes of the Bengalis. Some experienced changes in life style and social etiquettes. Others imitated the colonials and their behavior, clothing and life style. The blind imitation of the culture of the west was criticized and they became the butt of social satire. This satirical gaze at the changing

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<sup>36</sup>W.G. Archer, *Kalighat Collection from the Basant Kumar Birla Collection* (Formerly Ajit Ghosh Collection), Bombay : Marg Publications, 1962.

society, altering lifestyles and industrial progress finds expression in Kalighat paintings.<sup>37</sup> A new typology of men and women was created. The fashionable Bengali babu and the Bengali woman were caricatured and symbolized the erosion of traditional Indian values.<sup>38</sup> In these caricatures, these classes and their western lifestyle and especially fashion became the subject of critique. In this context, Kalighat paintings emerged as a potential critique of the western influence on the emerging courtesans, Bengali Babu and wives of the elites. Although, these were mostly caricatures, they did throw light on changes in fashion and the ideals of beauty. All mostly these were for mass consumption so the ideal of the body in a way represented the desired body. Let us look at a painting in order to trace these themes of fashion, gaze and changing life style. Figure 5 is a classic example of a kalighat painting which reflects the changing lifestyles and ideals.

These paintings no doubt offer an insight on the changes in clothing styles and fashion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta. It becomes integral to our understanding of the critique of the fashionable manners and culture of nouveau riche of Calcutta. These paintings reflected the desire of the upwardly mobile Bengali Bhadrakalok for social proximity to British colonial settlers and to consciously distance themselves socially from the lower classes and the middle classes.

The souvenirs of kalighat paintings were desired by the elite and especially by the British to be taken to their home. Kalighat painters also started to appropriate the imagery of the goddesses and reframed them in new modern icons to be enjoyed by the consumers. Jyotindra Jain points out when the Sitas, Paravatis, and Lakshmis shed their thrones, their crowns, their iconographic emblems and their mythological locale in favor of Victorian chairs, fancy attire, and coiffure and took on new emblems such as smoking pipes and more seductive stances and gazes, they emerged in their new roles as courtesans, dandied actresses and heroines.<sup>39</sup> According to him, these images of women with striking

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<sup>37</sup>Jyotindra Jain, *Kalighat Paintings: Images from a Changing World*, Ahmadabad: Mapin Publishing Limited, 1999,

<sup>38</sup> Most other Indian art forms, Kalighat paintings too started on with a religious note. Hindu gods and goddesses along with their incarnations were painted by the devoted painters. Gradually, with evolving time, social sentiments came to be expressed in the medium of paper and colors. Kalighat painting was the first of its kind in the Indian subcontinent that expressed subaltern sentiment and addressed customers directly.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p.9.

seductive poses had become objects of desire for permanent possession and consumption in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta.<sup>40</sup>

This image represents a man and a woman engaged in some conversation. The man appears to be fashionable if we take notice of his Albert hair style, dress and stylish shoes. Similarly, the dress and the posture of the woman too suggest a modern woman with confidence and power. The gaze and the gesture of both the participants show some play of attraction here in the image. It can also be interpreted as a professional interaction between the paan (betal leaves) and the Bengali Babu.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 5: Babu buying paan  
(betal leaf) from a woman**

**Source: *Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal*  
*Visual Archive*, circa late 19<sup>th</sup>  
century**

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>41</sup>Image from Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Visual Archive (Colour transparencies of paintings and prints from the collection of Mr. R.P Gupta, Battala wood engravings and Kalighat paintings).

Jyotindra Jain asserts that while conceptualizing the new female icon, the Kalighat painters must have derived elements from all the manifestations of new women seen around them.<sup>42</sup> Although the man in the image seems to be modeled on the rich Bengali but the identity of the woman is left to the viewer to judge. One can only assume that her gestures are flirtatious. Nonetheless, she becomes a subject to be desired by the consumer outside and inside the image as well. On this theme Jain opines that the image of the babu in the Kalighat paintings was the male version of that of the bibi, the actress or the courtesan. According to him, if the courtesan was the commodity then he was the consumer. However, more than questions of seduction and attraction the kalighat paintings captured the changing fashion of the new rich of Calcutta.

Tapati Guha Thakurta has pointed out, ‘the exclusiveness of the colonial art establishment was match by the counter exclusiveness of the nationalist art movement. As the new ideals of taste, beauty and aesthetic refinement became central in the self identity of the Bengali middle class, nationalism sought to supplant colonial practice with its own high art’. However, what is important here is that how these offer us with the way beauty and clothing became central to this new emerging Bengali and how ‘the erotic’ became the subject of the paintings.

Early twentieth century advertisements emerge as significant spaces in generating ideas of seduction and attraction as achieved through clothing and appearance. The views of the advertisements and the paintings were no doubt different and the circulation occurred at different regions too. However, both emerged as spaces for sartorial expression that equally defined ideas of beauty. The advertisements in the first half of the twentieth century sought to establish that appearance or the ability to seduce and attraction was the most desirable thing among people, and it could be achieved through dressing and beautifying one self. Especially for female consumers, seduction and attraction were projected as most desirable. In this section, I explore the meanings that were generated through an advertisement on the idea of pleasing the self and others. One dresses well or

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-138. Jain suggest that the prevailing notions of morality and the resultant crystallization of attitude towards single women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta did not leave much room for differentiation between prostitutes, courtesans, heroines of novels and actresses. They were all public women i. e belonging to the category of prostitutes.

looks good not only for our self but for a public and this theme is well illustrated in the advertisements.

Seduction was presented as a most important factor behind adornment in the discussions around beauty too. Use of cosmetics was justified if the purpose of enhancing ones appearance was to attract someone. Early writings by a Malayalee woman reveal an attempt to go beyond and critique in ways that there was an emphasis on woman's dressing because men valued good appearance more than other qualities. Paravati Nenminimangalim says that it was due to a man's desire that a woman has to dress up. 'If a woman labors in a field she is dubbed vulgar! If a woman does not wear a velvet blouse, she does not wear a saree with brocade – she falls below the mark!'<sup>43</sup> She further said that the only purpose of dressing was to seduce their husbands. However, women should try to marry men not by deceiving them with their looks. Instead, they should seduce with genuine affection and love.<sup>44</sup> The spectator becomes the judge of beauty and standards. It reflects pressures that women faced to keep their appearance and clothing in accordance with the expected patriarchal norms. We see how seduction is defined by the men's gaze and desire. The question of woman's clothing was therefore riddled with contradictions. The quote offers a critique that women's dressing was for seduction. In the process, it echoes the stereotypes with women's act of dressing and make. On one hand, women were supposed to dress according to codes of existing fashion to maintain their status. On the other hand, this example celebrates another kind of seduction and attraction which is based on genuine affection and love.

Advertisements in *The Times of India* reveal similar themes of seduction but they emphasized on individualized notions of taste, choice and self as crucial elements of beauty. One of the significant phenomena that the clothing and beauty advertisements emphasized was the emergence of the modern woman in the early twentieth century colonial India. However, unlike the debate in the vernacular texts the modern woman is not critiqued for use of western items, or wearing makeup but for her choice of clothing

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<sup>43</sup>J. Devika, *Herself: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Woman 1898-1938*, Kolkata: Stree 2005, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 148-150.

and appearance from late 1920's onwards. 'Capture the heart and keep it' proclaimed one ad (figure 6)

**Capture the Heart**  
*and keep it!*

It is a woman's DUTY to be attractive. Not just on special occasions but all the time. Feminine attraction depends to such a great extent on good grooming and careful toilette that the modern woman must have at her command a range of cosmetics on which she can rely for quality and uniformity. The Stanistreet beauty range meets this need to the full. Each member has been produced as a result of much careful research, is guaranteed to be absolutely pure, and to be ideally suited to the demands of the exacting Indian climate.

**WAR TIME PACKING.** Stanistreet products are guaranteed to conform to the highest world standard so far as raw materials and manufacturing technique are concerned. The effect of the Paper Control Order and other war time restrictions is however that many of our products are not packed and labelled in the manner that they deserve—for this we crave the public's kind indulgence.

**Stanistreet**  
COLD and VANISHING CREAMS  
TALCUM and FACE POWDER  
LIPSTICKS LAVENDER WATER  
ROUGE EAU DE COLOGNE  
STANAROMA HAIR SHAMPOO

Figure 6: Advertisement for Stanistreet toiletries

Source: *The Times of India*, 15 February, 1945,

p.7.

for Staniatreet makeup products. It declared: 'it's a woman's duty to be attractive. Not just on special occasions but all the time'.<sup>45</sup> The advertisement emphasized that the careful choice of a good product can make the modern woman achieve the impossible. The woman is shown in a confident alluring posture and seems to be posing for an audience. She has a range of toiletries at her disposal. It is interesting to take note of the representation of the 'modern woman' in the advertisements. She wears a modern gown, sports a short hair and has a slender figure. The image of modern woman has been analyzed by a group of writers in their book '*Modern Girl Around the World*'.<sup>46</sup> They argue that the modern girl phenomena arose across different countries during the 1920's and 30's all over the world. This modern girl was characterized by markers such as high heeled shoes, western clothing, college going, bobbed hair, use of makeup and cosmetics etc.

The modern woman in India challenged and shook earlier notions of womanhood and reforms her dress and appearance on her own. The Indian journals and texts glorify the modern woman and her skills during 1930-1940 period. One man notes in *The Times of India* that the modern woman is beautiful beyond doubt and that it was due to her knowledge of how to use cosmetics to the best advantage.<sup>47</sup> However, another author criticized the modern woman's beauty as too standardized, since women followed current fashions too rigorously in India too. By late 1920, the modern girl phenomenon was glorified. Similar themes around the celebration of the modern woman were invoked by other writers of *Times of India*. Her developed sense of beauty was appreciated. One essay points out that woman are right in using cosmetics as it affords them happiness which contributes to her attractiveness.<sup>48</sup> The women advised that if they could improve their natural looks by the use of cosmetics than they should. But, women were advised to do so with a proper sense of makeup and by not following it blindly. We see how within the realm of fashion, women were allowed to use foreign cosmetics and with caution to

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<sup>45</sup> Staniatreet, *Times of India*, 15 February, 1945, p.7.

<sup>46</sup> Alys Even Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, *The Modern girl Around The World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalisation*, London: Duke University Press, 2008.

<sup>47</sup> A mere man Talks, 'Standardized beauty means less charm', *The Times of India*, May 14, 1936, p.23.

<sup>48</sup> 'Are Women justified in using cosmetics? Majority of our readers say yes?', *The Times of India*, 19 June, 1925, pg16.

use them judiciously. However, although *The Times of India* was aimed at Europeans, Anglo Indian, middle class English speaking Indian readers, nevertheless it introduced themes such as taste, choice, and the right aesthetic sense to the Indian readers.

#### Fashion and the Enhancement of “Youth”

Advertisements selling beauty products invoked other themes such as youth and young skin. Jones notes an important shift around the theme of age which occurred over the preceding decades.<sup>49</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century older women, typically defined as women over 35, were dismissed as highly unattractive. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century women least by men, rather the commercial beauty industry in India had begun to focus on selling products which promised to make them look younger by applying creams, visiting salons or dyeing their hair. The promise to women either to preserve or restore their youth was to become central in skin care brands.<sup>50</sup> Jones traces history of hair and points out that the contemporary hair industry laid importance on changing the color of hair, taking good care etc. As it plays a very important role in appearance. The graying of hair or its loss altogether pointed to the fear of aging.

The focus on young skin and forever youth has been emphasized in figure 7 and 8. These two ads promoting Palmolive soap propagate the idea of keeping oneself young for a longer time. The caption of these two ads, ‘**now women grow young not old**’<sup>51</sup> and ‘**when must beauty cease**’<sup>52</sup> celebrates youth. The focus is on maintaining up-to date appearance all the time. Palmolive helps women to acquire popularity among those of the opposite sex and makes her the centre of attraction in the group.

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<sup>49</sup>Jones. *Beauty Imagined*, p. 52.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup>Advertisement for Palmolive Soap, *The Times of India*, 20 August, 1925, p.3.

<sup>52</sup>Advertisement for Palmolive Soap (When Must Beauty Cease), *The Times of India*, 26 August, 1926, p.20.



Admiration . . . Love—the prize of a youthful looking skin.

A woman with a clear, unclouded radiant skin is always surrounded by admirers.

## Now, **women** grow young—not old

*Palm and olive oil—nothing else—give nature's green colour to Palmolive Soap.*

*Palmolive Soap is produced entirely by machinery and is untouched by human hands until you break the wrapper.*

**Warning**

*Do not think that every green-coloured soap or represented as of palm and olive oils is the same as Palmolive.*

*Look for the green wrapper with black band. Palmolive Soap is never sold unwrapped.*

Certainly, the middle aged woman is disappearing, in this golden age of youth.

The reason?—simply that **women** have learned that age is judged by appearance, not by years. If you want to be always at your best, protect the beauty Nature gave you, by using Palmolive freely and with confidence.

Palmolive is exclusively a pure vegetable soap. Guaranteed not to contain a trace of animal fats or any harmful ingredients.

Palmolive is blended from palm and olive oils, the lotion-like, **cosmetic** oils discovered in ancient Egypt. Remember that complexion beauty extends to arms and shoulders. Make them more charming by bathing with Palmolive.

THE PALMOLIVE COMPANY, Chicago, U. S. A.  
(Delaware Corp.)

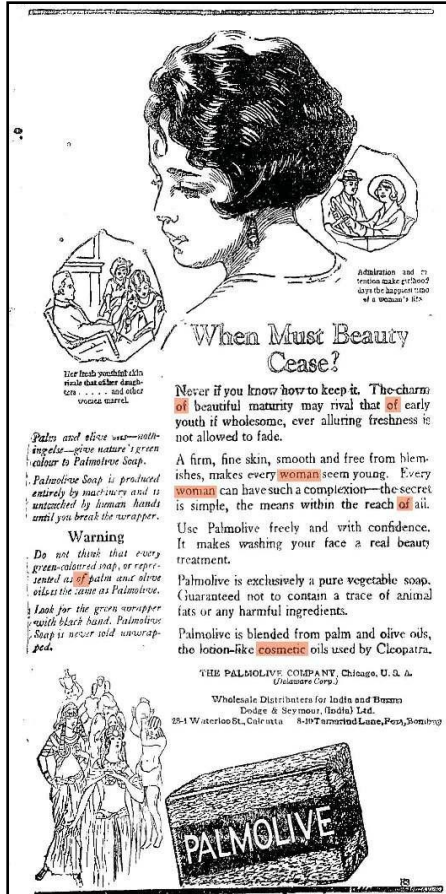
Wholesale Distributors for India and Burma  
Dodge & Seymour, (India) Ltd.  
28-1 Waterloo St., Calcutta 3-10 Tamarind Lane, Fort, Bombay

**PALMOLIVE**

Figure 7: Advertisement for Palmolive Soap

Source: *The Times of India*, 20 August, 1925, p.3

Thus, in urging the readers of advertisements to use their products in order to be young and beautiful, these advertisements addressed anxieties related to aging and health. Age is determined by looks not by years. Clearly, advertisements were tapping into a new definition of life expectation and aging that was emerging in cities with growing populations of middle class. Indifferent appearance was blamed even for failure in love life and marriage.



**Figure 8: Advertisement for Palmolive Soap (When Must Beauty Cease)**

**Source: *The Times of India*, 26 August, 1926, p.20.**

In contrast, the vernacular journals and tracts carried different approaches to the themes of aging and being young, and questioned the link between youth and beauty. The critique of women who did not pay attention to their appearance was more virulent. One of the writers of tracts, Jyotirmayi Thakur comments on women who looked old due to changes in the body:

*unke sharir mein bhayankar parivartan ho gaya hain. Unke us parivartan ko dekhkar mein kya batauin, meri kya dasa hui! Jo abhi kal apne roop auur youvan par ithlati hui chalti thi, aaj ve budhiya nazar aati hain! Meine ashcharya ke saath dekha, unka youvan unka wah roop kahan kho gaya...!*<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Thakur, *Stri aur Saundarya*, p.5.

(Grave changes have occurred in her body. I can't say what I felt seeing the changes in her body. She used to be proud of her youth and beauty but today she looks like an old maid. I was surprised to see that her youth and beauty were lost.)

The above quote suggests that a beautiful body and appearance grants confidence. According to the author women walked with pride when they were young and now they looked like an old made. For Thakur a young body and youth represents beauty. It emphasizes societal pressure women face due to aging. Women are considered to be old maids after they attain a certain age.

In the vernacular journals, beauty was presented as innate to women, beyond all caste, community and class differences. If a woman is healthy, she has the ability to attract everyone.<sup>54</sup> These texts drew attention to the link between health and beauty. For example: Jyotirmayi Thakur emphasized, that a woman doesn't need to work to become beautiful as beauty is natural to them.<sup>55</sup> According to her, body is naturally attractive irrespective of caste, class, morals and colour. The author narrates a story stressing importance of health for beauty. She met one lower caste girl called 'fulia' who had converted to Christianity. According to the author, Fulia was dirty and filthy as a child. However, now she was dressed in clothes similar to Christian women. Although she had dark complexion she appeared beautiful. Her clothes were clean and she looked like a 'memsaab'. The author argued that Fulia looked beautiful as she was healthy and she was physically clean.

Importance of health was projected to be beautiful. Thakur says, '*logo ka kehna hain ki ladkiyon mein mohini hoti hain. vah mohini ishwar ki di hui, unki saundarya shakti hain jo sahaj hi manav hridaya ko apni or akrist kar leti hain.*' (People say that a woman has the power of attraction and it is given by god. Her beauty is her power and can naturally attract human hearts). She comments:

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

*sharir ki gathan banawat aur uska rangroop saundarya kehlata hain parantu swasthya ke bina inka koi mahatva nahi hota. Yahi karan hain ki sunder se sunder striyan bhi jab apna swasthya kho deti hain to unke sharir ka rakt sukh jata hain. Prateyk ang ki haddiya aur nasein alag alag dikhayi deti hain , sharir aur mukh mein pilapan aa jata hain, us samay sharir ki sfurti mari jati hain aur wah sundari bahut badsurat maloom padti hain...*<sup>56</sup>

(There is no value of beauty without health. This is the reason why beautiful women look pale when they lose health. One can see the bones and nerves of a weak body. Their body becomes inactive, face and body looks pale and weak and thus those beautiful women seem ugly.)

The *Indian Ladies Magazine*, an English journal for women offered opinions on how beauty was perceived in India in the first half of the twentieth century. Regular columns with fashion suggestions came out in the *Indian Ladies Magazine*, and were written by Sister Susie. For her, beauty was made up of different elements such as perfect dressing, fine figure and features, attractive manners and liveliness of expression. She stressed that the most important element was to know oneself.<sup>57</sup> The importance of thoughts and actions in the creation of self was highlighted. Sister Susie believed that the real personality could be hidden under prejudiced thoughts, ignorance, moral cowardice and sentimentalism. Her columns gave equal importance to the personality of the person along with dressing. It was reflected in the way hairstyle,<sup>58</sup> makeup, footwear,<sup>59</sup> and ways of walking, manners and attitude was discussed.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, these magazines set trends to be followed by women and produced new norms for the fashion conscious. Bodily practice itself was altered to suit the dictates of elegance and beauty. *Indian Ladies Magazine* specified the right way of walking, the careful position of the hands while sitting, talking and the assumption of certain postures.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>57</sup>Sister Susie, 'Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 4, July and August 1935, pp. 135-137.

<sup>58</sup>Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, February, 1932, p. 330.

<sup>59</sup>Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions - Our Footwear Suggestions', *ILM*, January 1929, pp. 320-321.

<sup>60</sup>Bremmer, *A Cultural History of Gesture*, Gesture has been defined as a significant movement of limb or body or use of such movements as expression of feelings or rhetorical device. The book analyses how the body served as a location of self - Identification and demonstration of authority. Gestures were transmitters of political and religious power in medieval society. They were markers of social distinction. Gestures can convey different messages, emotions, reactions and expression of a person. In this volume gestures are seen as a product of the needs of society to maintain separation, impose domination etc.

Geoffrey Jones suggests the ethical objections to wearing cosmetics, based on wider societal values slow to give way, were most susceptible to change for more cosmopolitan and fashion driven women. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century sale of cosmetics by prestigious fragrances houses such as Rimmel aged the association of cosmetics with fashion.<sup>61</sup>

### Fashion as Sign of Independence

One needs to locate the focus on self in context of social changes of the period. As pointed out earlier marketing strategies used by the advertising firms were significant too. For example: Helen Landsdowne Resor bought the J.Walter Thompson Company and in 1916 her company was hired to devise a new marketing strategy for Pond's vanishing cream and Pond's Cold cream. Resor's new campaign was aimed to persuade women to incorporate both creams into daily beauty regimen. Jones points out that, 'the message was driven home by reviving the use of actresses testimonials, a practice that had fallen out of favor since the era of the Pears soap campaigns, and departed from the norm by employing celebrity endorsements not only in fashion magazines but also in large circulation middle class journals'.<sup>62</sup> He points out further that the campaign was targeted as building the middle class market for the cream which was positioned as a more respectable means of looking beautiful than using more explicit cosmetics.

Resor recognized and responded to women's rising social and economic independence which encouraged and increasingly permitted women to make their own choices about what to buy and how to appear. In both the United States and Europe growing numbers of young women entered retail and clerical work. Political emancipation had accompanied these changes. In 1920's for instance, women won the right to vote throughout the United States.<sup>63</sup>

Jones traces the rise of visual self awareness in the early twentieth century. She notes that with the new technologies there was more attention paid on the appearance of the person.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.100.

New commercial products and services emerged in the modern era to help beautify one's hair, skin and face. With other changes such as spread of commercial photography in the late nineteenth century one could study how one appeared and distribute one's own image everywhere.<sup>64</sup>

The brand's pitch was clear: it offered to make women attractive and lovable, just like the celebrities and the beauty of it all was that any woman could become beautiful if she used the brand. The underlying message was that every woman had a responsibility to herself as well as to those around her, to take control of her appearance and be her beautiful, successful best.

The claims of these discussions were varied. Often they sought to establish that well dressed appearance is the most desirable thing among both men and women. The target audiences for the beauty products were women but men were addressed to some extent as well in this period. Products such as soap, razor, shaving cream, perfumes emphasized that grooming of men's look was desirable too.

According to Joanne Entwistle, James Laver's work reproduces the myth about women's dressing.<sup>65</sup> Laver suggests that women are more narcissistic than men and their dress exhibits 'seduction principle'. The aim behind dressing is to enhance sexual attractiveness. He points out further that the purpose of clothes has been to make them more sexually attractive, and the purpose of men's clothes has been to enhance their social status. Joanne Entwistle opines that there is no evidence to suggest that women are 'naturally' more concerned about their dressing. In fact, the history of costume in the west suggests that men took equal interest in their dressing and appearance as women. However, in colonial India too, male clothing styles changed to a great extent and they seem to be concerned about their appearance as well but were severely criticized for it.

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<sup>64</sup>Jones, *Beauty Imagined*, p. 44.

<sup>65</sup>Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. London: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publisher, 2000, p. 160.

The *Stri Bodh* journal surveyed wide range of fashions in moustaches and beards, men's hair style, women's hair styles, shoes, etc.<sup>66</sup> Abigail McGowan argues that acceptability of styles depended on adequate finances and comprehensive knowledge of what to choose judiciously. Along with this, it worked through gender and forged separate boundaries around proper feminine and masculine consumption.<sup>67</sup> For men, proper heterosexual masculinity by the end of the nineteenth century permitted only limited time and expenditure on personal adornment. In the August 1881 *Stri Both* article on men's hair, the author pointed out the changes in the culture of appearance. She said that now fashionable Bombay dandies went to salons to get their hair done, they spent additional hours at home in grooming their looks by cleaning, perfuming, oiling, combing and parting their hair. An article which came out in 1881 on men's hair criticized The tone of the argument seems to be critical.

Those who keep a comb or brush with them day and night and think it their duty to comb the hair at least three or four times.... Forget that the great care they bestow on a small thing like hair merely show them to be useless and pests on this earth... the care and beauty of the hair is more important for ladies and by giving such time to their hair, even the boys seem to turn into feminine species, and men into women!<sup>68</sup>

The author suggests that men should save time and use it for some better work rather than grooming themselves all the time and forgetting that they are men. According to her, women by contrast, were right to primp and preen. Indeed, the very next article in the series argued that it is natural for women to take great care of their hair for it is a special feature of their beauty. Whereas men should use their time for other more useful things, women should still do fashion, just properly, tastefully, and beautifully. However, it was to be done with taste and style.<sup>69</sup> Dressing was a field where men were allowed to pay attention not so much to their appearance of their body on bodily abilities, rendering the

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<sup>66</sup>Haynes, *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, p.161.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., original source: 'Navi Navi Fashiono : Poshakno' ( New Fashion; Desire for Dresses), *Stri Both*, 25, (12), December 1881, p.270.

<sup>69</sup>Eco, *On Beauty*, Eco says that taste plays an influential role in consumer choices. According to Eco, this taste had to persuade the consumer need for rapid replacement due to disaffection so that there is no cessation of production, distribution and consumption of goods. Eco points out that taste teaches one about beauty and that as an autonomous faculty is provided with laws. He puts forward further, that this new beauty could be reproduced and it was also transitory and perishable.

body useful, and productive. In the discourse around beauty men were criticized and this theme is illustrated in the poem cited below.

What a creep, he won't touch mustard oil!  
But he uses Jabakusum, That's neat!  
Let's go take a look, girls, it's a treat!

Turmeric on handloom towels,  
But he won't rub his body with those.  
His thick beard is flowing with the froth of soap,  
Oh what an incredible feat!  
Let's go take a look, girls, it's a treat!<sup>70</sup>

The excerpt is a satire on the fashionable dandy men who took care of themselves. The tone of the ridicule becomes stronger with a mockery on items of personal care. The man is being criticized as someone who doesn't touch mustard oil but uses Jabakusum. He is presented as a promoter of soap than indigenous toiletries. Early twentieth century Bengali men were considered effeminate. The excerpt reflects some of those attacks made on the modern Bengali men.

He longs to be fair, scrubs vigorously with soap;  
Rubs with a towel till his skin peels off;  
Parts his hair in front in the style of Prince Albert,  
Scents himself liberally, and reeks like a Civet.<sup>71</sup>

Another poem criticizes the Bengali men as well. As we had seen in the representation of the Kalighat paintings that men were mocked and their hairstyle and fashionable attire became objects of criticism. Similarly, here the use of scent, soap, western hairstyle is severely criticized. This poem was in response to the critique on the Bengali women by Mokshodayani Mukhopadhyay. She was a sister of W.C Bonnerjee, the first president of the Indian National Congress and her father was the renowned lawyer Girish Chandra Bannerjee.<sup>72</sup> One of the poems 'Bangalir Babu' (the Bengali Babu) from her first

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<sup>70</sup>Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Delhi: 1991, p. 127. 'Folk Song: Ladies are giving the groom a bath: Early twentieth century', (Bengali. collected by Tilotma Dhar from Comilla, translated by Chandreyee Neogy).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 217-220.



collection of poems Bana Prasun (A bunch of Wild Flowers) was severely criticized. It was a response to the poem where Bengali women were attacked by the leading poet Hemchandra Bandopadhyay. In her poem the supposedly educated and emancipated babu in her poem is vain, pompous, slavish and degenerate.

In contrast, to this critique of the modern man, the advertisements create scope for men to turn to beauty and appearance. However, it had some limitations and it was to be done for enhancing personality rather than beauty. The body of the man becomes desirable by the woman in the advertisements of commodities used by men. There is a difference in the way masculine body is imagined. The sturdy, firm and confident postures indicate a different ideal for the men.

In another advertisement of Palmolive (Figure 9) for the same product, it was shown that man's personality can depend on shaving. A woman admiring a man's clean shaven face is depicted in the illustration. He is complimented for the new shaved look. Unlike, the virile woman he does not reforms his looks for a woman's attention but he gets it for free. Distinction is celebrated in the advertisement. Makeup serves two functions: Self expression and self creation. Looking different is being different. Jones points out during the 1920's the American beauty market boomed. The social importance of smelling and looking clean was now firmly established in the American cultural psyche. This was served further to diffuse hygienic habits as the need to keep millions of soldiers free of disease resulted in soap, razors and other toiletries becoming required elements of soldier's equipment. Soap companies continued to make the case for hygiene. Hygiene was increasingly associated with beauty.<sup>73</sup> We see that this notion of beauty invoked different idea of the 'sexual', 'attractive' and beautiful body. These changes are interlinked with changes in middle class lifestyles which took place in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>73</sup>Jones, *Beauty Imagined*, p. 99.

"EVEN I ENVY THE SMOOTHNESS OF YOUR FACE!"



"... that's the third compliment since I started using Palmolive Shave Cream"

HELEN: Can a shaving cream make that much difference, Bill? Why, you seem better looking!

BILL: Certainly, dear. Palmolive is a fast-working, comfortable, efficient shaving cream. Actually seems to soothe and soften the skin. Gives me a cleaner, closer shave without irritation. And what a tonic it is for my face!

**TRY PALMOLIVE SHAVE CREAM** and you'll agree with Bill. Because it is the only shaving preparation in the world with these 5 advantages: multiplies itself in lather 250 times; softens the toughest beard in 1 minute; maintains its creamy fullness for 10 minutes without drying; forms strong bubbles that support the hairs erect for cutting; fine tonic after-effects because it is made from a blend of olive and palm oils.




FOR THE PERFECT FINISH TO THE PERFECT SHAVE USE PALMOLIVE AFTER SHAVE TALC

M-FR

Figure 9: Advertisement for Palmolive Shave Cream (Even I envy the smoothness of your face)

Source: *The Times of India*, 19 September 1935, p.16.

This culture of print is part of broader history of middle class identity which developed under the conditions of colonial modernity. Douglas E. Haynes explores how advertisements helped in the making of middle class identities.<sup>74</sup> He suggests that the new efforts of the advertisers to sell brand name were geared primarily to the urban middle class. According to him, these advertisements involved an attempt to fashion the middle

<sup>74</sup> Haynes, *Towards a History of Consumption in south Asia*, pp.190-191.

class. He further explains how images of Indians were of high class Hindus who lived in comfortable homes and flats. Mostly, the ads represented nuclear families. In this context, Kaushik Bhaumik has argued that the period between 1910 and 1930 saw the emergence of the middle classes in Bombay no longer defined exclusively by the lifestyles they assumed.<sup>75</sup> In this period urban people engaged in an expanded range of leisure activities, including theatre, films, eating out in restaurants and purchasing and reading magazines, newspapers and novels.<sup>76</sup>

Haynes notes that the interwar period witnessed a variety of developments that promoted new patterns of consumption.<sup>77</sup> In urban areas changes in taste were causing shifts in demand away from products manufactured by small producers in the western Indian countryside, sometimes towards goods that were made in cities or that were imported from Europe, Japan or the United States.

Thus, one can say that the changes in consumption practices seemingly stemmed from the need to present oneself as modern, an identity which itself was influenced by range of cultural developments, from education to movements of social reform and changes in the occupational structure of Indian cities. The emphasis on the modern look and appearance has been traced in the context of transformations in the early twentieth century brought by social and political changes, freedom of press, technological inventions.

### **The Conjugal Body**

What was the notion of the ideal body for securing a marriage? This section traces the origin of the 'being beautiful' as an essential attribute in the context of matrimonial alliance. It focuses on what was the notion of desired beauty for the matrimonial alliance. It argues that the discussions on beauty raise questions of color and health along with the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>76</sup> Kaushik Bhaumik suggests how the new generation in the first decade of the twentieth century were reacting to the coming up of new cultural order which was based on the consumption of cultural and lifestyle goods that had begun to flood the Indian markets. However, their choice was often in opposition and had to face anxieties of the older order.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.,

idea of a pure and fertile body. There was a celebration of reproductive body of a woman in the vernacular texts, journals and folk songs in this period. At the same time, beauty became synonymous with the idea of producing fewer children and not having had a child marriage. The free sexuality of married woman is discouraged in the vernacular journals and texts. This section explores how the discussion of beauty and ugliness are invoked in the context of restraint. These offer a contrast from the definition of beauty that emerged from and from the expanding sphere of consumption.

Large number of matrimonial advertisements in the modern India that we see today projects the image of ideal desired female beauty as tall, slim and fair. However, the matrimonial advertisement started to appear in the Indian newspapers and journals only by 1960's. Match making was by and large done through the mediator or the middle man before the 60's. Did beauty become an attribute of match making and matrimonial alliances in early twentieth century India? There were more dominant ideologies which influenced the selection, such as those relating to age and caste. These categories played influential roles and beauty seemed to take a second place. However, it did play an important role in getting acceptance and being loved. Some of the advertisements stressed that beautiful looks guaranteed the love of a husband or the prospect of getting married.

As pointed out above, vernacular texts gave importance to appearances and good looks were tickets to a happy married life and marriage proposals. They argued that even a woman who was considered to be have been 'ugly' can improve their appearance by various means such as exercise, diet, and homemade beauty products and ensure a successful matrimony. Most of the advertisements promoted their products by manipulating the idea that appearance was responsible for success in various field, such as marriage, work, etc. They promise that beauty was something that can be acquired if a women chooses the right products and changes her lifestyle. The advertisements projected that becoming beautiful would lead to quick marriage and love of the spouse.



Figure 10: Advertisement of Pond's Cold Cream

Source: *Sarita*, 3 November 1966, p.5.

The theme was emphasized in the Pond's Cold Cream advertisement which appeared in a magazine in 1966 (Figure 10).<sup>78</sup> The advertisement represented a young woman who wishes to get married soon and by use of ponds cream for seven days, she acquired beauty. The advertisement defines that the ideals of beauty were '*kajrari ankhein*' (sharp eyes) and '*chamkeele daant*' (shining teeth). However, the woman in the image was represented to have a pale and dull skin. The caption put forward that the reason of her not getting married was the pale skin. The central theme of this advertisement is that beauty can be acquired in seven days, and so the illustrations show that the woman on applying the cream for over a period of seven days attains a glowing skin from the dull

<sup>78</sup>Jones, Pond's and other companies were also able to use the services of advertising agencies which, with the growth of mass circulation print media, were transformed from buyers of space in newspapers to creators of advertising copy. J. Walter. Thompson pioneered the placing of advertisements in woman's magazines. This agency like many others in the emergent American advertising and media industry was based in New York. In 1886 Pond's launched its first national advertising campaign for pond's Extracts with J. Walter Thompson. Pond's Cold cream was launched in 1907, p. 53.

skin. The change in appearance is put forth as a reason of a man taking interest in her, eventually leading to marriage. This 1960 Pond's advertisement projected appearance as an important factor in the marriage alliance. This example shows that the aesthetic of beauty that was being projected by the advertisement. The logic of beauty is framed in the language of having a clear, soft attractive skin. Similar advertisements in the early twentieth century claimed that beauty can be acquired by consumption of different products aimed at clearing skin, improved complexion and concealed age.

Coming back to our discussion of the idea of selling 'beauty', we see how the use of a certain product is represented to help the women gain something she was unable to attain otherwise. Judith Williamson has analysed this strategy in her work.<sup>79</sup> She points out that these kinds of advertisement generated a connection between the product and the second product, love, happiness etc. which it will buy.<sup>80</sup> In this advertisement of Pond's cold cream, it's emphasized that money can't buy love but the cold cream can. In the process, the product becomes interchangeable with a feeling. Here love is attained in the form of a clear skin. The cold cream is being advertised on the grounds of its exchange value, its capacity to buy something else in this case a husband. Williamson says that, thus in a way the products puts the consumer in the position of replacing them. The product does things that the consumer can't do for her/himself. And, as shown in the advertisement itself a woman does things to attract attention of the man. The cold cream here represents what the woman is not able to do on her own. Both have the same aim; to get attention of the man and get married. So, we see how the advertisements harp on the unfulfilled desires, motivations to sell a commodity.

As pointed earlier, matrimonial columns were not a popular platform for arranging a match in India until 1950's. Traditional match makers were responsible, for giving the information of an eligible boy and a girl in the first half of the twentieth century. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati's account gives us a glimpse of how marriages were arranged in the

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<sup>79</sup>Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd. 1978.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

colonial period. She points out that wealth and caste were the main concerns in marriage as opposed to looks.<sup>81</sup>

But wealth in one's own caste surpasses the merits of learning, beauty, and honor; parents generally seek boys of well to do families for their sons- in law. As the boys are too young to pass as possessing 'good qualities,' i.e. learning, common sense, ability to support and take care of family and respectable character, the parents wish to see their daughters safe in a family where she will, at least, have plenty to eat and to wear...<sup>82</sup>

She explains further that although good looking prosperous men were desirable by the parents for their daughter it was more important to matching horoscopes. Status and caste were dominant factors in arranging marriages. The desirable ideal groom perceived was wealthy, learned, and of the same caste. On the other hand, for females, age and beauty became the initial qualities to be considered marriageable. Although caste and class was important attributes in considering an eligible groom, age did not constitute as an important factor for being desired for match making, the history of marriage and child marriage in colonial India are amply illustrate.

Coming back to the question of how marriages were fixed in colonial period we get instance from Sudha Majumdar's account.<sup>83</sup> She says that in the year 1910 two marriage proposals were brought for her. According to her, one was very good looking but not well educated. But he came from a wealthy zamindar family of east Bengal. The other boy was not so good looking but had a splendid physique and was well educated. His home was in Murshidabad which was closer to Calcutta. He was appointed as a deputy Magistrate and had to travel to places. His father was employed in the service of Nawab of Murshidabad. Sudha's thoughts to herself are reflected in the quote below.

The word 'Nawab had romantic connotations, and a roving magistrate sounded more interesting than a dull landowner planted in a remote part of east Bengal. And as for looks, why, only a few days ago I had learned from my Bengali primer about the flamboyant *palash* flower that no one loves because it has no scent. It had been explained to me that men were prized were for their merits and that good looks without qualities had no value, for the flame red *palash*, because it has no perfume, can never be used for any *puja*. All this was fresh in my memory, while the idea of travelling to new

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<sup>81</sup> Tharu and K. Lalita, p. 249.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>83</sup> Sudha Mazumdar, *Memoirs of An Indian Woman*, London: M. E Sharpe, 1989, p.62.

places, being always on the move, and living without any fixed abode seemed absolutely fascination ...<sup>84</sup>

The account of Sudha Majumdar reveals the motivations of a young girl in deciding her preference for a groom. Looks certainly didn't play any role in persuading her to choose a husband for herself. Instead, the opportunity to travel to different places was more attractive for her. Her choice was motivated by the patriarchal definition of an ideal groom. Socially it was not important for men to have good looks but educational and financial stabilities were preferred. On the other hand instances of men being struck by women's beauty can be found in the autobiographies.<sup>85</sup>

On the other hand, for a girl looks and appearance seemed to be as important to caste and wealth. When the groom's family members were to come to see Sudha she was dressed properly. She remembers and says, 'my sister took an unusual interest in my appearance. She rubbed a few drops of scented oil in my unruly hair, and then plaited, coiled and pinned it back in a becoming manner and dressed me in a silk sari...' <sup>86</sup>

The importance of beauty for acceptance and love within the conjugal relation were emphasized by the texts. They show how the desirable body for a successful marriage can be attained by being healthy, confident and by practicing some kind of restraint or child birth. These discussions focused on value of exercise as a measure to attain beauty as opposed to ugliness. These discussions invoked a new ideal of body for women who were healthy as opposed to having slim figures and pale complexions.

An account of transforming one's married life reflects some of the themes that were invoked by the vernacular texts in the early twentieth century. The story "mein kis prakar sundar ban gayi" (how I became beautiful) narrates a makeover of an 'ugly' woman to 'beautiful'. The woman commented that:

*san 1905 ki baat hain, jab mein pehli baar apne sasural gayi, kya stri kya purush sab meri hansni udane lage, kisi ne kaha mein "bhad jhokti thi" kisi ne kaha "suwar charati thi" kisi ne kaha "khan mein kaam kart thi" mere pati ne kaha ki mera jivan nast ho gaya...*

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp.62-63.

<sup>85</sup> Tharu and K. Lalita *Women Writing in India*, p.89.

<sup>86</sup> Mazumdar, *Memoirs of An Indian Woman*, p.58.



(It's a story of 1905, when I went to my in-law's place for the first time, everyone mocked me women and men together, some said "she did menial job", some said "took pigs for grazing" some said "worked in mines", my husband said my life is ruined")

The story captures the dilemma of the woman who was considered ugly. The text did not reflect on the basis of which her physical appearance was scrutinized. One can say that probably the woman was dark complexioned and thin. More than being a story of the discrimination the story reflects a transformation of a girl who found beauty in her thoughts. According to the story, as a reaction to these taunts and caricatures this girl searched for way to become beautiful. She started to admire herself in the mirror everyday and reminded herself that she was a part of beautiful nature. The happiness she acquired by self admiration was reflected in her overall look and her friend commented that she looked beautiful. According to the author, the moral of the story was that one should not get discouraged by people calling one ugly and being confident about oneself. Happiness was emphasized as being beautiful.

Satisfaction with one's looks clearly paved the way to many successes. The women were advised to bring purity of thoughts and happiness to remain beautiful and at the same time men were advised to look for virtues other than beauty for selecting partners.<sup>87</sup> We see how the patriarchal concerns redefine the idea of beauty. Beauty has been seen in context of a man's gaze especially in popular art forms and in this process the debates reinforce stereotypes of women.<sup>88</sup>

Similar concerns were reflected in the popular novels during this period as a response to events that unfolded that happened. For example, Munshi Premchand's articles focused

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<sup>87</sup>Ganga Prasad Gaud, 'Sringar prasadhano ki bharmar', October, 1936, *Mahila*, Year 1, Number 1, pp.7-72.

<sup>88</sup>John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: Published by British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin books, 1972, p. 52. Berger analyses the ways in which women were seen and represented in art. He points out that the objective of painting nude women was to cater to the male spectator's need. The paintings were based on the idea of a man looking at the woman. The woman was shown to be responding to the male gaze by being aware of the male gaze looking at her. This tradition was used all through the paintings post renaissance and well into the eighteenth century. However, there were also exceptional paintings where the nude women in the picture did not allow the presence of a male spectator. The ideal spectator is always seen to be a male and the image is designed to flatter males.

on higher marriageable age, women's right to property and divorce and abortion.<sup>89</sup> Premchand's female protagonists were models of ideal womanhood and in the process he betrays a prejudice against 'modern women whom he depicts as possessing easy morals and shallow character.'<sup>90</sup> According to Geetanjali Pandey, Premchand recognizes that upper caste and lower caste mores were different. But he depicts lower caste women as 'ideal' characters by making them resemble traditional self-effacing women.

For example, his story 'sati' (May 1932) illustrates the above statement. The story shows a low-born 'beautiful' Malia married to 'ugly' Kallu. The story narrates that because of her beauty Kallu cannot trust Malia even though she is faithful to him.<sup>91</sup> However, Malia is shown to serve her husband dutifully and nurse him when he falls ill. However, here she doesn't assert herself. As a contrast, we get another argument of beauty no longer remaining a driving factor in marriage. The protagonist in 'Prenstru' (April 1926) Prabha, a traditional Hindu woman, is devoted to her westernized husband Pashupati who is attracted by another woman who is modern. Pashupati leaves Prabha for a few years in order to get married to Krishna which didn't materialize. In the end of the story both Prabha and Pashupati are reunited and Prabha emerges as an upholder of loyalty and duty.

These stories reflect early twentieth-century anxieties about the perils of education and modern women. As we see that the modern woman is criticized and ideals such as tradition, modesty and honor are celebrated in matrimonial alliance. These are examples where ideals such as chastity and duty are presented to be more important ideals than beauty. Interestingly, the westernized fashionable modern women are criticized. We see how the idea of beauty in respect to conjugal alliance highlights various notions of ideal womanhood. This idea harps on the physical and reproductive virtues of woman. Along with this it celebrates the traditional idea of womanhood. Indian elite as well as rural women are upholders of beauty whereas men are presented to be responsible for livelihood.

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<sup>89</sup> Alice Thorner and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Ideals, Images and Real Lives*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2000.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the history of beauty in early twentieth century India through the lens of advertisements. Opinions on beauty expressed by different mediums brought out the contradiction in defining the ideal body prevalent during a particular epoch. It examined the transformation in the idea of beauty from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

The texts, paintings, advertisements and Hindi and English journals expressed different concerns and anxieties while defining the ideal notion of beauty. The readership and viewership for these mediums was not homogenous and influenced the sartorial concerns of the masses differently. Despite varied and even competing reasons for defining beauty there were complex and often overlapping concerns.

In the Nineteenth century, beauty was marked by a combination of divine and the sexualized and the new 'erotic' was criticized. But, by the 1920s fashion begun to appropriate the 'sexual body' and themes such as taste and choice redefined the erotic and same time created space within the frame of nationalism, tradition and modesty. Gradually, other attribute like happiness and confidence was incorporated with the imagery of the 'erotic' and fashionable. As we saw the process of change was filled with contradictions and gendered. Mostly, beauty was considered to be a feminine attribute but by the late 1920s consumption and market created a space to challenge this notion of beauty, giving equal spaces to men to experiment with their looks.

### Chapter 3

#### Clothing and Presenting the 'Dalit' Body

It is these customs that mark the stigma of untouchability. These customs were forced upon us at some point in history. Under British rule, you can no longer be forced. All those things that mark you as an untouchable- you must drop them. The way you drape your saris marks you untouchable. Similarly the neckful and handful or artificial jewellery marks you. Clothes bring more grace than jewellery. Knowledge and education are not for men alone. They are essential for women too...<sup>1</sup>

In the history of clothing in India, dress and body remained a visible marker of caste identity and it continued to be so for throughout the twentieth century. B. R. Ambedkar, the prominent leader of the untouchable causes in India, advised the women during Mahad Satyagraha in the year 1927. The above excerpt is part of the speech he gave at the women's meeting that day. Ambedkar's speech urged the women from these communities to give up such items of dress which marked them as untouchable. In the quote, British rule is presented as an opportunity to break away from these markers of subordination.<sup>2</sup> Thus, dress more than jewellery emerged as a powerful way of presenting Dalit woman's transformed self as it was an obvious marker of caste. In Indian society, during much of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, it was vital for groups to show their status through their apparel and to be able to recognize other groups through their as well. Negotiations around clothing as we have discussed them so far were often articulated as a dilemma over choice. However, for specific groups such as the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes the choice over clothing was far more complicated, as suggested by the above excerpt. Control of clothing of lower caste was seen as an exercise of power to the extent that it often resulted in the prohibition of certain items of clothing and materials to specific caste groups in colonial India. An early set of proscriptions on clothing were the sumptuary laws which were implemented in

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<sup>1</sup>Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonies*, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006, p.54. Originally cited from Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, *Aamhihi Itihas Ghadawla Ambedkari Chalwalit Streeyancha Sahabhag*, Sugava Prakashan (Marathi), Pune, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> We will discuss B. R. Ambedkar's views of the British rule later.

Europe until the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> They were anti-luxury laws which focused almost always on items of apparel and which either prohibited certain groups from wearing certain types of clothing, and/or generally forbade excessive expenditure and luxury.<sup>4</sup> However, the history of caste and prohibitions on the use of ornaments/items of clothing in Indian context was a much more complicated process than the sumptuary laws. What makes the history of caste and dress regulation in India so specific to any study of clothing is the fact that although it was not imposed in form of legislation it was far more rigid due to caste power of the dominant groups, and it expressed both social and economic hierarchies.

In this context, histories of clothing suggest that sartorial conventions do not only represent identities but also express behavior of groups, communities and religions. Along with this, they also shaped individualist and group's notions of shame, modesty and humiliation. Within the Dalit community, the debate on clothing generated various responses ranging from mimicry and imitation as defiance to new forms of respectability and recovery of the past supported by other developments such as conversion and education many marginalized caste were collective to fashion a new collective self. Although the opportunities generated by colonial modernity were uneven and distorted, new institutional spaces, such as schools, the factory, the army, provided opportunities for self definition. In order to trace a longer history of clothing in India, I will examine various approaches to the recasting of self via clothing offered to the 'lower castes' known as 'untouchables' during the early twentieth century. Within the 'lower caste' cultural universe, clothing was seen as forming one of a series of patriarchal/upper caste constraints on untouchable bodies, ranging from strict codes of dressing to the imperative to cast off clothes. Equally important were new forms of covering naked bodies, which had earlier signified dominated caste status as it occurred in colonial North India and other parts of India.

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<sup>3</sup>Arnold, Kayla, 'Fashion and Self-Fashioning: Clothing Regulation in Renaissance Europe', *Summer Research*, Paper 93, 2011, Accessed from [http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/summer\\_research/93](http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/summer_research/93) on 10 August 2015.

<sup>4</sup>Herman Freudenberger, 'Fashion, Sumptuary Laws, and Business', *The Business History Review* Vol. 37, No. 1/2, Special Illustrated Fashion Issue (Spring - Summer, 1963), pp. 37-48, Published by: The President and Fellows of Harvard College.

In colonial India terms such as “depressed classes”, “Harijans”, “scheduled castes” and “outcastes” were in use. The term “Dalit” has more recently been used to express the oppressed status of the untouchables in India. It comes from the Sanskrit root ‘dal’ which means to crack open, split, crush, grind, and so it has generally been used as a verb to describe the process of processing food grains and lentils. Jotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar, two of the most prominent leaders of Dalit history were the first to appropriate this word to describe the extreme oppression of untouchables.<sup>5</sup> However, this name is largely accepted among untouchable communities as expressing their political and social identity all over India. Some sections see it as a most recent nomenclature for ex untouchables. For them, this term meant downtrodden or broken down but used with pride as a self chosen name that reflects no idea of pollution and can include all who identify themselves as oppressed by the caste system.<sup>6</sup> So, although it may be anachronistic, I will use the term Dalit to signify the radical alterity of ‘untouchables’ in colonial India.

The early twentieth century was marked by a drive to remove untouchability and evils of the caste system at different levels, across many regions in India. It was hugely debated among the nationalist, upper caste reformers, social reformers and before long by prominent Dalit leaders in the colonial India. One can trace various strands in the public opinion on the untouchable question. Nonetheless, these movements were crucial as they paved the way for reform and gradually led to rise of self consciousness within the Dalit community. Thus, this chapter describes some of the ways in which new social, religious or political ideologies such as education, caste movements, religious or ethnic concerns such as missionary activities, notion of cleanliness, nationalism, and emerging conceptions of the (individuated or dignified self) affected and transformed styles of dressing while producing new tastes and recasting social relations, particularly among communities designated as lower castes.

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<sup>5</sup> Om Prakash Valmiki, *Jhoothan: A Dalit's Life*, Kolkata: Samya, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>Vasant Moon, *Vasti: Growing up as Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* Translated from Marathi by Gail Omvedt, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers INC, 2001. p. XI

Emma Tarlo shows how in the early nineteenth century Indians reacted in many different ways to new cultural norms. Considerations of caste and religious codes led some Indians to shun the adoption of European clothes. Other indigenous people mimicked the colonizer in dress style and language. The mimicry was to become so sedimented that such Indians also urged changes to dress styles of tribals/lower castes. But, the process of cultural confrontation was complicated especially within the Dalit community. Like other Indians in the colonial period, the Dalits too sought to resolve the dilemmas of clothing and shaped their identity through a complex negotiation over clothing matters however, they did not share the similar experience.

What were the ways in which Dalits responded to the clothing dilemma as opposed to the other Indians in colonial North India? The chapter traces how the Dalit body was imagined within the frames of the Hindu society by various caste Hindus, upper caste reformist associations in North India during the early twentieth century. The chapter also examines the way Dalits talk about their experiences of altering or adopting to new styles of clothing during the second half of the twentieth century. Tracking the meaning of cloth for a Dalit through pamphlets, autobiographies and journals, I look at both personal dressing styles and community responses for much of the twentieth century. Their experiences vary as they continued to negotiate the requirements of differentiated spaces such as a classroom, tram, work place, home etc. In this process, elements of modesty, conservatism and national/communal identity were produced through sartorial choices and style. How did untouchable woman and man reconstitute their own body and self in the face of unresolved fears, challenges, pain and suffering within everyday life?<sup>7</sup> How do they locate hope, self esteem within their daily struggles?<sup>8</sup> Where clothes and styles of dress, and bearing might have signified caste, community or gendered status and identity, the new styles of clothing freed dress from such strict connotations, and anchored it in new meanings and choices of individual making. Thus, this chapter focuses on the role of clothing in the fashioning of the new Dalit self. The three approaches which were significant in the Dalit dress reform are: secular changes in society and the opportunities

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<sup>7</sup>R.S Khare, 'The Body, Sensoria, and Self of the Powerless: Remembering/Re-Membering, Indian Untouchable Women', *New Literary History*, Volume. 26, Number.1, 1995, pp. 147-168.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p.151.

it provided to the Dalit community, religious movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the experience of humiliation ushering in arrival of respectability.

### **Secular Changes and Opportunities**

What was the sudden conscious movement to reform the clothing of the Dalits? The entry of Dalit men and women into the public sphere, as a result of the changes in education, conversion, employment with British officials, army-military recruitment and civil services was seen as a posing threat to society. However, these were the factors which created a platform due to which the Dalits began to fashion a new self through their dressing in the first half of the twentieth century. The initial motive was to imitate the clothing styles of the British officials and the upper caste Hindus. Thus, this section will focus on how the modern period brought changes in the dress of Dalit men and women. It will focus on the experiments in the clothing which was done by the Dalits to shed old markers of caste and present a new identity.

Herbert Spencer in 1897 was among the first to recognize and theorize the uses of dress to redefine social structure.<sup>9</sup> He asserts that dressing and appearance becomes a tool to distinguish higher social status and political power within a collective group. He defined this process as 'fashion'. According to him, fashion springs from the act of imitation driven by power and status competition between social classes for higher status. In other words, those of lower ranks seek to gain footing by emulating the upper classes through imitation of their dress.

Similar arguments are made by Annette Lynch and Mitchell Strauss in the context of fashion adopted by the marginalized sections. Lynch points out that individual within the mass go about seeking their own needs through a process of selection. According to her, the convergence of individual decisions from within the mass is a form of social movement, of which there are several types identified by sociologists. Some social

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<sup>9</sup>Annette Lynch and Mitchell D. Strauss, *Changing Fashion: A Critical Introduction to Trend Analysis and Meaning*, Oxford: New York: Berg, 2007, p.60.



movements create new forms of order. On the other hand, Herbert Blumer<sup>10</sup> a noted sociologist identified fashion as a form of expressive social movement which does not seek to change or create social order, but rather serves as more of tension relief through some type of outward or expressive behavior. In our case, this expressive behavior is exhibited in form of dress. And the fashion is driven by emulation, conspicuous consumption and as a response to identity ambivalence and cultural conflict.

Drawing upon arguments made by Annette Lynch and Mitchell Strauss who studied changes in fashion among the marginalized sections, I argue that Dalits in colonial India fashioned a new self by reform of clothing and in the process emulated the Europeans and the upper caste styles during early twentieth century in India. However, the emulation of upper caste styles signified a much more complicated process than the former. This emulation marked a different politics which was based on the policy of resistance.

One of the approaches to the dressing among the lower caste community during the early twentieth century was that of imitation of the clothing of those who signified powerful status; in this case the British and the upper caste. This chapter seeks to trace what were the contexts and conditions which made the individuals, community of the lower castes to take up the dress of the upper. This will look at how the clothes were used to fashion a new identity which distinguished them from their earlier status. We noted earlier that the Dalits were prohibited from wearing certain items of clothing and were forced to wear other items which marked their low status in society. Forms of clothing, especially proscriptions relating to caste and rank, began to be challenged from the earliest encounter between the colonizers and Indians. While some sections may have resisted sartorial changes, others were prohibited from challenging dress codes signifying their status in society. A good example of this was the resistance among dominant caste, landowning Nairs to the adoption of breast cloths by the community in Southern Travancore then known as 'Shanars'. Christian missions in South India encouraged low-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

caste 'Shanar' women converts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to cover their breasts in public places, which were permitted only to upper caste women.<sup>11</sup>

The initial initiative to reform Dalit clothing to carve out new identities occurred as the introduction of education and through conversion. Charu Gupta's work on North India shows how the Dalits projected an alternative representation of a Dalit body as opposed to the stereotypes projected by the Arya Samajists, reformers, and the British.<sup>12</sup> In an attempt to assert an alternative identity, Dalits articulated a sense of self through demonstrations. Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, who established one of the first Dalit presses in Lucknow and challenged pictorial representations of Dalits by stating that Dalit intellectuals should pay careful attention to their dress styles and present to the world a body which appeared efficient and modern.<sup>13</sup> Gupta further stressed that discourses around demeanor, clothing and the elevation of male status were also tied to conversions to Christianity.

Reformers in colonial North India noted that social mobility was enabled by conversion. Cartoons and articles published in journals during the twentieth century depicted upper caste anxieties about conversion. Some cartoons caricatured two outcaste men together, one who was converted and the other unconverted. The converted Dalit man was represented as dressed in a suit, wearing shoes, and walking ahead royally as a sahib.<sup>14</sup> The unconverted Dalit was portrayed as walking behind him, was bare-footed and carried his load. The change was marked by the dressing style, deportment and status. Gupta's work shows that *Chand* carried a series of cartoons which depicted converted Dalit men flaunting their wealth and giving a tip to the unconverted untouchable man. In other images which appeared in the same journal, converted Dalits were shown playing sports and getting their shoes polished by the unconverted. The elevation of status through conversions was quite visible. The claim by some Bhangis and Chamars around Meerut that conversions to Christianity gave them a new life through literacy, dignity and

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<sup>11</sup>Hardgrave, 'The Breast Cloth Controversy', pp. 171-87.

<sup>12</sup>Charu Gupta, 'Feminine, Criminal or Manly: Imagining Dalit Masculinities in Colonial North India', *The Indian Economic Social History Review*, Sage Publications, 2010, pp. 309-348.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp.332-334.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

stature strengthens the earlier statement. The new life gets articulated in the form of changed lifestyles and dressing as well.

Some of these themes around conversion and alteration of dress was captured in the Dalit autobiographies too. These autobiographies were written during the 1960s and later period nonetheless some of these throw light on the Dalit lives during the early twentieth century in colonial India. As a potential source for documenting the Dalit's experience of clothing we need to keep the limitations of autobiographies in mind as a historical source. The autobiographies were written in a particular context and purpose. So, the reformist tracts and autobiographies both will have different audience and politics to cloth and present the Dalit body.

The cartoons which caricatured two outcaste men convey a message that the untouchables can attain dignity and status and it was achieved through conversion. In this process, clothing items such as suits, shoes etc became a visible marker of elevated status.<sup>15</sup>

These tracts were encouraging reform of untouchable's status and life style by advertising the advantages of conversion to Christianity. Gupta further argues that conversions to Christianity had particular implications for Dalit women's clothing, as it brought to the fore questions of the body per se vis a vis caste. She says that Dalit women used clothing to distinguish themselves from others. Dalit women were burdened with humiliating dress restrictions and these dress codes marked their bodies as inferior and sexually promiscuous. For example; the women who belonged to the sweeper community in Lucknow could not wear a bodice, gold ornaments or a nose ring.

Hazari's autobiography *Untouchable* offers a different story about the quest for a new identity for an individual in the United Province of colonial India as opposed to that projected by these reformist tracts.<sup>16</sup> In his autobiography, the change brought by change of identity and change of clothing did not grant elevation of status immediately. The

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<sup>15</sup> Charu Gupta, 'Intimate Desires: Dalit Women and Religious Conversions in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume. 73, No. 3, 2014, p. 664.

<sup>16</sup> Hazari, *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969, p.66.

process of change was much more complicated and slow. As the name suggests it describes life of Hazari who was born as an untouchable in United Provinces and his autobiography narrates events from the mid 1920s to the 1950s.<sup>17</sup>

Hazari claims that he could not escape his ‘untouchable’ status even by changing his religion and clothing. During his employment in Bombay he was asked by his friend Yusuf to take off his turban since it marked him as an untouchable.<sup>18</sup> For Yusuf wearing different clothes and parting hair like Europeans was necessary to forge a different identity which would enable them to mix easily with other people. As J. Devika points out, the differentiating function of dress continued well in to the twentieth century, with important additions, the new mode of dressing was a way in which westernized people could be identified from those who were not.<sup>19</sup> We see how Hazari’s friend suggests a change of clothes in order to mark oneself off from others. However, adoption of western cloth was not a simple process, as he first felt uncomfortable. He says that, “everything about me was wrong, clothes were wrong, I was born in the wrong family and could not see how I could overcome...”<sup>20</sup> In spite of being uncomfortable with the new identity, he still bought a coat, trousers and a tie. Hazari frankly expressed this strange feeling in the following paragraph:

When I put on my new shirt for the first time, I felt very self conscious and uncomfortable. I did not like the idea of dressing in European fashion; I felt it was not the dress for India and I am still of that opinion. I came to like it only because it made me

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<sup>17</sup>Hazari says that he was born in one of the villages in the district of Moradabad, in the United Provinces, which, after India’s independence came to be known as Uttar Pradesh. The exact year of Hazari’s birth is not known since his illiterate parents had not maintained any record of this. However, there are certain indirect references to some events from which we can infer his age. Once Hazari mentions that he might have been eight or nine years old in 1914, the year when the First World War begins. All the events Hazari mention in his autobiography took place before India gained independence in 1947. There are references to India’s freedom struggle, the roles of Congress Party and Muslim League, etc. Hazari must have been around thirty when he left India for France for his study getting financial support from Mr. Newman, one of his English patrons. That is when the narrative ends.

<sup>18</sup>In Bombay, his ideas of how to behave and ways to dress were shaped by Yusuf. Yusuf was a steward on a merchant ship. He used a Muslim name to conceal the identity of an untouchable and to get access into Muslim circles. It is interesting to note how Yusuf was very particular about his dress. He suggested Hazari to take off his turban as it signified him as an untouchable. Yusuf stressed on wearing different clothes, to brush and part his hair like European style and open his shirt’s collar.

<sup>19</sup>J. Devika, ‘The Aesthetic Woman: Reforming Female bodies and Minds in Early Twentieth – Century Keralam’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 30, 2, 2005, pp.461-487.

<sup>20</sup>Hazari, *Untouchable*, p. 86.

look different from what I was and gave me a social status I could not have otherwise acquired, except changing, my religion.<sup>21</sup>

So, as James Freeman says that untouchables throughout India rarely claimed to be proud of their place in society, instead they attempted to pass as clean castes by changing their names, customs, occupations and dress to those of ‘clean’ castes.<sup>22</sup> In a way, Hazari’s adoption of western clothes was an attempt to pass off as one of the clean castes.

Mulk Raj’s fictional character Bhaka’s aspiration to wear trousers and jacket of the ‘tommies’ in the military cantonment echoes the aspiration of the lower castes to imitate and adopt the westerners.<sup>23</sup> However, not all Dalits shared the same experience while convey to terms western dress. To elaborate further, for Hazari it was an issue of discomfort which probably was because of wearing something new or because it was not ‘Indian’. For Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu it was a question of the presentation of a modernized body. For Bhaka it was a mere adoption of a western style. The most significant example in the context of experimentation with western clothing was offered by the most prominent leader and champion of the Dalit cause B. R Ambedkar himself.

He is considered as an icon of western ideas and western clothing. His experiment with western clothing offers a new experience of sahibness. Ambedkar used western clothing as a sign of emancipation. Robert Deliege stresses that unlike other leaders, B. R Ambedkar never bothered to dress in Indian fashion, but on the contrary he took pains to project an image of a westernized man, cultured and superior.<sup>24</sup> Deliege opines that Ambedkar demonstrated his own identity and that of his fellow untouchables by conducting himself like a westerner. According to him, Ambedkar used his dress to personify the ambitions of his community. Drawing upon Deliege, I argue Ambedkar’s clothing not only signifies a personal choice but also becomes a tool to assert his political ideology. During this period when national leaders were turning to a national dress

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James M. Freeman, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*, California: Stanford University Press, 1979, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2001, first Published in 1935, p. 8-10.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Deliege, *The Untouchables of India*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999, pp.178-179. Personal accounts describe Dalits as filthy, dirty and foolish. Baby Kamble clearly recalls how the women of her caste used to disgust her with their hair crawling with lice and their filthy clothes. Baby Kamble, *Prisons We Broke*, Translated from Marathi *Jina Amucha* by Maya Pandit, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006, p. 66.

defined or drawing from the indigenous identity Ambedkar fashioned a new national identity for himself and the Dalit community by emphasizing his exit from the dense semiotic networks of Indian dress.

To Ambedkar, the politics of western attire was significant. He himself adopted the western style suit and tie. He emphasized wearing clean and neat cloths even if they were torn. He asked Mumbai's Dalit railway workers, who were notoriously fond of their uniforms, not to wear them all the time. Shailaja Paik stresses that his discourse and programmes penetrated deeper and affected ideologies of many Dalits.<sup>25</sup> Immediately, after his Mahad speech in 1927, helped by the upper caste women, Lakshimibai Tipnis and Indirabai Chitre from the Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu community, women readily draped their saris like upper caste women, covering their legs down to their ankles.<sup>26</sup> To do so, everyone was given eight *annas* for *choli baangadi* (blouse bangles). Ambedkar's speech (quoted in the beginning of the chapter) also affected the men: they gave up the jewellery on their hands and ears.

These examples describe the politics of western dressing among the lower caste communities in the early and late colonial India. As we have seen, the process of adoption of European clothing was complicated within the Dalit community. Firstly, European clothing was available to only few people from the Dalit community who were educated, who converted to Christianity or had government jobs in the British government, those who donned the uniform. On one hand, one can see there was a direct emulation of foreign attire. Emotions of happiness and pride were associated with their adoption of dress of the British. On the other, the experience of European clothing was complex. According to some, European clothing was uncomfortable. One needs to understand it in the context of reservations against western clothing and as well as clothing worn for the first time. This reservation was probably experienced by the Dalits and the non Dalits in a similar manner.

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<sup>25</sup>Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*, New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 171.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

As I have already pointed out that, Dalits explored western items of clothing and fashion when they carved out opportunities due to education, government jobs, army, missionary influence and financial stability. Autobiographies which describe life of Dalits in western Indian regions provide us with ample examples where few individuals got opportunities to experiment with new lifestyles. For example; Baby Kamble<sup>27</sup> while describing the events from Maharashtra region (Maharashtra) during the 1930's in her autobiography, recalls that her grandfather was literate and spoke excellent English as he had lived in the cities and worked as a butler in European families. She remarked on his style of dressing and said that she found butler clothes to be elegant. For her, the pressed uniform created a good impression on her and that his grandfather's appearance was one of the reasons due to which he was considered no less than a minister by the villagers. Here, the well dressed appearance is projected as a reason for his enhanced standing invoking sense of pride. It can also be understood as a natural admiration of a granddaughter for her grandfather and so pride for his western dress. The feeling of pride and respect marked by the presence of western items of clothing becomes crucial for our understanding of sartorial history among the lower castes in colonial India. How one sees himself/herself and how one is received by others when adorned in these items such as a suit are two aspects related to this understanding.

Similar experience of pride and respect on wearing western clothing was enjoyed by Vasant Moon. Vasant Moon is retired civil servant and Dalit activist. Moon's *Vasti: Growing up Untouchable in India* is an autobiographical narrative of an untouchable boy who grows in a slum amidst poverty to become a self-made person and later, a responsible leader of Dalit community in Maharashtra, the homeland of Ambedkar. Being an orphan at an early age Moon's struggle to become an educated person must have been an arduous task. Moon's determination to grow in life not only resulted in his having completed a post-graduate degree, he also became a civil servant in the state government of Maharashtra.

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<sup>27</sup> Kamble, *Prisons We Broke*, p.45.

Moon's autobiography provides us with numerous examples of a Dalit's experience with western items of clothing and thus, becomes crucial for our understanding of the politics of dressing amidst the lower castes. In his narrative, his grandfather Sadashiv Lohkare's attempt to dress him in European Fashion becomes a happy memory. Moon's grandfather was used to western lifestyle. Vasant describes that in early 1930's, Sadashiv used to dress him properly in 'European fashion' (shorts and shirts) before sending him to school.<sup>28</sup> He remembers that his grandfather would tuck his shirts and button his pants. Then, he would take the straps from his pants, throw them across his shoulders and then buttoned them over his chest, from left to right and right to left. In the end, Sadashiv used to put handsome socks on Vasant's feet and canvas shoes over them. It is also interesting to note how after dressing him, his grandfather said that Vasant should never get dust on his feet and that he will be a saheb.

Moon remarked that how his grandfather's idea of a saheb was taken from his observation of Europeans and their lifestyle. Some items of dress like pants, shirts and boots was kept safely by Moon for a long time. They become special part of his memory of his association with his grandfather. Being dressed in European clothes was not only a matter of self presentation but it was also a way in which one was perceived by others. To some lower caste western clothing offered new experience of 'sahebness'. This experience is celebrated in some of the accounts. Employment in government services uplifted the status of the Dalits and such individuals experimented with their clothing in order to match up to the dressing rule of those in services.<sup>29</sup> Here, we see that clothing not only serves the purpose of presenting oneself but provides an alternative cultural identity along with the new acquired social mobility. In the process, dressing was not

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.10.

<sup>29</sup>Moon, *Vasti: Growing Up Untouchable in India*, p. XII. Eleanor Zelliott notes that how the coming of the British offered new occupations in the army and on the docks and railroads and in the mills, while at the same time it destroyed the Mahar work of carrying messages, determining land boundaries, and caring for government official horses, leaving the removal of dead animals, the bringing of wood to the burning ground, and agricultural labor to the lot of the Mahar.<sup>29</sup> She points further that the mix of new opportunity and lack of viable traditional work such as than in leather pushed and pulled the Mahar into greater mobility than many other untouchable castes. According to her, the Mahar world of Moon in the region of Vidarbha, eastern Maharashtra, is different even from that of the caste in other parts of India. This is crucial for our understanding each of the varieties of indignities and responses to them that were generated among 'lower caste' in the colonial period.



simply related to choice and taste but provided a decisive criterion for the construction of cultural meaning and maintain a distinctive hierarchy.

The experiment was in order to fulfill the dress codes of those in services. Vasant Moon's first day as a deputy commissioner offers an interesting example. According to him, the meaning of 'sahib' was a white man or an Indian who has the accoutrements of a sahib in clothing or life style and in case of Ambedkar's title 'Babasaheb', an indicator of respect.

When Vasant Moon got selected as a deputy county commissioner his friend came and selected a briefcase for him to carry. He told him to get a coat, shoes and hat so that he could look like a 'Saheb'.<sup>30</sup> Later, Moon reached Saunsar where he was posted and went to offices to meet journalists and lawyers. When he reached his work place Moon's experience of wearing items of western clothing can be best described as he wrote about an incident on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1955:

Seeing me with coat and hat and thinking some new sahib had arrived, many people bowed to greet me. I was twenty three year old. It was my first time wearing a hat and a coat. Even elderly people greeted me with deference. I liked it very much. I was enjoying the new experience of 'sahebness'...<sup>31</sup>

We need to understand his response in terms of his transformed social position in the society. Here, his response cannot be a simplified understanding of his wearing a new hat and a coat. One needs to be alert to the social conditions and his past experiences in the upper caste society. During much of his early life Moon had to compromise with cast off, torn, or dirty cloth in absence of means to fulfill clothing needs. Sometimes, he would just simply mend old torn clothes instead of buying new ones.<sup>32</sup> His autobiography shows that how he rose from being a poor Dalit boy to being a civil servant. However, Moon does not celebrate his progress in his autobiography but certainly the above experience can be understood as not only a result of change of clothing but a position in status as well.

The question of appropriate dressing in urban areas, as new jobs etc. which Kamble's and Moon's experience show different perspective on the process of change which took place

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<sup>30</sup> Moon, *Vasti: Growing Up Untouchable in India*, p.XV.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.158.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

among the Mahar communities in Eastern Maharashtra. The way they narrate their experience is different yet evokes similar themes. Moon's sartorial experiences were deeply embedded in the poverty and the caste rules which later confronted new identity owing to change of status and clothing. On the other hand, Kamble focused on the ritual aspect of clothing in her autobiography. Each of them responded to the caste norms imposed by the caste Hindus but quite differently.

She would drape it around herself in various styles and perform a kind of a fashion show. One moment she would drape it around her shoulder like a Brahmin *kaki* and imitate her accent, 'Hey you, Mahar women, shoo, shoo stand at a distance. Don't touch anything. You will pollute us and our gods and our religion.' The next moment she would be a Gujar woman, draping the *pallav* in the Gujarati style, and finally a Mahar daughter in law, pulling the *pallav* from her head to her nose.<sup>33</sup>

The fashion show can be seen as a play where the girls are experimenting with various styles of upper caste women, Mahar woman and a Gujarati woman. However, if we analyze the text critically it reveals how themes of untouchability, pollution and dressing were experienced by lower castes. The Mahar girl drapes the sari as worn by a Brahmin woman. Then, she imitates the Brahmin woman saying how she would drive Mahar girls away. The process of pulling the *pallu* from head to toe indicates that how the cast away cloth is used to reproduce the dress styles of the upper caste women.<sup>34</sup> It's interesting to see how the woman acted as a Brahmin woman and then again wore the dress in Gujarati style, finally producing the sartorial style of a Dalit woman.

Maya Pandit states this excerpt signifies that the Dalit woman is critically aware of the caste of woman's clothing.<sup>35</sup> She points out further, that fashion shows are driven by considerations of promoting a product in the market but Baby Kamble's testimony *Prisons We Broke* shows what is discarded as obnoxious can be resignified as a weapon to make a comment on prevailing dress codes. Here the use of fashion show/ emulation

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<sup>33</sup>Kamble *The Prisons We Broke*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p.168. Baby Kamble's work depicts another dehumanising practice with a sense of humour. According to the custom of the village if somebody died Mahars had to fulfil funereal duties. They had to spread the message of the death and then collect firewood for the cremation. When the body was placed on the funeral pyre, the white sheet covering the corpse was taken off and thrown away. The Mahars had the right to this white sheet. When it was brought home after washing it was given to the young daughter. Kamble narrates how the daughter would be elated to get it.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

of upper caste dress and identity are not so much an enactment of envy as an awareness of the textured hierarchies of dress, forms of address, and deportment among Dalit woman.

Baby kamble shows that the code of being respectable as set in caste society, was followed by Dalit women in Maharwada. In the process of identifying the upper castes, some women emulated upper caste codes of conduct and morality of the higher caste. For instance, Dalit women in Kamble's community applied kumkum tilak on their forehead and observed *purdah* by pulling pallav over their head.<sup>36</sup>

We see that the clothing experiments of the Dalit women and men were based on two principles of following the styles of the upper caste and the British employees. These experiments showed that the issue of dress was significant for the newly acquired identity of the Dalits. Education, government services and army was the platforms paved the way for them to carve out a new identity and fashion themselves. There were other concerns which were crucial for the identity making of the Dalits and in the process these movements questioned the social status of the Dalits in the twentieth century. This leads to the next section.

### **Religious Movements in the Twentieth Century**

The social and religious movements which took place in the beginning of the twentieth century in India took up the cause of the 'untouchables' as part of their reform programme. Some of the concerns of the reformers echoed in the journals and tracts on issues of caste from the 1920's in North India. They focus on various notions of purity and pollution which prevailed in the society that time. The writers in these journals put forward arguments against the nakedness and untouchability. The consciousness of the nakedness of the Dalit body combined with the rejection of rules of untouchability later motivated the Dalits towards reform of their clothing.

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<sup>36</sup>Kamble, *The Prisons We Broke*, p. 17.

Although attempts had begun by the Dalit castes from the late 19th century to organize themselves, various sections of the Dalit liberation movement really began to take off from the 1920s. They took place in the context of the strong social reform and anti-caste movements which had by then started to gain mass support. The most important of the early Dalit movements were the Adi-Dharm movement in the Punjab (organized 1926), the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra mainly based among Mahars which had its organizational beginnings in 1924, the Namashudra movement in Bengal, the Adi Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu, the Adi Andhra movement in Andhra which had its first conference in 1917, the Adi-Karnataka movement, the Adi- Hindu movement mainly centred around Kanpur in UP and the organizing of the Pulayars and Cherumans in Kerala.<sup>37</sup>

In most of the cases the Montagu- Chelmsford reforms provided a spark for the organization of Dalits but the crucial background was the massive economic and political upheavals of the post-war period. Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt argue that the movements had a linguistic-national organizational base and varied according- to the specific social characteristics in different areas, but there was considerable all-India exchange of ideas and, by the 1930s, this was beginning to take the shape of all India conferences with Ambedkar emerging as the clear national leader of the movement.<sup>38</sup>

Along with these, the Scheduled Castes Federation was founded in 1942. Later, it was converted into the Republican Party. This gave Dalits a genuine all-India political organisation. However, it remained weak except in certain specific localities and did not by any means constitute the entire Dalit movement. According to Patanakar and Omvedt the social reform and anti-caste movements played an important nurturing and facilitating although often an ambivalent role in relation to the Dalits. Thus, the movements in Maharashtra and Madras to a significant extent came out of, and were influenced by the non Brahmin movements in those areas, especially their radical sections the Satyashodhak Samaj of Phule and Self-Respect movements. Dalits in Kerala were influenced and helped by the Ezhava-based movement under Sri Narayana Guru. The

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<sup>37</sup>Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt, 'The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume: 14, Number: 7/8, 1979, pp. 409-424.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p.415.

Gandhian movement against untouchability also created a mass support for the Dalits. Thus, the movements organised by Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar, Gandhi and Narayanaswami Guru in Kerala, Achutanand in U.P, Mangoo Ram in Punjab were crucial in shaping the struggles led by the Dalit community and simultaneously, led to an awakening among the Dalits of modern India.

These caste movements stress on the idea of purity and pollution at different levels in the twentieth century across various regions of the Indian subcontinent. Themes of purity and pollution were one of the most important factors which influenced the clothing of Dalits. In this discourse, body and clothing became the central symbols in the Indian struggle to defy caste oppression and express a Dalit identity. The emphasis was on making them pure and 'clean'. This section explores how the colonial officials were undertaking the task of inculcating notions of hygiene and cleanliness in the minds of the Indians since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. And the Dalits also incorporated this drive to civilize. However, for the untouchable, the discourse around cleanliness and purity exposed the imposition of the caste Hindus. In the process, cloth generates cultural hierarchies both across and within different social groups which can lead to conditions of pain, humiliation, and shame.

In the same period, reformist and revivalist rhetoric in North India reached new heights. Associations like, Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha and Harijan Sevak Sangh made indigenous critiques of caste rigidities and at the same time upheld caste hierarchies. Harijan Sangh Sevak ('Servants of Untouchables of Society') was founded by Mahatma Gandhi and his close associated in 1932 as a means of strengthening the national movement's commitment to the cause of redeeming India's so called 'suppressed classes'. The organization was ambivalent in their understanding of untouchability.<sup>39</sup> The Gandhians who ran the organization were initially of the 'clean' caste origin.

Along with these, reformist journals argued the caste question voraciously in the public sphere of North India. They often linked them to modernity, civilization and nation building. The ideal '*samaj*' was supposed to incorporate the Dalits into the Hindu

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<sup>39</sup>Susan Bayly, *Caste Society and Politics in India: from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, The New Cambridge History of Modern India, IV, 3, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.250.

community. Many of their publications which circulated in North India projected an alternative solution to the caste question. In the process, they focused on the idea of purity and pollution. As most of these associations and the print culture which argued against the caste system were by the caste Hindus. So, this chapter also examines how the Dalit body was imagined by the upper caste in the colonial North India.

The journals published in the North India carried articles, songs and stories on the life of Dalits and their condition in the twentieth century. The nakedness of the Dalit body gets articulated in some of the folk songs and short stories. A folk song laments on the condition of the Dalits:

‘Kaune achool sunai bipatiya fatati chatiya

Apne deswa ki gatiya fatati chatiya

tan ke na vastra petwa ke rotia dulam bhaile na’<sup>40</sup>

(Hearing Untouchable’s experiences my heart cries out

Seeing the condition of our country my heart cries out

Even the basic clothing and food for stomach is scarce)

This Bhojpuri folk song describes the pain and agony that one feels by hearing the condition of Dalits of one’s country. It indicates how the Dalits didn’t have basic clothes to cover their body and food to fill their stomachs. It reflects that the Dalits in colonial India were at the receiving end of the discarded sources; the waste food and cast off cloth. The question needs to be answered is why did the untouchables could not manage basic necessity of food and clothing. The economical conditions can be cited as one of the reasons. However, more pertinent were the dictums imposed by the caste Hindus, where clothing and food habits of the Dalits were to strengthen the social hierarchy.<sup>41</sup> The above quote also reflects the paradoxes in the literature by the non Dalits where the oppressed classes are treated as a mute subject and having no agency. On the other hand, the autobiographical narratives offer a contrast to other literary writings.

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<sup>40</sup>Lok Geet, Harijan Sevak Sangh, (pamphlets of folk songs) Varanasi, n.d. p.10.

<sup>41</sup>Gopal Guru, “Food as a Metaphor for Cultural Hierarchies”, CASI Working Paper Series, Penn Arts and Sciences, November, 2009.

*Brahman Saraswa* offers an alternative understanding of the purity and pollution and tries to sympathize with the *achoot* community. The journal observed that there was a rise of new disease born in Bombay and was led by Gandhi. The writers in this journal opine that there was no caste system in India before the arrival of Gandhi and everyone co-existed peacefully. Offering sympathy to the outcastes in the community, the articles in the journal argue that the Dedh and Bhangi communities are manipulated by Gandhi and admitted in ashrams and so, it led to the formation of a new caste called the Untouchables. In one of the essay it was argued that the government in an attempt to divide the Hindu community is arguing to give the untouchables one third representations.<sup>42</sup> The writer agrees that there were some communities where there was the rule of untouchability but this untouchability existed in higher castes too. Here, the *achoot* community is stereotyped as a meek dumb community who can be easily manipulated and who can't understand the politics of caste eradication. These views were endorsed by other reformers as well.

Upper caste perception of untouchability presented the Dalit body as a Hindu body and expected them to observe the orders of pollution as part of old traditions necessary for the running of ideal society. As Charu Gupta points out there were two broad trends in construction of Dalit bodies.<sup>43</sup> The desired body was one which could be manipulated and measured by its utility<sup>44</sup> and the worst were those who not only declined to serve, but dared to challenge upper caste supremacy,<sup>45</sup> symbolizing a reversal of established hierarchies. Hindu reformers depicted the Dalit community as incapable of taking decisions on their own and easily manipulated. *Brahman Saraswa* was against the removal of untouchability. Stressing the need of untouchability in the society Pundit Yadukul Bhushan Shastri observed: '*Yadi hum apne hanth se bojan karte hain toh isse*

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<sup>42</sup>Achoot aur unke pratinidhi', *Brahmana Saraswa*, Volume 28, Number 6, June 1931, pp. 228-229.

<sup>43</sup>Gupta, 'Dalit Masculinity', p.322.

<sup>44</sup> Pundit Somnath Sharma Nagar Mathura, 'Din fer achootan ke firi hain', *Brahmana Sarvaswa*, Volume: 30, Number: 3, 4, March –April 1934, p.151.

<sup>45</sup>Shri Trivenidutt, 'Achootodhaar par ek dristi', *Brahmana Sarvasva*, Volume: 30, Number: 2, February 1934, pp.105-107.

*hum apne achool bhaiyon ko kast nahi dete kintu swayam chulhe chauke ka kast sahan karte hain, jis karya ko karne se hamara dharam bana rahe.*<sup>46</sup>

(If we eat food cooked by ourselves then we do not trouble our outcaste brothers. As we bear the burden of the kitchen work, in order to keep our dharam intact. )

It was further argued that if inter-dining was to foster bonding among different communities than what was the reason of a great war between Kaurawas and Pandavas when inter-dining was prevalent between them. The writer stated the example of the English culture of eating together to make his argument stronger and says that despite eating together their history is full of wars and so eating together need not create brotherhood. Similarly, he criticizes the Arya Samajists and said that they frequently fight among themselves.

Other accounts of untouchability were framed in the same language strengthening the rules of pollution. On the idea of temple entry one writer stated: *Aur jab Brahman Kshatriya aadi jati ko asprishyon ke sparsh karne ki manovriti nahi hoti ain tab kanuna adi ke dwara balatkar se achoolon ko dev-mandiro mein pravesh kara kar sparsha karane ka prayatna sarvatha asangat hain.*<sup>47</sup>

These were some of the arguments which encouraged the need for the differentiation based on the old ideas of the purity and pollution observed by the upper caste. However, other upper caste writers were more reformists and argued for the removal of untouchability. But in the process they offered a romanticized version of casteism.

Harijan Sevak Sangh's pamphlets and short stories presented Dalits as feeble, submissive men/women who needed reform undertaken by the upper caste men. They were considered to be incapable of resisting on their own.<sup>48</sup> Some stories presented Dalits taking initiatives on their own against the caste discrimination such as the story in which

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<sup>46</sup>Shri Goswami Pundit Yadukul Bhushan Shastri , 'Kya hum achoolon ke virodhi hain ?', *Brahmana Saraswa*, Volume 28, Number 10-11, December 1931, pp. 379-387.

<sup>47</sup>Shri Paramahansa Parivrajacharya Shri 108 Swami Jayandrapuri Ji mandeleshwar Maharaj Kashi, 'Dev mandir aur achool', *Brahmana Saraswa*, Volume 30, Number 4, January 1934, pp. 28-31.

<sup>48</sup>Viyogi Hari, *Mohana: A collection of short stories*, Delhi: Harijan Sevak Sangh, n.d. The year of publication is not known but as the writer was actively writing during the 1940's these pamphlets were probably published during the same time period.



two men from the untouchable community were ill treated in a newly opened hotel by the *sawarnas*.<sup>49</sup> So, these Dalit men opened a separate Dalit hotel. However, the story ends with a reformist tone as both the hotels gradually started to cater people from all castes and did not restrict entry on the basis of caste. Other issues of the caste movement were emphasized in the stories such as temple entry, access to water and wells.<sup>50</sup> The idea of clean and unclean body emerged in the discussions which got linked to the notion of purity and pollution.<sup>51</sup>

The Dalit body was presented as a true devotee of god and thus, the term ‘Harijan’ was justified in the stories. In a story ‘*achoot*’ the female protagonist Ganga is an Untouchable *chamar* girl who is praised for understanding the true meaning of the song ‘everyone is equal in the eyes of god’.<sup>52</sup>

Along with notion of purity and pollution the debates address the emotion of pain which gets linked with the discrimination.<sup>53</sup> Although, the upper caste writers are not able to capture the pain as the Dalit testimonies do. Nevertheless, they consider it to be crucial to the understanding of the system of untouchability. Testimonies written by the Dalits focused on idea of discrimination as well. Along with notion of pain they evoke the sense of self respect about their body and themselves.

One of the autobiographies ‘*Jhoothan*’ is a poignant tale of the pain due to inhuman caste practices which entitled Dalit community to rely on the leftover food for survival. This work set in Uttar Pradesh of North India is a narration of Omprakash Valmiki’s life and Chura community in post -independent India. But nonetheless, it emphasized on the evils of caste system as it was practiced during the colonial period and its continuation into post 1947.

Making a historical jump Valmiki’s autobiography offers a poignant tale of a Dalit’s life in both pre and post Independence India. Omprakash narrates an incident which took place in the year 1955 when he was in fourth class. This incident presents dilemmas of a

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<sup>49</sup>Viyogi Hari, *Hotal*, Delhi: Harijan Sevak Sangh, n.d.

<sup>50</sup>Viyogi Hari, *Jati Nahi Pani Manga Hain*, Delhi. Harijan Sevak Sangh, n.d.

<sup>51</sup>Viyogi Hari, *Kutharaghat: Chuachat aur Jati Pati Par*, Delhi. Harijan Sevak Sangh, n.d.

<sup>52</sup>‘Achoot’, *Chand*, Year 10, Number, 2, June 1932, pp. 121-130.

<sup>53</sup> Viyogi Hari, *Aspriyashayata Ek Maha Pap*, Delhi: Harijan Sevak Sangh, n.d.

Dalit child in a local school and how he negotiates with the problems of clothing dominated by rules of pollution. Valmiki stated, ' *saaf suthre kapde pehenkar kasha mein jao toh ladke kehte, "abe chuhre ka, naye kapde pehen kar ayah ain."* Maile purane kapde pehan kar jao toh kehte, "abe chuhre ke dur hat badbu aa rahi hain...'<sup>54</sup>

(If we ever went to school in neat and clean clothes, then our class fellows said, 'abey Chuhre ka, he has come dressed in new clothes.' If one went wearing old and shabby clothes, then they said, Abey , Chuhre ke , get away from me, you stink.)

One can argue that Dalits started to define taste and choice only after they stopped wearing cast off and dirty cloths. Why did they stop wearing cast off cloths? When consciousness arose against the codes of clothing as dictated by the caste Hindus and upper class? One can argue that it was because consuming this cloth folded them into what was called "savage identity". However, as we have seen in the above excerpt that this process of changing one's clothing habit was not so simple. As suggested by Valmiki's narration one can say that one could not change one's caste identity simply by changing one's clothing habits, since the new clothing practices did not quite anonymise the Dalit body. So, the choice to wear clean/ new cloth / covering upper body was exercised with much difficulty amidst feeling of humiliation and ill treatment due to strict codes of untouchability and dressing. For example, Valmiki got a khaki shirt and pant from school as he had joined a scout group in 1967. Though was supposed to get it ironed, he could not persuade the dhobi to iron his shirt. The dhobi said that, "we don't wash the clothes of the Chuhras- Chamars. Nor do we iron them. If we iron your clothes, then the Tagas won't get their clothes washed by us. We will lose our roti..."<sup>55</sup> The dhobi's refusal to iron the clothes was less a personal refusal and more a sign of the dense web of hierarchies of which Dalits were a part. However, Valmiki's testimony is not only a story of discrimination. His autobiography is an example of a life history of a Dalit who succeeded amidst discrimination and his work touch on moments where his friendship in high school (1960) was free from the connotations based on caste identities. The Dalit body as presented in the testimonies offers a stark contrast to the portrayal Dalit body by

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<sup>54</sup> Valmiki, *Jhoothan*, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17

the upper caste writers. Both Dalit men and women are presented as strong who were employed to serve the upper caste but sometimes strongly raised their voices against the discrimination. Omprakash's mother and father seem to be good example of such voices. Both challenged upper caste hierarchy in the most inhuman conditions. They are shown to be capable of speaking their mind in times of injustice of the upper caste Tyagi's of the village. For instance; Omprakash's father shouted at the school teacher who made Valmiki sweep the floor instead of letting him attend the class. His mother rose in anger when she was even denied the leftover food of an occasion of a marriage where she toiled hard for the entire day. The association with the upper caste was not only of discrimination and injustice but there were instances of friendship and being supported by other people of the community as well.

Baby Kamble shows how in Maharashtra, Dalit women's way of wearing sari was supposed to distinguish them from upper caste women. Kamble says that these women wore saris with their pallav reaching to their knees and a veil fell over their head. Their traditional way of sari was that the front plates were taken through the legs and then were tucked behind. Kamble's account shows that there were caste rules even for how one tucked the pleats. Mahar women had to tuck them in such a way that the borders remain hidden. Only high caste women had the privilege of wearing their saris in such a way that the borders could be seen. A Mahar woman was supposed to hide the borders under the pleats; otherwise it was considered an offence to the high caste.<sup>56</sup>

Similar instances were found in south India as well. Gunasekaran's work *The Scar* reveals tales of caste oppression and prejudice prevalent in the villages of Tamil Nadu. K. A Gunasekaran's periamma (mother's elder sister) recalls when she had come to the village Thovoor after marriage she had never worn a blouse. She mentioned that the Cheri women were not allowed to wear blouses as per the caste regulations of the village.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Kamble, *The Prisons We Broke*, p.54.

<sup>57</sup>K.A Gunasekaran, *The Scar*, translated from Tamil *Vadu* by Kadambari, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2009, pp. 26-27.

Saurabh Dube explores the ritual of authority and subordination of the Satnamis in the late colonial period. His account 'Authority and Discrimination in Everyday Life' studies the nature of power in caste society of South Asia.<sup>58</sup> In the nineteenth century, Satnamis were prevented from using clothes and accessories, and mode of transport. These were supposed to be signifiers of rank and status within village society. Dube comments that these rules were enforced rigidly in villages where Satnamis were few.<sup>59</sup> In these places shoes, umbrella and turbans became focal signs of contest. He shows further that to wear all these items constituted a public assertion and challenge that questioned the principles of the subordination of the group.<sup>60</sup> In retaliation upper caste opposed and nullified the claim of Satnamis over a public space.

We see how clean cloth becomes a marker of the socio cultural identity of a group. Some arguments constructed the cultural identity of the Dalits just because they wore unclean filthy clothes. This in effect assigned an ascending sense of contempt and repulsion for the Dalits. In addition, Dalit perception traced their identity to personal clothing habits. Most of the testimonies show that Dalits tried to do away with the untouchable status which was associated with being unclean. Thus, they were not fit to be touched by incorporating notions of hygiene and cleanliness. Uncleanliness was presented to be the main reason behind system of untouchability in a story 'achoot' and 'Chuachut ki Maya'.<sup>61</sup> Through the process of reform of a Dalit girl Ganga this story throws light in the debates related to question of untouchability and its removal by wearing clean clothes. Ganga meets high caste Brahman man shyamlal and is advised by him that if she wears clean clothes she will be allowed to enter a temple but when she is denied entry even after wearing a clean cloth she questions Shyamlal.

He replies that what he told her was a lie. However, regular meetings with Shyamlal Ganga learn to read and gradually change her appearance too. Seeing this Shyamlal says that the behavior and clothing of Ganga did not associate her with her untouchable status

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<sup>58</sup>Saurabh Dube, 'Authority and Discrimination in Everyday Life', in *Caste in History* edited by Ishita Banerjee Dube, Oxford University Press, and New Delhi: 2008.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p.281.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>61</sup>Anand Kaushlayan, *Yeh Chuachat ki Maya*, Benaras: Indian Press, p. 10. Achoot, *Chand*, June 1932, year 10, no: 2. Pp. 121-130

anymore and it was not easy to identify her as one. We see how change of appearance and conduct let Ganga pass as one of the 'clean caste'. Later the story unfolds and one sees that she faces discrimination as an outcaste. More than the question of removal of untouchability through cleanliness and clean clothes, this story reflects the anxieties of the high caste reformers as the Dalit 'girl' is a beneficiary of upper caste reformist sentiments. The story ends with Shyamlal getting married to Ganga and so he is boycotted by the community orthodoxy. Throughout the story the girl is presented as someone who doesn't have any agency and is a mere receiver of Shyamlal's affections.

Similar concerns were found in the autobiographies. The clean cloth did not lead to a status where they were declared touchable. SharanKumar Limbale's testimony argued the same theme of the clean clothes and untouchability.<sup>62</sup> He asked, 'I used clean clothes, bathed every day and washed myself clean with soap, and brushed my teeth with toothpaste. There was nothing unclean about me. Then in what sense was I untouchable? A high caste who is dirty was still considered untouchable...'<sup>63</sup>

We get a similar argument from Moon's testimony which shows that in spite of the desire to wear clean cloth he couldn't do it in absence of soap. Most of the testimonies reveal that it was so difficult for the Dalits living in villages to manage basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. As his clothes became old he stopped washing them as in absence of soap clothes had to be cleaned with hard beating and then there was danger of tearing them. Once his teacher asked him that why he hasn't washed his clothes and he answered that he doesn't have another pair if they get torn. Then his teacher suggested his fellow mates that they could give away some of their clothes as they were well off.<sup>64</sup> Bathing and wearing clean cloth seems to be something a special part of his life which Limbale recounts in his work. He remembers how when he had to perform with a group of singers he would dress up in clean clothes to look smart.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Sharan Kumar Limbale, *The Outcaste*, Translated from Marathi *Akkarmashi* by Santosh Bhoomkar, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Limbale, *The Scar*, p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> Moon, *Vasti: Growing Up Untouchable in India*, p.36.

<sup>65</sup> Limbale, *The Scar*, p. 60.

We see how there was a growing consciousness to define an identity which was free from this cultural identity of a low status ascribed due to one's appearance. This appeal against dirty/ cast off cloth was visible in the campaign that was carried out by Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Cleanliness was one of the first things Gandhi took up to reform the status of the Dalits. Gandhi points out that cleanliness is the first lesson to be taught to 'Harijans' when they are admitted to school. They should be taught to clean themselves and nearby environment.<sup>66</sup> In another work of Gandhi he narrates how once in Tamilnadu he brought a Harijan boy. He first cut his hair and then he was made to take a bath. He was given clean dhoti, kurta and cap to wear. At the changed appearance of the dirty Harijan boy Gandhi, says that he looked better than any boy. Along with cleanliness he popularized the idea that adoption of khadi by everyone would help in uplifting the needy, widows and Dalits.<sup>67</sup>

His thought on the current politics is crucial for our understanding of opinions of an untouchable of congress. During a discussion of home rule with fellow servants Hazari was unable to take a side of British or congress. He said he could not decide whether to fight for the freedom of India or to fight for the freedom of untouchables from the degradation of the caste system.<sup>68</sup> It is clear that neither congress nor Gandhi's appeal to bring untouchables into the four fold of national movement did have any impact on him. He did not adopt Gandhi cap which was worn by many people.

Gandhi and Ambedkar were main proponents of removal of Untouchability and worked towards upliftment of Dalits. However, along with movement led by these two leaders there were other movements which led to caste consciousness and awareness among the Dalit community in colonial India. In the earlier section, I explored how different movements creates a respect of self and dignity and which focused on reforming life styles of Dalits and granting the different rights and accesses to restricted spaces. Led by Ambedkar, Dalits gave up the cast off cloth and discovered a morally higher value in

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<sup>66</sup> Gandhi, *Harijan Bandhu*, Bankipur: Hindustani Press, 1935, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Achoot Samasya*, Lucknow: Ganga Fine Arts Press, 1934, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Hazari, p. 92.

favor of dignified and self respect. Their clothing underwent a radical shift. However, the cultural identity remained same and ambiguous to some extent. Along with the political changes and social reform movements, other factors such as education, conversion, new modern sites such as trams, roads and markets facilitated change of clothing habits of the Untouchables in the twentieth century.

### **From Experiencing Humiliation to Presenting Respectability**

This section looks at how the reform Dalit clothing was a result of the experience of humiliation and the quest to present respectability. Along with this, it traces that in the search for respectability and as an act of defiance the Dalits used their dress as a way of resistance. As we have seen there were several dictums imposed on the lower caste including wearing of prohibited items and jewellery.

Cloths or dressing could become a site of struggle to change designated caste markers. Uday Kumar's essay 'Self, Body and Inner Sense: Some Reflections on Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan' explores how ideas of body and the self are reconfigured in this period, and how notions of clothing were changing, along with notion that the body had to carry marker of caste.<sup>69</sup>

At a symbolic level these movements adopted a particular form of dress to defy feudal 'consumptuary' rules in which the upper castes tried to prohibit untouchables from wearing fine clothes. For instance, the followers of the Ad-Dharm wore red turbans and sashes which, up to then, had been only a high-caste colour; low castes in Tamil Nadu and Kerala claimed the right to cover their breasts which they had not been allowed to do previously, and so forth.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Udaya Kumar, 'Self Body and Inner Sense: Some Reflections on Sree Narayan Guru and Kumaran Asan', *Studies in History*, 13, 2, 1977, pp. 247-240.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Ayyankali's (1863-1941) one of the foremost Dalit leader challenged the rigid caste codes in the pre modern Kerala.<sup>71</sup> Along with the criticism of various caste rules he used dress as a means of protest. In this process he also attempted to reform the clothing of Dalits. In Kerala around 1914, confrontation was brewing up between the Nairs and Pulayars on the questions of public spaces, mode of dressing, use of ornaments and cleanliness. Sanal Mohan argues that even though these appear superficial as well as material, they had a strong symbolic value since they indicated the relative social status of individuals. M. Nissar and Meena Kandasamy show that there were several cruel strictures against the Dalits and among them the most important was that they were not allowed to wear any clothing above the waist and below the knees and this rule applied to both men and women.<sup>72</sup> In addition to these women were supposed to wear a sort of bead called *Kallayum Malayum*. It has been argued that this particular ornament worn by the Pulayar women was interpreted as a mark of subordination and savagery. So, Ayyankali urged them to stop using this ornament.<sup>73</sup>

Patankar and Omvedt argue that in terms of economic relations, the movements and struggles centered around two themes.<sup>74</sup> They say that on the one hand there was the growing refusal to perform the traditional caste duties, carrying away dead animals, playing music at funeral ceremonies, performing forced labour for village headmen and government officials. This attempt succeeded partially and at sporadic places. According to them, this was the direct fight against feudal forms of bondage within the village. Along with this there was a struggle for education and employment as it offered a platform by which Dalits could resist feudal customs by escaping from the village to the towns.

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<sup>71</sup> M. Nissar and Meena Kandasamy, *Ayyankali: Dalit Leader of Organic Protest*, Kerala: Other Books, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.88-89.

<sup>73</sup> He encouraged the untouchables to achieve progress by having faith in god, reform clothing and adopt modern dressing and observing obedience and discipline. He also appealed the upper caste not to resist such reforms in custom, dressing and manners. Gradually, he was able to take the consent of the Nair leaders to allow the change of dress codes. However, the process of change was not so easy and was marked by incidents of violence when Pulayar women's ears were being cut off because they had stopped wearing stone ornaments.

<sup>74</sup> Patankar and Gail Omvedt, 'The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period'. p. 420.



Education, change in rank and status, religion offered avenues to Dalits to explore themselves and thus they felt necessary to reform their attire. New notions of taste and styles were also created by the market, as new styles of clothing were available for purchase and advertised widely creating new desires, new needs. Some Indians incorporated only a few elements of western styles, whereas others were more open to new fashions. These changes along with other social transformations made the entry of Dalits in the public arena possible and acceptable to some extent. However, as we have seen that these changes were adopted by middle class and educated Dalits as for most of them it was difficult to manage even basic necessities.

The depiction of the resistance and irritation of the upper caste shows that dress was a powerful signifier of the caste identity. Sanal Mohan argues that the mode of dressing is capable of emitting messages of dominance and subordination.<sup>75</sup> In the caste hierarchy, it was very obvious that the mode of dressing and caste had an inverse relationship.

History of the dress in the context of colonial India is linked with a history of resistance. Historical works have looked at how clothes become an important mode of classification. This section looks at how cloth became a symbol of cultural contestation and resistance. History of cloth as a symbol of cultural contestation within the Dalit community can be traced back to the controversy which took place in early eighteenth century in Travancore. Robert Hardgrave's work, 'The Brest Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore' shows how dress was critically linked to caste consciousness and social change in southern Travancore.<sup>76</sup>

This section explores how an act of wearing a new cloth was seen as an act of defiance by the caste Hindus. This often led to conflict and resistance by the Dalits. This section examines such instances of conflict and resistances and argues the symbolic value of cloth as a sign of resistance.

We don't know much about these resistances which took place in North India in twentieth century except few of them. One of the incidents which took place in United

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<sup>75</sup>Sanal Mohan, 'Dalit Discourse and the Evolving New Self: Contest and Strategies', *Review of Development and Change*, 1999, p.17. This has been taken from *Ayyankali*, p.70.

<sup>76</sup> Hardgrave, 'The Brest Cloth Controversy', p. 178.

Province during the late twentieth century in Omprakash Valmiki's Village echoes this theme of cloth as symbol of cultural contestation. Fashionable clothing worn by Valmiki's brother Surjan Singh was criticized and he became an object of contempt and ridicule. However, the critique of the educated/non educated well dressed Dalit man or a woman needs to be located in the general fear of disruption of the existing caste order. In the case of Valmiki's <sup>77</sup> brother Surjan Singh, good appearance became the subject of criticism and insult. Singh had lived in Dehradun right from his childhood. As pointed out by Valmiki, his manners were not only different but they were superior to other upper caste of his village. Surjan was disliked by teachers and class fellows equally because of his well dressed appearance. This was seen as an act of rebellion to rise above one's status in 1967. Being born in a Chuhra caste it was not supposed to dress and act like that. This animosity resulted in severe insult of Surjan by a teacher. He thrashed and abused him. He commented that, '*Abe sale, Chuhre ki aulad jab mar jayega, bata dena . Bahut hero bane hain, aaj khadhunga teri julfo se tel...*'<sup>78</sup>

(Abe brother in law, progeny of a Chuhra, let me know when you die. You think you are a hero. Today I am going to draw oil from your tress.)

The satirical tone of the statement made the ridicule stronger. The act of wearing better clothes was seen as an act of a rebellion and so, the body becomes a battle ground. The city lifestyle of Surjan Singh was threatening the social order of the village. Thus, such an act of rebellion as perceived by the upper caste men was suppressed. The desire to wear new and clean clothes was met by thrashing and humiliation. The Dalit testimonies reveal that such caste identity was inherent and the subjugated status of the untouchable could not be changed by any means. Equally important was to demonstrate one's status by markers in dress and on the body, so that rituals of purity and pollution could be observed and not broken by the upper caste in most of the regions of modern India.

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<sup>77</sup>Valmiki, whose surname signifies his untouchable Chuhra (sweeper or scavenger caste) status, sets his life story in North India in the 1950s, just after the constitution outlawed untouchability.

<sup>78</sup> Valmiki, *Jhoothan*, p.61.

Another example of resistance by the Dalits against the caste dictums of the upper caste Hindus occurred in 15 villages of Indore district in May 1927.<sup>79</sup> The high caste Hindus viz. Kalotas, Rajputs and Brahmins including the Patels and patwaris of village Kamaria, Bicholee Hafsi, and 15 other villages, informed the Balais of their respective villages that if they wished to live among them, they must conform to the following rules:

The Balais caste were told that they must not wear gold lace bordered pugrees. Secondly, they were not allowed to wear dhotis with coloured fancy borders. According to the caste Hindus, the Balais were supposed to convey intimation of the death of any Hindu to relative of deceased, no matter how far away these relatives may be living. In all Hindu marriages, the Balais had to play music before the processions and during all marriages. The Balai women were warned against wearing gold and silver ornaments. The rules forbade these women to wear any fancy gowns or jackets. They were asked to attend all confinement of Hindu women. Most important rule was that if the Balais did not agree to abide by these terms, they had to clear out of the region. These incidences of resistance and violence needs to be located into the fear and anxiety felt by the upper caste orthodox leaders against the disruption of the old caste rules and fall of the societal order.

We see that for the Dalit community, cloth and their body became a site of resistance in wake of humiliation and to gain respectability in the society.

## **Conclusion**

Early twentieth century journals and books focused on the need to improve the conditions of the Dalits. In the process, the reformers and the high caste writers focused on removal of evils of the Caste system. These tracts and pamphlets offered various reasons for removal of abolition of untouchability. However, concerns of the Dalits were different from what was argued by other writers from these tracts. We see how autobiographies offer a different image of a Dalit body than what was presented by the upper caste writers and activists. Associations such as Harijan Sevak Sangh, Jat Pat Todak and Arya Samaj

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<sup>79</sup> Vasant Moon, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* Vol. 2 Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay 1982.

argued for the causes of the removal of untouchability but their efforts were limited, as they echoes the concerns of the conservative Hindus. But nevertheless they seem to be pioneers in arguing for the Dalit cause through print culture. The very fact that these debates were taking place on such a wide scale reveals that the Dalit men and women's position acquired a significant place among the social problems that needed to be reformed. These associations created awareness and along with the political developments and initiative taken by the Dalits themselves reform towards abolition of untouchability gained momentum in the early twentieth century.

Clothing styles of the Dalits were not only influenced by caste, nationalism and religion but market, job opportunities, education and fashion. Gradually, there was a strong force which had an effect on clothing choices and introduction of different tastes in clothing. In the next chapter, I pay closer attention to everyday events and spaces and how they transformed clothing habits and styles of consumption.

## Chapter 4

### Camera, Lights and Action: Public and Private Clothing Transformed

A part of this strangeness of dress is that it links the biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than a biological entity. It is an organism in culture, a cultural artifact even, and its own boundaries are unclear. Dress is the frontier between the self and the not self...<sup>1</sup>

Clothes do not only cover the body but it has a social life.<sup>2</sup> The social life revealed through the prism of the private and the public. In this revelation what becomes important is how individuals and social groups present the self through clothes. In this context when individuals have to decide what to wear they have to consider the problem of their audiences. In the early-twentieth century dressing was marked by several clothing dilemmas faced by Indian men belonging to the elite and professional classes. Indian women were offered fewer choices in clothing than their male counterparts and so they faced fewer dilemmas owing to their restricted entry in public. The clothing was context specific: different clothes were suggested for different spaces and occasions.

In this context, David Arnold says that since the late-nineteenth century our ideas of time and space, and of self and the 'other' have been profoundly transformed by technological innovation and by the incorporation of ever changing technologies into our daily existence.<sup>3</sup> Arnold points to some of these technologies that became part of emerging identities and shaped how people saw themselves. For example, this happened with the invention of the sewing machine and camera.<sup>4</sup> The coming of sewing machine and

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, pp.2-3.

<sup>2</sup>Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>3</sup>David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013, p.5.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

tailored garment affected the styles and patterns of Indian clothing during this era.<sup>5</sup> There were other inventions, like the camera, that did not affect the dressing style of the Indian population directly, but yet shaped how people presented themselves to the world.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The main concern of this chapter is to locate the transformation which took place in personal and public dressing, and explore the individual or community identity embedded in the politics of appearance. In section one I will trace how the notion of proper and improper dress emerges during the late-nineteenth century India. I will explore the notions of home clothing, office uniform, ceremonial dress as they emerged in this period? This links to the second section where I will locate role of camera as an agent of recorder of self, power, class, reflected through the dressing in the photograph in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The last two sections track these shifts through a study of two popular technologies; camera and the sewing machine.<sup>6</sup> Karlekar has already shown how important photographs are to study sartorial transformation over a period of the time and the ideas of self.<sup>7</sup> Whereas, sewing machine became a harbinger of modernity in the lives of the Indian women.

### **Wearing for the Occasion**

What does one wear at home and work, to the movie, or to school? The distinction between specific clothing for different spaces is defined through history. Although, sometimes they do blur: for instance, home wear can become fashionable, or the reverse. A change in sartorial tradition can be marked especially in the late-nineteenth century when many Indians began experimenting in European clothing. The question that had to be confronted was the following: when and where could one wear western clothes? How was it possible to retain ones traditions as well as open up the west? The solution to the moral restraint in wearing western items of dress was to wear them at office and change back to traditional clothing at home. Men faced more dilemma than women, as the entry

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<sup>5</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, He categorized different technologies as 'everyday technology'. According to him, they are technologies which did not attract much attention unlike technologies such as railroads and telegraphs and only marginally appeared in photographs, novels or short stories, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> Many scholars and historians like Malavika Karlekar trace the evolution of clothing styles through family and studio photographs. See *Re-visioning the Past, Tagore and the Sartorial styles: A Photo Essay*, New Delhi: Social Sciences Press, 2010.

of the women into the public arena was possible by the early twentieth century only. Nonetheless, the public literature debated the proper clothing for women in public and private spaces during this period. For example, the discourse around *purdah* in North India in the early-twentieth century was around the futility of covering faces of women at home as opposed to women without veils in the public spaces.<sup>8</sup> These debates in vernacular journals and tracts on *purdah* encouraged women to dress appropriately in public and private spaces.

Conflicts over codes of dressing were linked to questions of identity, and cultural difference. A lot has been discussed in other chapters of this thesis about how the Indian elite males incorporated western elements of clothing into the Indian dressing since the early nineteenth century. So, it is crucial to look at British responses to Indian clothing. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, for instance, it was customary for British officials in India to follow Indian etiquette and remove their footwear in the courts of ruling kings and chiefs. Later, this tradition of their early experience in the durbars of Indian rulers influenced the shoe regulation imposed in 1984 in India.

However, it led to a conflict due to the cultural differences between the East and the West.<sup>9</sup> The point at issue was whether Indians had the right to wear shoes in public places like government offices and judicial courts. K.N. Panikkar suggests that the reason for the conflict was the British ignorance of the body-cloth relationship in India. They were unaware that this relationship differed substantially in public and private spaces.<sup>10</sup> The British wanted the public to demonstrate their respect for colonial power. However the Indians saw it as it was an attempt to destroy human dignity and a violation of their religious sentiments. The conflict became public at Surat in 1862 when the judge of Faujdari Adalat forbade Manockjee Cowasjee Entee, a Parsee and an assessor from entering the court without removing his shoes.<sup>11</sup> Manockjee refused to comply to the judge's insistence as the Parsees were exempted from this regulation in other towns and

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<sup>8</sup>I have looked at similar debates on removal of *purdah* in the vernacular journals which were circulated in various regions of North India in my M.Phil dissertation titled: '*Taste, Ideology and Clothing in Colonial India.*' 2011.

<sup>9</sup>K. N. Panikkar, 'The Great Shoe Question: Tradition, Legitimacy and Power in Colonial India', *Studies in History*, Vol. 34, No.3, 1988, Sage Publications, pp.21-36.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

according to him his religious faith did not permit walking with his bare feet. This example stresses how cultural differences and the norms of public/ private dressing led to conflicts between the British and the Indians. This occasion did not take place in isolation and similar incidents were taking place in India around the shoe question.

What happened when the British officials wore Indian clothes? How was Indian dressing items received among the British population in India? As the British consolidated their political dominance in India in the early-nineteenth century, the wearing of Indian styles became increasingly unacceptable. It was seen as a sign of eccentricity and even a cause of discredit. In 1830, Europeans were forbidden from wearing Indian clothes at official functions, so that the cultural identity of the white masters was not undermined. The regulation was directed against Fredrick John Shore, a judge in upper India, who wore Indian clothes while sitting in his court.<sup>12</sup> 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 a better understanding of the natives but also for their full employment in the governance in their own country.<sup>13</sup>

Accounts reveal the seriousness with which the British considered their clothes. Aldous Huxley recognized the psychological dependence on such rituals. One civil servant, Kenneth Warren,<sup>14</sup> posted to an isolated outpost in upper Assam some comments a few years before the Great War. He always made a point before dressing for dinner:

If you lost your self -respect you were not looked upon in a respectful manner. So, in order to maintain my self -respect I put on a dinner jacket and dressed for dinner and I said to my servants, who were quite likely to get a bit slack just looking after a man by himself in the middle of the jungle, 'now this is a dinner party and every night is a dinner party and you will serve dinner as though there are other people at the dinner table.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998, p.112.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>The author notes that this incidence took place some years before the Great War. The time period is perhaps the First World War if we read further in the book.

<sup>15</sup>Charles Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj: Images of British India in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, London: Charles Allen and British Broadcasting Corporation, 1975, p.69.



This example suggests the importance of dress and the dignity associated with a particular kind of clothing. Here, what becomes important is that there was a specific dress for the occasion of a dinner. It became important for Kenneth Warren to don the dinner jacket in order to demand self respect. This also suggests the dependence of an official to a set of clothing to define an occasion even when there was nobody except him and his servants. Similarly, another incident in the early twentieth century narrated by a British official John Morris during a tour in Gilgit stresses on the importance of a dinner jacket for having dinner. He was invited for a dinner by a local political officer who added “P.S. a black tie” at the end of his note. Morris recalls, ‘fortunately I had been warned about this man and told that he was a terrific stickler for the correct costume and so had hurried my dinner jacket for miles and miles...’<sup>16</sup> Morris’s insistence to carry his dinner jacket for miles was embedded in the tradition prevalent among the British in the early twentieth century. Moreover, as Morris himself says he had been warned about this man this, the need to carry his jacket was partially due to the eccentricity present in the host’s character.

We see how the items of clothing such as a dinner jacket and a shoe become an agent of respect. Removing or absence of such items of dressing in the given specific context meant disrespect to others and to the self. Most importantly it was the need of a particular occasion which drove the dressing concerns in the examples cited above. One can say that it was a form of accepted social dress which was to be observed strictly for a certain occasion and not only a form of psychological dependency.

The British did not only control the dress of their own officials but that of the Indians as well. The British attempts to control Indian dress were by no means limited to the sphere of education. Cohn has illustrated how the British chose to orientalise the uniform of the army and the official dress of the Maharajas. They also laid down regulations concerning what Indians should wear for official and ceremonial occasions.<sup>17</sup> The first instances of sartorial change were seen as a reaction and reception of British Imperial presence. New forms of government, education and social etiquette gradually influenced the clothing and

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.74.

<sup>17</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, p. 42.

new sets of clothes had come to go with it. The result was that individuals began to juggle their sartorial identity. The need to have different clothing was not only felt by the British but the Indians as well which was visible in clothing dilemmas during much of the twentieth century.

I argue that one of the factors of clothing conflicts was the development of new aesthetics in clothing. Modern sites like the railways, schools, markets, theatre, hotels generated new cultures of dressing according to space and occasion. These spaces brought new etiquettes of clothing in colonial India. However, Indians experienced a dilemma when they had to choose what kind of identity they wanted to project at any particular moment. Emma Tarlo argues, changing one's clothes to suit the occasion allowed an Indian man to maintain two distinct sartorial identities, an Indian one and a European one. According to her, the advantage of this approach was that it enabled a person to dress according to two different and often incompatible standards of cultural correctness.

This cartoon which appeared in the 1930s in *Marwari Aggrawal* magazine helps us understand one of the clothing dilemmas.<sup>18</sup> It is a satire on the disadvantages of investment in activities such as a horse race and blind adoption of western clothing. The protagonist of the cartoon, Sethji is shown to be pondering over his poor condition. In the process, he decides to make money by investing in horse race. The next image shows him going to a shop to rent a pair of trousers and a coat. He is shown to be ignorant about the new items of dress he rented as a result he wears the trousers in the wrong manner. The horse race made Sethji lose money as he failed in the horse race. Moreover, other people mostly Europeans mocked him for not wearing the trousers properly. We see how he tries to wear the acceptable dress code for the race in order to blend in with other people but his ignorance only brought ridicule. Thus, this cartoon illustrates one of the various clothing dilemmas faced by many middle class and elite Indians in order to dress according to a particular occasion. The cartoon in demonstrating the dilemma also ridicules the effort to mimic the west.

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<sup>18</sup> Figure 1, *Marwari Aggrawal*, May 1930, p.9.

## शनिवार शामको



लेनेको भुगतान सेठजी  
 वड़ी खुशीसे जाते हैं,  
 घोड़ा आया लास्ट जान वे  
 सिर धुन-धुन पछताते हैं ।  
 धोती खुली देखे विदेशी खूब  
 उहाका लेते हैं ।  
 देखे वे घर फूक तमाशा जो कि  
 रसमें जाते हैं ।

Figure11: A man going for a horse race

Source: *Marwari Aggrawal* (1930)

However, as Tarlo points out despite the inconvenience and discomfort of European dress, there were a number of reasons why Indian men might have wanted to wear it even for a temporary time.<sup>19</sup> In the process what becomes important is how he or she was perceived by the others. Here, European clothes become a means of self-representation and a way by which he was judged by others. In the above incident, the man dressed in European clothes became the victim of prejudices.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.54.

However, Indians were not always the victims of these prejudices. Sometimes, the adoption of Western clothes was used as an advantage, wearing a mix of western and Indian items of clothing. Let me explain this by an example. A number of elite Indians wore the English coat over a dhoti or a turban over the English suit.

Consider what Nirad Chaudhuri writes.<sup>20</sup> He states ‘the interaction between the Indian and European costume was immensely powerful than anything prior to that point.’ He notes that there was a visible influence of west in almost all “city clothing” where either a western garment had been added to Indian clothing and was considered to be a part of it or where Indian garment was restyled along western forms. In this context, Chaudhuri narrates his own personal experiences. Writing about his times he notes the visible presence of tailored shirts in the 1920s, worn with almost every style of ‘lower’ garment including a *dhoti*.<sup>21</sup> He shows how the taste of Indian elite class in dressing was evolving. He notes that during his childhood the European dress shirt was favored for formal occasions and was much admired and respected. Chaudhuri commented:

During this time wealthy people went to visit and even to parties in these shirts, looking very imposing with their starched fronts, gold or diamond studs and links, sometimes a gold chain and a very fine crinkled dhoti as diaphanous as the finest Muslin and also patent leather pumps with bows. The European coat was very popular in the cities and was regularly worn with a dhoti and sometimes styled with an embroidered shawl placed on top.<sup>22</sup>

Chaudhuri’s experiences suggest that the western shirt was incorporated with all the Indian lower garments and became an acceptable dress for all formal occasions during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. We also see that this came to be considered the proper attire for a formal occasion such as work and parties. What is interesting about the dress code is the combination of European and Indian clothing.

One of the major problems with changing one’s clothes to suit the context was that one had to decide where one context ended and another began. This involved some kind of prior knowledge of the contexts in which one was going to move, but if even if this

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<sup>20</sup> Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Intellectuals in India*, New Delhi: VIR Publishing House, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Arti Sandhu, *Indian Fashion: Tradition, Innovation, Style*, London : Bloomsbury, 2015, p.29.

<sup>22</sup> Chaudhuri, *The Intellectuals in India*, p.67.

knowledge was readily available then there was still the problem of awkward transformation.

These notions of proper and improper dress emerged due to different dress codes for all occasions. We saw how this culture of dressing according to an occasion was popularized by British policies of clothing themselves and their idea of what Indians ought to wear. We saw there was a visible influence of western clothing on types of clothing which emerged for all occasions for examples, evening gown and dinner jacket. The notion of appropriate code of dressing was visible in ceremonial occasion as well. For example a wedding ritual required a certain type of dressing and has become mandatory. Saroja Kamakshi offers an interesting example on how women negotiated the conflict between everyday clothing and ceremonial dress. In her article 'uneven earth and open sky' she narrates the childhood of her mother and her maternal uncle during in the British period.<sup>23</sup> She recounts her mother's marriage which took place in late 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

For most of the time they ran wild in the huge compounds of bungalows or in the camps. When they were taken out the girls wore frocks, shoes and socks. Marriage however changed all this. At 12, my mother was married to a 24 year old lawyer, Parrabhiraman. My mother, a skinny tomboy was dolled up for the occasion in a 9 yard sari and all her jewellery. Father wore diamond earrings and his long hair in a Kudumi. Father saw and approved. A grand wedding, lasting five full days, took place...<sup>25</sup>

For lot of young girls it was not unusual to wear frocks and shoes especially in families who were influenced by western lifestyles. This was true for most of the elite families

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<sup>23</sup>Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi, *A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 165-179.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 167. According to Saroja Kamakshi she was born in year 1931 however, the time period of her mother's marriage is not specified one can assume that these events took place in the first decade of the twentieth century. She also notes that her grandfather was raised to be a superintending engineer during the British period.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. Appropriateness of dress can often be critically important. Let me cite an incident which took place in 1960s in an Indian village. The incident shows how deeply religious and caste identity continues to be linked with the clothing. This incident took place in the year 1960 in a village. A Dalit man was rejected by his father-in-law on the day of the wedding. The marriage was almost called off. The problem: the Dalit man had worn shirts and pants and not the traditional dress of the community. To the father in-law wearing shirt and pants indicated loss of caste and identity. Since the groom worked in the city and the same dress was considered respectable in the city and the groom took special care in wearing a set of nice shirt and trouser for the wedding. The marriage was reinstated only after the groom wore the traditional dress.

during the early-twentieth century. However, marriage was an occasion when young girl was supposed to be dressed in traditional sari and jewellery.

A similar incident is reported by Sarala Devi in her autobiography. This is how she describes the marriage ritual of the girls in families influenced by Brahmo culture:

The presence of Jagadish Bose's sisters in our school brought about certain subtle changes in the character of the school, largely influenced by their Brahmo culture. A more relaxed ambience, a progressive attitude to the course of the studies, and in some ways, adoption of English ways was noticeable. In those days many Brahmos modeled their ritual customs in imitation of the western style. At their prayer meetings, the language used was often English and not the mother tongue. At marriages, the bride was usually dressed in white and where she was clad in a sari and not in western gown, she would wear a veil of net to which was attached the traditional orange blossom. The pose of bridesmaids following the bride was also a must at certain weddings.<sup>26</sup>

This example shows how a few elements of western culture were retained during the wedding ceremony, but still the preferred mode of dress was the sari.

Similarly, in the early 1930s the need to dress properly for an evening party made Madhusudan Dutta wear *dhoti kurta* instead of his usual European dress. Emma Tarlo points out that the incident in the life of Madhusudan Datta reveals the process of differentiation at work. Macaulay's Education policy resulted in narrowing the cultural divide between the British and the educated Indian elite.<sup>27</sup> Within the constraints of a given tradition, whether ancient or modern, there is room for individuals to negotiate and act, and if clothes are like badges of identity, they can, like badges be removed and replaced.

What such incidents provide is a picture of people making decisions, choosing to some extent their own self-image playing with identities and recognizing the role of clothes in image construction and interpretation. As Tarlo points out, clothes are not merely defining but they are also self-consciously used to define, to present, to deceive, to enjoy, to communicate, to reveal and conceal.<sup>28</sup> The relationship between clothing and the wearer answered a lot of questions. We see why individuals choose to dress up in a

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<sup>26</sup>Ray, *The Many Worlds of Sarala Devi*, pp.72.

<sup>27</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p.41.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.8.

particular way for a particular occasion. The examples showed us how it evolved over a period of time. We have looked at the sartorial juggle to negotiate modernity and tradition, and the opposition between Indian and western cultural identity.

The sartorial problem of proper and improper dress to suit an occasion need not always be framed by standard markers. The agent of an outsider is equally important. Who is the spectator of the dressing? For example; a Hindu man living in Delhi might dress in cotton Kurta Pyjama (tunic and trousers). To most foreigners he looks 'Indian' but if he wishes to attend a particularly auspicious Hindu ceremony he may find his stitched clothes associated with impurity and even with foreignness in certain traditional regional contexts. There is number of different criteria's in which his dressing is judged. When individuals have to decide what to wear they have to consider the problem of their audience, but they make, like the man in Delhi, have multiple audiences with multiple expectations. Emma Tarlo says that historically this has been the case particularly with Indian men's dress and that women had fewer alternative audiences with which to contend.

We see how the Indians faced clothing dilemmas and struggled to devise a new aesthetic for clothing during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. We see how new ideas of the difference between everyday and public dressing emerges. Dressing according to occasion gets codified. This leads to our next section which will look at how the camera is used to frame images of ideality.

### **Dressing for the Camera**

By looking at a set of photographs this section will argue that the camera played a significant role in recording and codifying the sartorial transformation since the late-nineteenth century. The choice of clothing for the camera reflects how a subject seeks to present herself to the others. However, one cannot deny the agency of the photographer, as the photographer most often decided on the backdrop, prop and attire. The camera was influential in revealing the private to the public. Did the camera merely an agent of recording dress style of a particular gender, caste and class prevalent during that time? Or

did it have a more constitutive function? As Christopher Pinney says what the photograph records is the fact of manifestation of what is placed in front of the camera not the 'atypicality' of the act or the performance. So, one needs to be mindful of the limits of what the camera records. The clothing of the person becomes a way of presentation of the self too; and the photograph need not only be looked at as a record of clothing styles.

Madhava Prasad argues that the studio photographs during the early-twentieth century served the purpose of self-representation.<sup>29</sup> He states that although the images reflect a particular type of dress but on the other hand they were a conscious production of a self-image. According to him, the photographs serve as an important historical source to understand the sartorial modernity the Indian leaders experimented with in response to the colonial encounter. For Prasad, the self-image was an image for the other, thus a type of representation of self. In this the significance of clothes as a mode of expression of various social statuses plays important role. This raises a question of what, who and when to represent. The element of choice plays a role too. What is important for us is that the photographer and the subject both chose the sartorial mode of expression and representation. So, I will look at the camera both as an agent of recording and reforming of dress. Most importantly, it would be important to understand how the camera created ideas of public and personal dressing. One of the needs for the reform of female clothing was to define an appropriate dressing for public spaces. The need to educate the Indian women created the possibility for the women to appear in public or within the home the 'public' entered. I will explore the role played by the camera in fashioning a proper dress or the Indian men and women. In the case for female dressing, clothes which was previously considered immodest and inappropriate for an outsiders gaze had to be altered.

The Indian nationalists, reformers and intellectuals advocated clothing reforms for women against the colonial perceptions of the status of Indian woman as backward. It was necessary to present the image of an Indian woman who was superior in appearance and intellect than their western counterpart. One of the ways in which the British officials in India categorized, scrutinized, imagined, and presented the Indian population and

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<sup>29</sup>M. Madhava Prasad, 'The Struggle to Represent and Sartorial Modernity: on a Visual Dimension of Indian Nationalist Politics', *Inter-Asia Cultural studies*, 2014, 15:4, pp. 527-588.



costume was through camera. One of the initial perceptions of the indigenous as backward and dress of the Indians as ungraceful became one of the reason to civilize and dress them. However, the new dress code for the Indians was supposed to differentiate them from British officials. In this project of dress reform the British officials used clothing to assert their authority and power. The camera helped to visualize and popularize the social status of the wearer: the British and the Indians alike.

The question of un/dressing in the photographs was debated since the early-nineteenth century when the Europeans were fascinated with the ‘nakedness’ of the colonized population. In this context, Bernard Cohn makes the point that ‘one of the first impressions formed by the British travelers and officials to India in the nineteenth century was of nakedness of most Indians whom they encountered on their arrival’.<sup>30</sup> Here, nakedness defined the Western encounter with the colonial and potential spaces. The fetish with the subjects’ nudity was reflected in various photographs taken by the amateur and professional British and European photographers. In the context of colonial ‘gaze’, one of the most revealing photographs and captions is Sache and Westfield’s ‘Mr. Homfray keeper of Andaman orphans’ (Figure 12). Mr. Homfray poses with a group of almost half naked tribals who are adults not orphans.<sup>31</sup> This image was photographed at Calcutta and was displayed at the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle.<sup>32</sup> It reveals the politics of the power. Here, it is achieved through the clothing of the colonial and unclothing of the colonised. When the British colonised the Andaman Islands in 1858 the Andamanese and British identities and histories became newly entwined.<sup>33</sup> Claire Wintle says that it was a part of the British fetish to share multiple identities of the Andamanese as imagined from a British perspective.<sup>34</sup>

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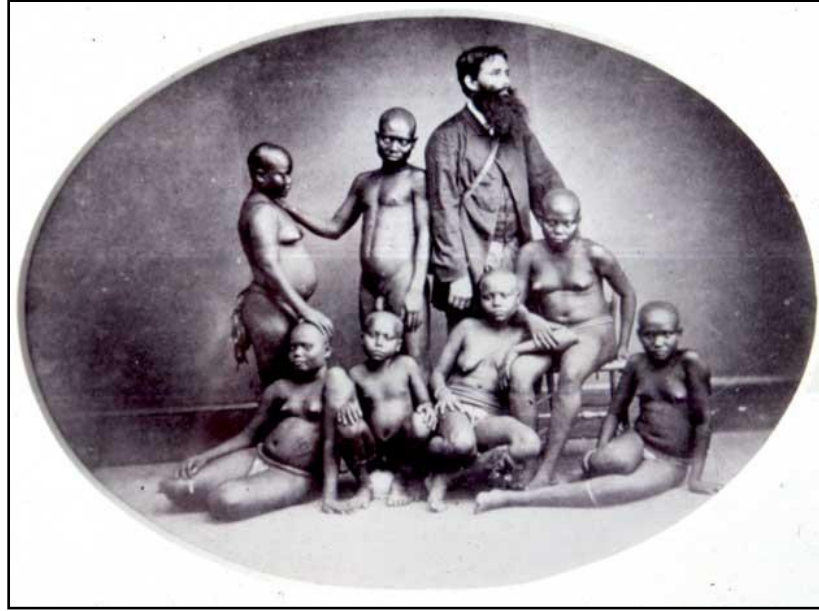
<sup>30</sup>Philippa Levine, ‘States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination’, *Victorian Studies*, Volume 50, Number 2, Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup><http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/exhibition-at-national-gallery-of-modern-art-showcases-photographs-of-indias-colonial-past/1/289521.html> Accessed on 6, November 2015.

<sup>32</sup>Taken in the studio of Saché and Westfield in September 1865, this image was part of a selection of primarily archaeological photographs compiled by the Archaeological Survey of India for the India Office (John Falconer, personal communication, 05.02.07). Eighty-three samples from this series were shown at the Paris Exhibition, but only one made the indigenous Andamanese peoples its subject. Claire Wintle, ‘Model Subjects: Representations of the Andaman Islands at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886.’ *History Workshop Journal* 67, No. 1, 2009, pp. 194-207.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*



**Figure 12: By John Edward Sache and Westfield, 'Mr. Homfray, Keeper of Andaman orphans with Andaman group at Calcutta' 1865.**

**Source: Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Archive, CSSS, Kolkata**

In this image the 'naked, savage and uncivilised' representation of the Andaman tribals has been stressed. It is one of the ways in which the colonial 'exotic' was deployed for the European gaze. However, it is interesting to see how Mr. Homfray looks away whereas the tribal male and female makes eye contact with the photographer. Mr. Homfray wears a western suit and the female tribals wear minimal clothing to cover the genital areas and the male adults have nothing to cover their body. Here, the imagined identity is not the subject's construct but the photographers.

A similar fetish can be traced in the *Juang* women's naked photograph clicked by British official E. T. Dalton and used in *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872). Regarding this photograph, Tarlo opines that the lithograph does not reveal anything about them, except that they were reluctant victims of colonial administrators and photographers.<sup>35</sup> She says that it does not even tell about the clothes of peoples of India, most of whom have far stricter codes of modesty than any European. Drawing on Tarlo's opinion I argue that

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<sup>35</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters* 'Reflections on a Portrait' p. xviii- xix.

both the images become relevant as they throw light on the series of attitudes which dominated the colonial discourse and the subject of dress. The image merely suggests the role of the camera in strengthening the colonial notions of Indian primitivity, and the ‘disgraceful’ clothing styles of Indians. To what extent this perception of the ‘dress of the natives’ persuaded the Indians to reform their clothing? We don’t know that. However, the colonials did employ means to reform the clothing of the individuals. The desire to ‘civilize’ the Indians clothing was particularly apparent in missionary activities where the naked were often quite literally clothed.<sup>36</sup>

Not only the British but the Indian elite also used photographs as a sign of power. The choice of studio setting, posture, gesture and clothing in particular was to distinguish them from the others and it was meant for personal as well as public viewing. Christopher Pinney begins his book by imagining a ruler’s behavior when getting a photograph clicked. Pinney mentions that the ruler would have given direction to the photographer to make him look so royal and full of aura that seeing his photograph his subjects should be scared of him. Pinney’s imagination touches upon the possibility of the use of photography to create a sense of power and differentiation. In this context, the photographed body becomes the site of this power. The politics of power by maintaining difference was emphasized through various dress codes (Figure 12).

According to Pinney photographic self-representation also seems too often act as prophecy, as a tactic of enquiry and imagination.<sup>37</sup> Ronald Barthes writes: ‘Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of “posing”, I simultaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.’ This creates a possibility of presenting what one was not, what one wanted others to see them as. It evokes questions of personal dressing and public dressing too. To illustrate this further, let us take an example of the collection of photographs by James Waterhouse in 1862. In this album Secunder Begum of Bhopal was photographed by Waterhouse. What is striking about the eight photographs in the album was that Secunder Begum was dressed differently in each photograph. Waterhouse reports, ‘I was

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<sup>36</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge*, pp. 78-87.

<sup>37</sup> Pinney, *The Coming of the Photography In India*, p. 138.

constantly employed in taking pictures of the Begum in various dresses of Native ladies. I had no time to take the same picture a twice, as the Begum changed her dress immediately'.<sup>38</sup> Pinney states that in one image the Begum appears in satin pyjamas, a gold embroidered black jacket and a cap with a Bird of Paradise plume which all offset her recently awarded Star of India whereas in another image she flaunts a kincab jacket embroidered with blue and gold, with feathers or fur around the collar and very looser Turkish trousers. Here, as Pinney points out, the most remarkable thing about these pictures is that the sitter controls the process of the photograph in the presence of the camera. The process suggests that the camera becomes a zone for the presentation of selves that could not be so easily presented elsewhere.

The very act of representation affects the people who are to be represented. During the nineteenth century the long drawn out process of being photographed provided plenty of time for the introspection if not for negotiations of how a sari should be draped and a hand was to be placed.<sup>39</sup> The above example of Secunder Begum suggests the limitation within the process of representation. For many clients, the camera created a space for the affirmation of a certain stage within the life cycle. And in this clothes and accouterments had to suit the role as also did the pose and posture.

The photography offered platform to Indian women to choose an identity that she wanted to present or what was needed to be presented. In most of the albums which had collections of family and studio photographs of elite Indian men and women, individual photographs of a woman presented them as educated. The striking presence of books in the images need not suggest that the women were educated but the fact that it was used as a popular prop. Books had become a sign of status and class. This was visible in most of the photographs which were taken during the period between 1910-1940s.<sup>40</sup> Mostly the woman appeared alone in the image with different props in the background especially books. However, there was a presence of other subjects as well. Before we move to the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 145. For further details please refer this book.

<sup>39</sup>Karlekar, *Re- Visioning the Past*, p.95.

<sup>40</sup>Photographs from the Alkazi Collection of Photography (New Delhi), Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal archive (Kolkata CSSS) show many photographs which used a prop of books and a single woman.

discussion of the educated and the individual women let us look at an interesting image (Figure 13) which features female students in a school setting.

What is crucial about the image is the dressing of the subjects in an educational institution. I have already pointed out that education played an important role in reforming the clothing of Indian women. We have seen in Chapter I that the reformist sections were concerned over the issue of appropriate female attire. Apart from accepting the new codes of decency they were aware that women's education and their entry to the public realm were impaired by inappropriate attire.<sup>41</sup> Malavika Karlekar argues that visits to photographic studios would hardly have been possible without the introduction of befitting clothes for women and girls.<sup>42</sup> The uniform as well as the school became part of the new culture of socialization and dressing. The uniform was mode of disciplining bodies, creating new markers of secular identities, and exhibiting the signs of the 'civilizing' process. Since not everyone went to school, or wore school uniforms, the new dressing codes also became a mode of differentiation and categorization.

Photograph (Figure 13) captioned 'by unknown photographer' within a classroom of Alexandra Native Girls' English Institution in Bombay (Maharashtra from the Archaeological Survey of India Collections: India Office Series (Volume 46)), was, probably taken by the staff of Bourne and Shepherd studio. This image, showing a class of pupils seated in a semi-circle around a globe was exhibited at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, and is mentioned on page 224 of John Forbes Watson's catalogue of the Indian Department.<sup>43</sup> In 1863, with subscriptions and a grant of land from the government,

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<sup>41</sup> Himani Banerjee, 'Textile Prison: Discourse on shame (lajja) in the Attire of the Gentlewoman (bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1994, pp.169-193.

<sup>42</sup> Karlekar, *Re-Visioning the Past*, p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> <http://oldphotosbombay.blogspot.in/2010/07/class-in-alexandra-native-girls.html>.

<http://oldphotosbombay.blogspot.in/2011/02/vintage-bombay-schoolscollegeshospitals.html> Accessed on 7th November 2015. Female education in India grew dramatically in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Imperial Gazetteer of India states regarding female education, "The Government did not take up the subject until 1849, when Lord Dalhousie informed the Bengal Council of Education that henceforth its functions were to embrace female education, and the first girls' school recognized by Government was founded shortly afterwards by a committee of native gentlemen. The dispatch of 1854 directed that female education should receive the frank and cordial support of Government...The Education Commission of 1882 advised that female education should receive special encouragement and special liberality...The adoption of this attitude has resulted in a considerable development of the public instruction of girls, although it still lags far behind that of their brothers. In 1871 there were 134 secondary and 1,760 primary girls' schools; in 1901-2 the numbers were 461 and 5,628 respectively."

Manockjee Cursetjee had set up the English medium school and it was the first of its kind in Bombay to provide a liberal education for Indian girls — but it was mostly the Parsis who attended it.<sup>44</sup> Bhikaiji Patel (later Madame Cama) is perhaps the school's most famous *alumnus*. The school continues to this day in the city, though in different premises.



**Figure 13: Unknown photographer, Class in Alexandaria Native Girls School, Bombay**

**Source: Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Archive, CSSS, Kolkata, 1873.**

The photograph shows the girls dressed in elaborate Parsi-border saris, or *garas*. These were either originals or based on the all-over hand-embroidered silk *garas* brought back by Parsi traders from China in the 1850s.<sup>45</sup> Under the sari *pallav* is the *mathubanu* that loosely binds the head. The girls are from different age group. In the image the younger ones wear jackets and *topees* over skirts and were most likely from more than one class.

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<sup>44</sup>Malavika Karlekar, 'Lessons in a Sari: Did Women's Education in India Changed the way they Dressed', *Telegraph*, 4 January 2007, [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070204/asp/opinion/story\\_7340747.asp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070204/asp/opinion/story_7340747.asp), Accessed on 7 November 2015.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

It is possible that they were especially dressed for the occasion. They all look in the direction of their teacher, who is rotating the globe, though the downcast eyes of a couple are unmistakable. Possibly, the glare of lights and the long duration of the entire process had tired them. Although, they do not carry any book in their hands the study table beside the teacher shows books. The remarkable attention with which they all look towards the globe indicates the possibility of it being a posed photograph. Thus, it serves as a space of experimentation where new identities and sartorial styles are shaped and asserted. The politics of power in clothes has been revealed through the camera.

As Malavika Karlekar states public viewing through the photograph so to speak, of mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters was integral to the affirmation of emerging identities and an engagement with gender relations. She says that in the context of Bengali society that the visibility of the women became a metaphor of their changing status. And as Calcutta increasingly offered new spaces for definition of household, family, conjugality by the late nineteenth century the camera was available to record them.

The camera does not only record the clothing prevalent in a particular period but it intervenes the lives of the elite and middle class. They appealed to the middle class sensibilities and families keen to maintain the record of their lives. What is selected as important enough to be recorded seems interesting to those who photograph themselves. Careful reading of the prop, gestures and the pose tell us much about the meanings around the pose and the photographer and the subject's intent. Apart from this the photograph offers the objectification of self-image and newly acquired status. Figure 14 offers an interesting example showing that photography transformed women's relationships to public space and helped create new ideas of domesticity. The mediation of education in the emergence of the conjugal unit as represented by the photograph is worth noting. As we know by the nineteenth century in the westernized upper echelons of Bengali society the notion of the wife as companion emerged as a new value. For this it became imperative to think about education and learning for girls.<sup>46</sup> The space of photographic studio focuses on marriage as conjugality and as a relationship between

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<sup>46</sup> Karlekar , *Early Photography*, p.93,

husband and wife. However, more than this I want to look at the question of the presentation of self, and dressing in the fashioning of self. To go a studio to be photographed after the wedding became increasingly popular after the 1870s and it was also an occasion for impressive sartorial displays. For example: Figure 14.



**Figure 14: Wedding picture (photograph of Basanta Choudhury) 1920s.**

**Source: *Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Archive*, CSSS Kolkata**



Basanta Chaoudhry wears a dhoti and kurta and a chador wrapped around the upper body. This was the usual attire of Bengali men of fine dhoti, shirt and a chadar.<sup>47</sup> He rests his elbows over a pile of books and looks directly at the viewer. His wife who looks barely thirteen or fourteen wears a sari in modern style and also wears fairly elaborate jewellery. It is interesting that the wife has no footwear while her husband wears one. One wonders whether that is a marker of domesticity: the confinement of the woman to the bounds of the home. Shoes were to be put on only by those who were expected to move out of the home. The wife holds a book too. She sits on the chair where as the man sits on an elevated table. Although he looks away the pose and positioning suggest closeness and intimacy. The setting doesn't suggest that it is a studio. Probably, a plain cloth hung over in the background with the chair and table as a prop. Most of the photographs of couples or weddings showed the subjects in expensive gear and suggested conjugality. However, what is interesting in this image is that education becomes an aspect of the presentation of self.

We know that the earliest attempt to redefine the dress of the women was undertaken by women of the Tagore family in particular daughter in law of Jnanandandini Debi who combined elements of western style with the indigenous sari. Karlekar says that such sartorial changes were essential for a heightened female visibility both within and outside the home.<sup>48</sup> With her attempts the introduction of the new style of wearing the sari with a blouse and chador namely the "Thakurbarir Sari or Brahmika sari" took place. However, what is significant is that in her crusade for dress reform Jnanandandini Debi offered to help out those who may have difficulty in imagining what the new outfit looked like. She volunteered to send a picture (*chhobi*), though the term *chhobi* could mean a painting as well as a photograph.

Jnanandandini's example of using a photograph to make the others aware of the latest sartorial change may be one of very few attempts that we may know of. However, the experiment suggests the diverse possibilities offered with the invention of camera and print media. The use of camera no doubt made possible that the image or dress of a

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<sup>47</sup> Sukhendu Ray, *The Many World of Sarala Devi*, pp. 76.

<sup>48</sup> Karlekar, *Early Photography*, p.94.

person can be recorded, circulated and preserved for self and personal. Probably later when they were in circulation they were used as agents of change of dressing. We see that in the journals which were published in a large number in North India and other regions of India since the late-nineteenth century onwards, there were images showing women and men in various types of sari's, dresses, and clothes.

If we look at the contemporary period we know that popular magazines for women and men carry photographs of men and women modeling various dressing styles. They shape the taste and the dressing style of the readers to a very great extent. Although, the use of images in the journals started to appear by late 1920s in the English language journals and by late 1930s in the vernacular journals. These journals informed the readers about latest fashion in clothing styles such as in what different ways a sari can be worn, or what colour or material was in practice by Indian women. Images of women dressed in different clothes along with the discussions on changing dress among the various classes and regions in India no doubt popularized changing styles in fashion. To illustrate this statement further lets us look at an image which appeared in *Indian Ladies Magazine* in the 1930's Figure 15.<sup>49</sup>

As we see this image shows two Indian women sporting different types and colour of sari. The article following these images described how the style of sari worn by the two women was mode of prevalent fashion.<sup>50</sup> Sister Susie the author of this column notes that this kind of saris (Figure 15 A) with broad elaborate patterns were popular more in North India and western India than Southern India. She further notes that the ladies of the South would do well, therefore to start a new fashion by having silks heavily embroidered with silver. The pattern is intricate and original and the combination of black and silver is at once striking and chaste. A blouse of silver tissue would look well with this sari. According to Susie, the light cotton sari (Image 15 B) with dark green silvered border worn with the blouse of image indicated popular choice of ladies those days. To stress on the green colour as fashionable choice she said that she saw a woman was wearing a pale green georgette sari with a delicate black pattern. Another interesting point to note is that

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<sup>49</sup>Our Fashion Notes, *ILM*, September and October 1932, Vol. 5, No. 11, pp.529-530.

<sup>50</sup>Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion suggestion', *ILM*, September and October 1932, Vol 5, No. 11, pp. 531-532.

underneath the photo Wilson studio perhaps alludes to the fact that the image itself was clicked for Sister Susie's article. One needs to stress that the style worn in the photograph was what the writer believed was the way in which Hindu women from Northern India dressed in 1930s.

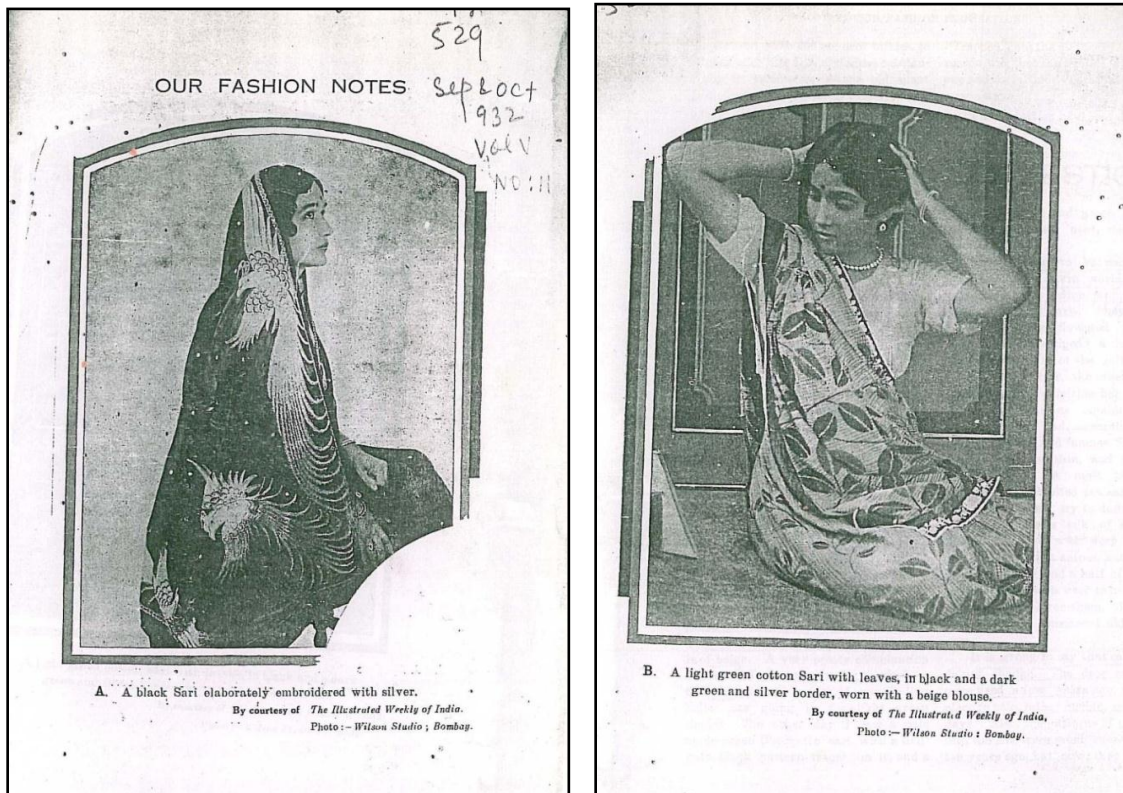


Figure 15 A & B: Sari styles, 'Our Fashion Notes'

Source: *Indian Ladies Magazine*, (1932)

The role of the camera being an agent of change of fashion does not seem to be the obvious focus of this article. However, the illustration and the discussion combined served the purpose of influencing the target audience. To what extent these suggestions on fashion were actually responsible for change of styles is unknown nonetheless they were responsible for creating a taste for emerging dress items as chapter one explored in detail.

A similar role of the camera in influencing fashion was stressed by one author of *The Times of India*. The photograph used by Joan Williams's focus on the ways in which the camera frames the colonial understanding of 'eastern dresses'. William's article **The Fascination of the Eastern Sari** narrates about her friends desire to click just one of the saris worn by Indian princesses. 'Could I please photograph one of the two saris to send to England! My friend asked: I am terribly sorry madam, but we dare not, once these designs are seen by our competitors or the public, they have lost half the value'.<sup>51</sup> One does not know whether this conversation was actually took place or not; however it tells us about the role of the camera in producing a picture which could have been used as a source to inform others about style, or enable them to copy the latest design.

Sailaja N. Joshi notes that writers such as Williams used photographs as an attempt to authenticate their discussions and centre their knowledge of eastern dress as legitimate.<sup>52</sup> She suggests that the photographs of women in their traditional dress achieved two purposes. One was aimed at the European population who could understand and identify what an Indian woman looked like, and the other was for Indians for whom the images served as a way in which they could understand how to behave, and how to drape their bodies.<sup>53</sup>

We have seen how the camera visualizes new identities and clothing styles as well as portrays the old ones. Karlekar states that the album photographs too served as an object of fantasy but more importantly they visualize new identities created by colonialism.<sup>54</sup> She says that the adoption of dress codes was necessary important markers into a new way of life. As we shall see the acquired status often led to many dissonances with the old order or ruptures between tradition and modernity. The photograph became important in legitimation and in the process of acceptance.

As we have seen it is important to observe how people appear in front of camera to represent themselves. Equally we need to note how in this process the photographs

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<sup>51</sup>Joan Williams, 'The Fascination of the Eastern Sari: Simplicity and Symmetry of line of Classic Styles of Ancient Greece', *The Times of India*, September 12, 1932.

<sup>52</sup>Sailaja N. Joshi, 'Fashioning the Folds: The Creation and Representation of the Sari by Colonial European and Indian Woman', Simmons College, GCS 410, May 2012.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p.13.

<sup>54</sup>Karlekar, *Re-Visioning the Past*, p.17.

become an item of self-consumption and self-fashioning. It does not necessarily mean that the clothing of the wearer has changed too. Camera was used to fashion oneself in various forms of exotic dressing too. To visualize different identities, the working class as well the political leaders dressed themselves up. Prasad has offered us some examples which show how leaders such as Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna dressed and presented themselves to the masses. In this context, Gandhi's sartorial experiments and Khadi has become the most popular focus in scholarly works. What remains important here is the difficulty faced by many national leaders concerning the choice of attire for the public role that they chose for themselves. Prasad asserts that a new sartorial mode of expression arises which continued to play a significant role in Indian social life and politics until the day of independence. However, there were others like B. R. Ambedkar who chose to project an image of himself which was contrary to that of the other political leaders of the time.

The camera, thus, performed two functions. It recorded what existed, and it projected an ideal. The camera probably did not directly change the way people transformed their clothing styles. Perhaps, when the images circulated and were seen by others then it created a field of familiarization.

There were other technologies which impacted the sartorial lives of Indians much during the beginning of the century. This leads us to the second section which looks at the sewing machine as an agent of transformation in dress and identity.

### **Sewing with the Machine**

The section will focus on the significance of the sewing machine in sartorial transformation during the early-twentieth century. Along with this, I trace the significance of sewing machine in carving out a new identity for the Indian women and the darzis. This section will argue further, that the introduction of the sewing machine in the Indian homes, at local darzi shops facilitated mass production and impacted clothing styles much more than what the camera did. Unlike the camera the sewing machine

entered the lives of larger social groups and classes such as the middle class female users as well as the tailor ‘master’ as we popularly address them today.

The use of the machine came to signal modernity in the lives of Indian woman. It also helped in reshaping what a modern woman should be and what a modern nation should be. In this process, sewing was appropriated in different frameworks. The nationalist defined the act of sewing and knowledge as crucial for the nation’s progress. To some it was an issue of traditional versus modern technology. The national newspaper and women specific journals popularized the use of sewing machine and advised women to have a skill of stitching. Some discussions focused on the changes in fashion brought by the sewing machine and some echoed the anxieties of the nationalist and the orthodox reformers. What happened to the life of the male darji? What is the reason for the domination of the male darzi’s to the occupation of stitching clothes even till today’s era? Does the sewing machine and sewing operate in a similar manner in both the cases?

Let us begin our discussion by tracing the origin of sewing in India. The art of stitching clothes has been traced back to the eleventh century. Probably, it was done by hand with the use of needle, pin and thread. Some Indian women wore stitched skirts (*ghagharas*), bodices (*cholis*) and head clothes (*odnis*) and even Indian men wore stitched tunics and trousers particularly in parts of northern and western India many centuries before the Muslim conquest.<sup>55</sup> Example of women wearing *cholis* (a short, fitted bodice) can be found in the Ajunta cave paintings, dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. And there is significant evidence, from the diary of Emperor Babur, to support the view that the *jama* (tunic) was worn by men before his invasion of India in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>56</sup> By the nineteenth century a long sleeved outer robe (*jama, angarakha*) or tunic (*kurta*) wore with trousers (*pyjamas*) had become an acceptable outfit for an Indian educated man in public. Muslim women generally wore a veil (*dupatta*), a long tunic (*kamiz*) with trousers (*salwars*) or flared skirts (*ghaghras*). Tarlo points out that following the Muslim conquest of Northern India, many Hindu women gradually adopted such dress, eventually making it in the regional style for parts of Northern India.

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<sup>55</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p.28.

<sup>56</sup> Accessed on 2 May 2016 from <http://www.aharwood.ca/personae/costuming.htm>

By the late-nineteenth century the sewing machines were introduced in India. The reception of the modern technology was not easy. It was a very long and complicated process in the Indian subcontinent. Before 1914 (or even 1939) many of modern machine goods were not manufactured in India, but were assembled and reconditioned in local shops, workshops and factories.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, unlike European countries where the sewing machine easily gained market amidst the European women and tailors, it was a slow process in the Indian market. In the West, sewing machines were sold for women's use especially at home. However, the popularity of the machine among the male tailors and female users for hobby and occupation grew over a period of time. Earlier it was considered that the sewing machine had little use in India owing to the "stich-less" nature of clothing. So, in the Indian market, the Singer sewing machine had to employ strategies different from that deployed in the west. In the early-nineteenth century they targeted the Indian tailors, the community and caste leaders (as master tailors themselves) who made the critical decisions about purchasing or hiring sewing machines.<sup>58</sup> By 1905, owing to the strategy of a Parsi employee ( Nasavarji Vervanji Patell), there were a hundred branches across India, Ceylon and Burma.<sup>59</sup> Certainly, there was a growing demand for the product and potential consumers too. Earlier women were not central to the advertising strategy of the sewing machine companies. However, by the early-twentieth century there were a number of women in India including in the Parsi community, who were using sewing machines or learning to sew on such machines.

Gradually over the decades, the sewing machine became popular among the tailors and the middle class Indian women. One can argue that the changes brought by the invention of sewing machine in changing the clothing styles was a significant but slow process. The needlework in domestic establishments in India is performed by the tailor or darji. These were the men who were employed by the ladies and undertook the task of sewing, hemming, stitching and copying departments. With the coming of the sewing machine it was easier to do the same work in less time. It could be used to save labor and time as

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<sup>57</sup>David Arnold, 'Global Goods and Local Usages: the Small world of the Indian Sewing Machine, 1975-1952', *Journal of Global History*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011, pp. 407-429.

<sup>58</sup>Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p.72.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

very rightly pointed out by the *Times of India* author in much later year 1926.<sup>60</sup> In order to encourage women to adopt the sewing machine she pointed that the sewing machine enabled quick hemming, seaming, tucking and gathering work. This was perhaps the most significant change in the way sewing was done. For both, the tailor and the Indian women, it signaled less time. Thus, it facilitated mass production of clothing. For Nira Wickramasinghe, this feature along with others epitomized modernity.<sup>61</sup> She has argued that the sewing machine was easier to work with, faster than the humans and an instrument of standard, and so it was as much a part of modernity as photography or print.<sup>62</sup> In the field of clothing it acted as a boon as saris and dresses could be made as each person had a block pattern which the tailor referred to.

The tailor was notified under “caste and tribes” in the colonial ethnography. The caste name Darzi was listed under the classification of ‘artisan’ among other castes such as Lohars, Sonars, Malis and Hajjamas.<sup>63</sup> According to Arnold, this is one of the ways in which technological pessimism can be ascertained, as the artisan’s manner of work was transformed by the coming of the machine.<sup>64</sup> In the colonial iconography of the Indian castes and tribes the tailor is a familiar figure who is often seen as sitting cross legged on a mat or a veranda. He has few props which are needle, thread and scissors. In the popular sayings and proverbs he is described as:

Tailors, goldsmiths, and weavers are too sharp for the angel of death: God only knows where to have them.<sup>65</sup> The tailor's "this evening" and the shoe-maker's next morning “never come. A tailor's finishing, a goldsmith's polishing take many days. However, sharp his sight a Darzi is blind. (He sees nothing but his work.) A Darzi's son is a Darzi and must sew as long as he lives. A Darzi steals your: cloth and makes you pay for sewing it. When four tailors meet they talk about want of work. When a tailor is out of work he sews up the mouth of his son. Sai, Merai, and Darzi, these be three; "with our yards, scissors and thread," say they," we be six." A tailor's needle, now in embroidery

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<sup>60</sup>‘The Sewing Machine: One Little Known Uses’, *Times of India*, November, 1926, p.21.

<sup>61</sup>Nira WickramaSinghe, *Dressing the Colonized Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>63</sup>Imperial Gazetteer of India, volume viii, 1901, <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100009/212139/002>, p.309, Accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

<sup>64</sup>Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup>People of India: Appendix I Caste in Proverbs and Popular Sayings, <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.145655/219225/010>



and now in canvas. What is it to a tailor whether he march or halt? He has only needle and thread to carry.) A snake in a tailor's house; who wants to kill it?

In the year 1901 the People of India series described the traditional caste of the darzi. He was branded as a thief, cunning and unreliable. We know of the three props that he owned. In the proverb he is also praised for sticking to his work. The proverb seems to suggest that there was sewing work was not highly valued and popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was mostly deemed to be a copyist and not an innovator. There were instances to prove that the Darji was often bewildered by the frequent changes in the European dress. But still using his own imagination he copied the style from the old garments given to him.

Gradually, by the early twentieth century the Indian darji came to be associated with the sewing machine. With the new changes in dress and technology the tailor acquired importance but perhaps only by the beginning of twentieth century. There was a growing influence of western fashion on Indian dress and the darji did not have to wait for the acceptance of western dress to find a new role and new market. The fashion conscious European resident often employed them. The Europeans also employed other personal dress-makers. A taste for items of clothing such as shirts, petticoats, uniforms and tunics spread amongst Indians too. The necessity of uniforms for various professionals such as the men in the army, doctors, servants created a demand for the tailors to make, mend them and their machines. In addition, the popularity of other styles and the ability of the Indian tailors to copy them was important for the new roles that the *darji* came to play.

Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century Miss Emma Roberts advises the outward cadets:

The clothes in which the cadet embarks, if well and fashionably made will be quite sufficient guides to the tailors of India who are very good workmen and expert imitators and young men are strongly recommended to employ a respectable native Maitree tailors to make up their jackets. Instead of going to the European artists who are notoriously exorbitant in their charges and who can only procure the same class of operatives employed by the Maitree Darjee and therefore cannot be any possibility render their manufacture superior, in portion to the excess to their bills.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Miss Emma Roberts, 'Parbury's Oriental Herald and Colonial Intelligencer: The East India Voyager', *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Letters Arts Sciences*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1838, p.192.

The Indian tailors are praised for the workman skill and copying techniques. The European cadets are advised to employ the native tailors to stitch their jackets. It also indicates that the European workers charged more prices than the local tailors. The quote also suggests that well made clothes often serve as a model to be copied, a way in which designs circulated.

Tailored Indian garments became part of professional outfit, especially for those who worked in law courts during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Such outfits were worn with the type of headwear (turban, *phenta*, and cap) considered appropriate to an individual's social and religious standing. Initially when the elite educated Indians were faced with the problem of what to wear instead of merely adopting European clothes, they used western fabrics to tailor Indian garments. For example: the Persian cape was gradually given a more Indian form (*angarakha*) and finally developed into the *sherwani* which had buttons down the front, following the European fashion.<sup>67</sup> In the early stages the wealthy men's robe were made from luxury fabrics like muslin and silk, and they often embroidered. But as the money elite became more Europeanized, they became increasingly like the Englishman's frock coat made from heavy dull material. The ornamentation on the coat was reduced and the sleeves were tightened.

The westernization in Indian clothing was not only visible in uniforms but in everyday clothing too. The Imperial Gazetteer mentions in 1901 that there was a growing European influence which was making itself felt in the cut and texture of the coat that covers the upper part of the body, and the shirt and collar that were to be detected underneath.<sup>68</sup> During this period, the Muslims and Parsis wore trousers in Bombay. Whereas, in Mysore during the same time trousers, short coats etc of the more western type had been common with all Hindus including Brahamans. The Gazetteer mentions the use of petticoat in Gujarat. Muslim women were said to be wearing a colored petticoat and bodice. This seems to be a new style as earlier the sari was worn without any

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<sup>67</sup>Cited in Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 47, originally from A. H. Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, London: Paul, 1975.

<sup>68</sup>Imperial Gazetteer of India, volume viii, 1901, <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100009/212139/002>, p.309, Accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

underclothing. The bodice (choli) was worn earlier as well, but the blouse with various styles of sleeves became common in the early-twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> We have seen in Arnold points that the sewing machine created the basis of readymade dress industry, which brought about changes in dress modes. Arnold describes significant changes in dress which took place due to the utility of the sewing machines.<sup>70</sup> According to him, male laborers began to wear shirts and cotton jackets bought readymade in towns, especially in Punjab. The calf length skirt worn by Rajasthani women gave way to sari and salwar kameez. Experimentation with the blouses, chemises, tailored jackets was more marked among women who came into direct contact with European teachers, doctors and missionaries. The sewing machine played an important part in the diversification of clothing practices and the manufacture of new types of clothes.

We located the role of the male Darji and his sewing machine in sartorial transformation in India during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Gradually the sewing machines entered homes, and sewing became a household preoccupation. As we noted by the early-twentieth century women were targeted by the Singer brand. So, over a period of time, the work space of the sewing machine was not restricted to the male Darzi only but it revolutionized the work and occupational space of women too. Stitching and sewing was associated with women's work even earlier than the twentieth century but with coming of the sewing machine it also became a marker of modernity. Arnold shows how during the early colonial period sewing along with embroidery, dressmaking and millenary was seen as suitable occupation for poor white or mixed race female orphans or among the destitute women taken up by Christian charities.<sup>71</sup> Making and mending family clothes was a part time occupation for many Indian women and was considered a useful and respectable form of women's homework.

Sewing as an occupation or paid labor was perhaps undertaken by only a few women initially at the beginning of the century. However, the sewing machine also became part of the repertoire of Indian women's uplift programmes and social reform from the second

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<sup>69</sup> Newspapers such as *Madras Mail*, *Bombay Chronicle*, and *Indian Ladies Magazine* discuss various types of blouses, dresses and focus on western influence on Indian clothing.

<sup>70</sup> Arnold, *Everyday Technology*, p. 37

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

half of the nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup>In the didactic literature produced by Hindu reform organizations like the Arya Samaj and Sikh Singh Sabha women were urged to take up useful domestic tasks like sewing and to cut costs or augment family incomes by making their own clothes. The sewing machine enabled women to earn money while remaining within the respectability of the home. The acceptability of the modern machine such as sewing machine was a gradual process and partially linked with the reform movements and nationalist activities. In chapter 1 of the thesis, I have looked at the idea of *Swadeshi* and *Khadi*, and how Mahatama Gandhi spelt out the role for Indian women in this framework. Although he was against western machinery in general, the sewing machine was an exception. He himself used it and simultaneously advocated its use too. These created the space for the use of a modern machine for the national good and for the reform of women's condition.

The use of the sewing machine was advocated on a much larger scale by the print media too. From the 1920s onwards the newspapers, tracts and journals debated the use of sewing machine. The target audience of these debates was the Europeans and middle class Indians. We already know that the print media popularized western notions of fashion into the Indian setting. There were regular columns on the art of stitching and sewing. Ruth Wyeth Spears wrote regular columns on Home Sewing in *The Times of India* (New Delhi) from the middle of 1920 to the late 1930s. She wrote several books on home sewing and dress making too.<sup>73</sup>Her works are considered to be the basic guidebooks on stitching and dress making by worldwide users.<sup>74</sup>

We know that with the coming of the sewing machine the popularity of the dress patterns grew as now dresses could be copied by following the instructions. Initially the tailors were bewildered by the western patterns. Gradually, they learned the skills of imitating the designs. The authors of the newspaper and the vernacular texts encouraged women to be their own dressmaker by using a sewing machine. The articles focused on how to cut a

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p.79.

<sup>73</sup>Ruth Wyeth Spears, *Better Dressmaking*, New York: M. Barrows & company, inc, 1943.

<sup>74</sup><http://zilredloh.com/2011/01/12/more-mail-better-dressmaking-by-ruth-wyeth-spears/> Accessed on 15 September 2015.

dress,<sup>75</sup> provided visual illustration of dress patterns and instruction on how to take care of a sewing machine.<sup>76</sup> There were other details discussed. For example: the right cut for the right figure, dressing according to the body type, etc.<sup>77</sup> Chapter I traced how the new aesthetic in clothing had emerged which encouraged Indian men and women to dress according to body type, color and taste. There was a notion of individual taste to be observed in dressing style. Clothes which enhanced body shape were preferred. For example; we have seen that in studio photographs of the late-nineteenth century that the style of draping a sari was modeled on western gowns. It was supposed to be wrapped tighter around the waist. Given these changes, some of these themes on dressing were incorporated within the home sewing columns.

In 1929, Ruth W. Spears commented:

Of course, any mature woman who values her dignity does not wish to dress like a flapper. Yet there are no "old lady" styles any more. The older woman merely adapts fashions to her needs by avoiding extremes, and by being careful to choose lines that conceal any irregularities that passing years have left in her figure.<sup>78</sup>

Dressing according to one's age and figure was one of the themes introduced in this article. The writer assumed that any mature woman who valued her dignity would not wish to dress like a flapper. The important thing emphasized in this article is that by avoiding extremes one can make a dress according to one's own need. By considering the flapper fashion unfit for the old lady and her body type the Spears suggests that themes like dignity are linked to the idea of dressing. The Flapper were a "new breed" of young Western women in the 1920s who wore short skirts, bobbed their hair, listened to jazz, and flaunted their disdain for what was then considered acceptable behavior.

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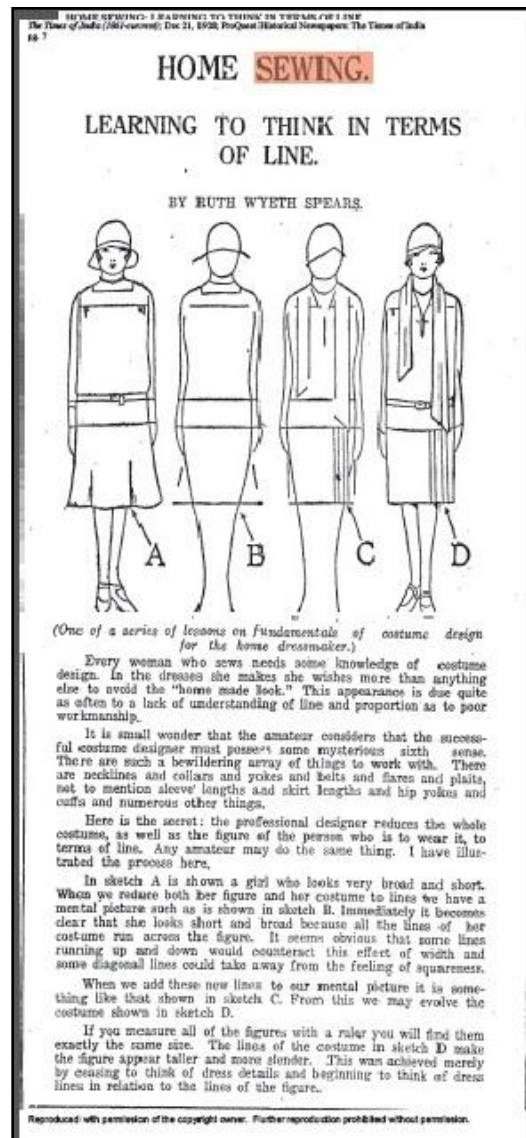
<sup>75</sup>Ruth Wyeth Spears, 'Home Sewing: How to make a smart dress Trimming', *Times of India*, 23 April, 1929, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup>'Care of Sewing Machine: Occasional overhaul needed', *The Times of India*, 20 June, 1925, p.15 and 'Your Sewing Machine: You should Treat it kindly', *The Times of India*, p.15. These articles advised the readers that one should pay constant attention to the sewing machine to keep it in good use. It should be covered when not in use and change of sewing thread is advised.

<sup>77</sup>Ruth Wyeth Spears, 'Home Sewing: How to Make a Smart Dress Trimming', *The Times of India*, 23 April, 1929, p. 13, 'Home Sewing: Your Sewing and Pressing Equipment' *The Times of India*, 12 January, 1932, p.6.

<sup>78</sup>Ruth Wyeth Spears, 'Home Sewing: Planning Frocks for the Mature Woman', *The Times of India*, 29 August, 1929, p. 11.

Flappers were seen as brash and were censured for wearing ‘excessive’ makeup, drinking, treating sex in a casual manner, smoking, driving automobiles, and otherwise flouting social and sexual norms. We do not know if the influence of flapper fashion seeped into the Indian clothing. However, one can draw similarity to the critique of the western educated women and her lifestyle during the early-twentieth century.



**Figure16: How to think in terms of line**

*Source: The Times of India (1928)*

The theme of dressing according to one’s body type included other articles. In one a clothing pattern was suggested so that hips looked slender. The article pointed out that

there were more women with large hips than otherwise and this design could help them look good.<sup>79</sup> The author had received several letters asking how to plan dresses to overcome the appearance of too much width across the hips. There were several requests for instructions on how to alter paper patterns so that they could fit the figure with a hip measurement that was larger in proportion to the bust measurement. The answer to this problem, it was suggested, was to design a costume that could conceal the real figure and think in terms of line (Figure 16).<sup>80</sup> Through the example of various illustrations Spears showed how the professional designer could reduce the whole costume as well as the figure of the person who wore it. The solution was to think in terms of line. According to her, any amateur could do the same thing by following the steps. Spears not only introduced the readers to dresses for different figures, but told them how to cut and sew different dresses. She also gave information about how to use different materials. In an article on fur she pointed out that, there were a few tricks of the furrier's trade that any home sewer could master and this knowledge would be of invaluable service when it came to repair or model furs.<sup>81</sup> According to her, many women who were clever at sewing did not even hesitate to buy small pelts and fashion collars and cuffs for them. The focus on being one's own dressmaker by having the right information of dress sewing and the latest fashion designs perhaps enabled women to make clothing on their own. This is something that they had been doing earlier as well but the paper patterns and the dress designs became models on which they could stylize their dress on their own. The illustrations which appeared in *The Times of India* were mainly for women's clothing in western fashion. There were general articles which discussed the Indian clothing; but the home sewing columns did not discuss Indian clothing at all. These were not only making a plea for the use of sewing machine but were training the readers on the aesthetics of line. (Figure 16)

We don't have any paper patterns on Indian clothing styles from the early twentieth century. However, we do have sewing books issued by various sewing institutions in the

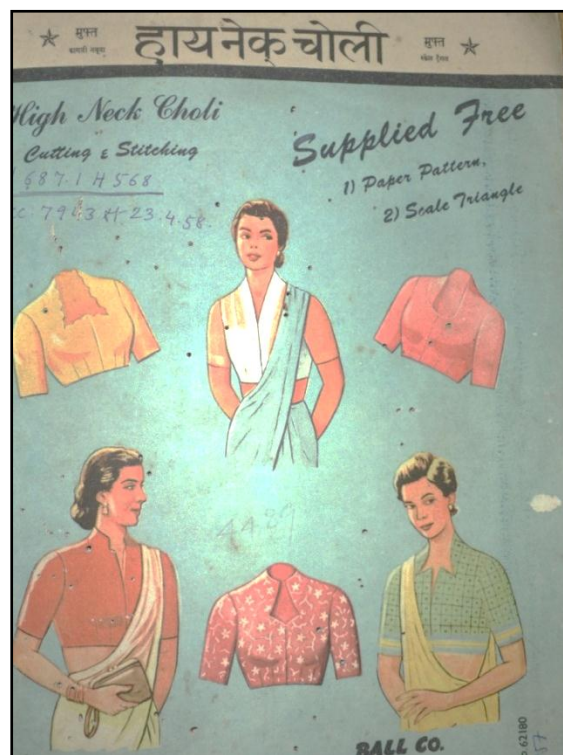
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<sup>79</sup>Ruth Wyeth Spears, 'Home Sewing: How to Alter a Paper Pattern to Fit the Figure', *The Times of India*, 3 April 1929, p.14.

<sup>80</sup>Ruth W. Spears, 'Home Sewing: Learning to Think in Terms of Lines', *The Times of India*, 21 December 1928, p.13.

<sup>81</sup>Ruth W. Spears, 'Home Sewing: Important points about working with fur,' *The Times of India*, 17 December 1929, p.18.

1950s. Looking at the way illustrations aimed at making of dress we can have an idea of the importance of sewing patterns enabled by the sewing machines. These design books issued by tailoring institutes illustrate how to stitch different types of blouses, three piece suit, *achkan* cap and *pyjama*, *kurtas* and *salwar kameez*. For example: Figure 17 shows the cover page of the book on sewing and cutting called ‘*Hai nek choli*’ which was published in 1957 Bombay and was issued by Commercial Tailoring college. This illustration shows three women wearing different designs blouses and saris. The women in the illustration also sport different hairstyles. The book carried patterns of blouses, steps of how to cut cloth and how to take measurements (Figure 18). Similarly, other sewing books titled as *Modern Ladies Fashion* book and *Up-to-date Fashion* from the same time period illustrates both men and women’s clothing. They popularize Indian form of clothing as well as western male and female dressing. Some of the styles illustrated were English three piece and two piece suits, dinner suits, closed necked coats, Nehru coat and achkan and Gandhi cap, long over coats for females, salwar kameez and blouses.



**Figure17: Sewing book ‘*Hai nek choli*’**

**Source: Commercial Tailoring College  
(Bombay. 1957)**



These clothing manuals suggest the importance of the paper patterns which could be copied and followed by the home users. The clothing manuals also suggest the different types of clothing which were introduced in India such as two-piece suits. We know from other sources that two-piece suits were worn by the elite Indians in various professions since the late nineteenth century itself. We cannot claim these changes were an influence of the sewing machine but we can say that the making of these types of clothing were probably easier with the sewing machine. As we already know that the readymade industry of clothing was a result of the sewing machine. Although the increasing popularity of readymade clothing industry led to a decline of the making of dress t home or by the tailor nonetheless it still seems to be one of the popular options to dress one self.

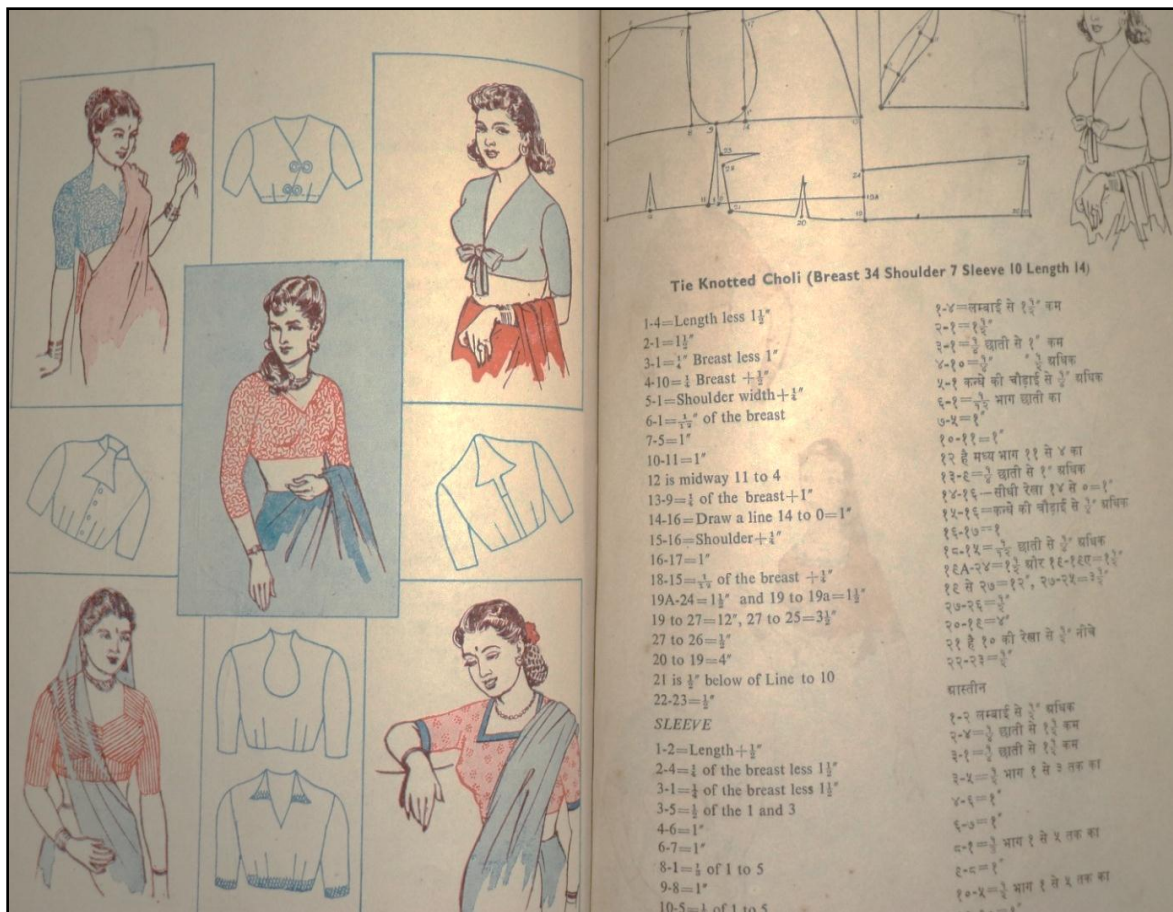


Figure 18: Tie knotted Choli

Source: Diploma of the Shakuntala Kala Niketan School of Tailoring, (Delhi, 1961)

Clothing styles and dressing were influenced by the consumption and market in the early twentieth century. Various male and female clothing advertisements illustrated tailored clothes, on the spot fitting at the shops. These were the claims made to attract the consumers. The fact that one could save time and get their clothes fitted at the shops instantly was one aspect of the readymade clothing. Although the advertisement sported by various clothing brands in the newspapers indicate the potential consumers for readymade clothes. Still one cannot assume that they did away with the sewing by hand and machine. Perhaps, they were still the popular means of making clothes especially by women at home.

In India by the late 1920s we know of the focus on the skill of sewing by the women. The growing demand of sewing machine by the first decade of twentieth century and women taking up sewing as occupation and hobby marks a visible change from the earlier period. It was facilitated by several initiatives. Sewing was introduced in the school curriculum as well. 'Silai' sewing was one skill women were encouraged to master.<sup>82</sup> Examinations were held by various sewing schools and institutions and the results were declared in the newspapers. For instance, the woman branch of the Social Service League, Bombay called Mahila Mandal conducted classes of sewing, cutting and held examinations.<sup>83</sup> The results were declared and printed in newspapers as well. The list of the successful woman candidates were: Sushila Bai Kudalkar, Miss Kumud Bai Killawalla, Suman Bai Killawalla, Miss Lilabai Pradhan, Mrs. Manakbai Pradhan. In the 1930s other initiatives came from reformist writings too who focused on knowledge of sewing and advocated the need of self stitching work to be undertaken by the Indian women themselves.

Jyotirmay Thakur presents knowledge of sewing as one of the virtues of ideal women.

She comments:

*Aaj kal ki striyan jo padhi likhi tatha sikshit hain ve apne hanth se hi machine par apne apne bachho tatha ghar ke anya logo ke bhadiya se bhadiya kapde si lia karti hain. Hoshiyar striyan toh apne kapde itne ache se si leti hain ki who unke badan par fit baithta hain... Jo striyan is योग्या hain ki ve machine le sake unhe chahiye ki ve hanth se chalne wali kapda sine ki machine le kar silai kia kare. Ek bar machine le lene se zindagi bhar ke lie unhe kapda sine ka aram ho jayega. Ek machine ke ghar mein hone se*

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<sup>82</sup>Jyotirmay Thakur, *Navyuvatiyon ko Kya Janna Chahiye*, Prayag :Sahitya Mandir,1934.

<sup>83</sup>'Mahila Mandal Sewing and Cutting Classes', *The Times of India*, October 1, 1927 p.15

*ghar ki sabhi striyan achi silai kar sakti hain aur apni ladkiyon ko bhi sikha sakti hain...*<sup>84</sup>

The article advises women to stitch clothes on their own. The independence of being able to sew on their own brands the women as intelligent as they make dresses which will fit them well. Art of sewing by machine marks them as educated. It is presented that buying one machine will enable to sew clothing with no difficulty and could be used to teach younger girls. Similar arguments are made which focus on making dress oneself in order to have a better fit. However, here the branding of the tailor is worth noting.

*Iske alwa striyon ko silai sikhna isliye avashyak hain ki ve kam se kam apne kapde oh avashya hi si lia kare. Kyonki darzi unke kapde si nahi sakte. Striyan na toh darji ko achhi tarah se apne kapde ka nap de sakti hain aur na ve darjio se apna sharir napwa sakti hain. Isi karan darjiyon dwara sile hue striyon ke kapde unke sharir par fir nahi hote. Khain se dheele ho jate hain aur kahin se tang . striyon ke kuch kapde toh aise hote hain jo darjiyon se silane layak nahi hote jaise neech pahne ki body, choli, choti kurti ityadi.*<sup>85</sup>

According to the author, women should learn sewing as the tailors could not stitch their clothes. She said that it was difficult for the darji and the women to give the measurement of their body. As a result, it was said that the clothes stitched by the tailors were loose or tight. The text also introduces the idea of undergarment for example; underclothing. ‘*choti kurti, neech pehenne ki body*’. More than the question of female and male sexuality which has been underlined in the text what is important for us is that there was a stress on being one’s own dress maker by the 1930s and this had certainly become easier with coming of the sewing machines. Most importantly, the sewing machine became the harbinger of modernity into the lives of Indian middle class women. Let us begin by looking at Figure 19:

The calendar poster from post 1947 (figure 19) illustrates a domestic scene with sewing machine, record, clock and western clothing sewn for children. It reveals the consumer ideology which was marked by a desire to consume goods which signified modernity and carved out new identity and life style. This image provides an entry point into the lives of an Indian home and its interaction with modern technologies. It indicates that these

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p.51.

<sup>85</sup>Thakur, *Navyuvvatiyon ko Kya Janna Chahiye*, p. 50.

modern technologies created a market for alternative taste, for example in clothing. Most significantly, it is about a nuclear family and how a sewing machine becomes a marker of modernity. The figure of the woman is interesting as she imbibes both traditional as well as modern. She wears a frock with shoes and clothes her children in western night gowns and dress. The image also suggests the western influence in the Indian clothing and home in the 1950s. The seeming marks of modernity are inscribed in the image. The image symbolizes the sewing machine being marker of westernization and modernity which was a gradual development which had started to take place since the 1920's in India. By extension, as in many other parts of the world, sewing and the use of sewing machine came to be seen as a desirable part of modern women's upbringing and domestic accomplishments especially in societies where there were strong reservations against women working or trading outside the home.<sup>86</sup>

Cornelia Sorabji's narration of use of a sewing machine by a *zenana* woman is an example of how it became an emblem of modernity during the colonial India.<sup>87</sup> In her memoir depicting the lives of the purdanashin women and the life of the zenana, Sorabji narrates a story of Giribala. She was a young widow whom Sorabji visited as a part of the Court of Wards business in Bengal. As she tells it, 'Giribala had a great and secret surprise which had sprung upon me. She had acquired a Singer's sewing machine and had made loose covers for her chair because she had found my room in summer chintzes.' One of the first mass marketed 'consumer durables', the sewing machine had also been touted from the start as an agent of civilization and a sign of modern. According to Antoinette M. Burton, Giribala's story demonstrates not how modernity had made its way into the zenana but how constitutive the emblems of modernity were for the very trope of zenana itself.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.79.

<sup>87</sup> Antoinette M. Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women, Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.



**Figure 19: Post 1947 calendar poster**

**Source: *Tasveer Ghar Archive***

We see how there was an emphasis on the consumption of a modern technology by a women in zenana. Use of a Singer Sewing machine to stitch covers for Sorabji is seen as entry of modernity into the inner world of zenana. Here the use of a modern technology is celebrated and becomes a marker of progress as opposed to the life of the purdanashin. However, we can't assume based on this example that sewing machine offered a platform to many women who could work and earn by remaining with in the inner quarters of home. Although, few women did take up sewing as a means for earning money it's unknown that how many women who took up stitching for earning money. Nonetheless, it was a way in which modernity could be accommodated with traditional roles of an Indian middle class woman. On one hand, we see that the act of using a sewing machine

was an emancipator to a woman and many women like her. On the other, the act of sewing by hand did not become insignificant for some.

Zarina Bhatti shows that the women of the zenana in her household knew and practiced stitching with hand even during 1930. She comments, “although confined to the home, women often were very busy with stitching and embroidery- outlets for their creativity. They used their imagination and their hands and made beautiful covers for their imagination and their hands, and made beautiful covers for khosdaans and pandaans. These artistic covers formed part of a girls wedding trousseau...”<sup>88</sup> Bhatti notes further that they wore flowing *ghararas* (long divided gathered skirts) which were stitched by hand at home. According to her, these olderwomen taught the younger ones how to sew and embroider and make own clothes along with skill of cooking and other domestic skill.<sup>89</sup> This example suggests one of the possible scenarios where the older traditions continued even after coming of the newer technologies. This also suggests the lack of knowledge of new inventions in dress and dress making techniques which were probably used by number of other women.

We see that coming of the sewing machine did influence clothing of the Indians over a long period and also affected the occupational classes/castes associated with it. The Indian women enjoyed the benefits of the sewing machine in various forms, as an agent of recreation, modernity and occupation. What is interesting in the way that the sewing machine made these aesthetic in clothing popular into the public culture. How one can dress and enhance one’s figure is becoming a public language through a discussion on the sewing machine.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter traced the relationship between technologies and everyday dress during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. How the concept of everyday clothing began to be differentiated between what needed to be worn at public and private space? It is interesting to note the role played by the print media to bring these new aesthetic of

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<sup>88</sup>Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi, *A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women*, New Delhi: Sage Publication , 2005, p. 70.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., Zarina Bhatti, ‘ A Daughter of Awadh’, p.71.

dressing into the public discussion. India had a culture of different clothes meant for private and public dressing prior to the coming of the British too. However, the options were few and especially an insignificant issue in realm of women's dress. But twentieth century transformed this especially as new modern machines came and shaped ways in which people presented them. These influenced ways in which people saw themselves or imagined the body in new ways. The act of wearing a dress and making a dress becomes important in this visualization and presentation.

Most importantly, through these machines the receiver were being trained in new emerging codes of dress and simultaneously it changed the taste in dressing too. We saw how the camera and the sewing machine helped in shaping new dress codes and evolution of every day clothing in the twentieth century India. Different codes of dressing according to age, figure, colour emerged in this period and the machine adapts to such changes. Moreover, new spaces and occasions such as going to a market, theatre, college, office, etc brought the question of clothing to the fore. As it became how people presented themselves to self and to the others. The issue of how one appeared was important more than ever during the twentieth century. We have seen in earlier chapters that the lifestyle of the Indian people marked their social status during this period. All these developments helped to transform everyday clothing of the Indian population from the later nineteenth century to the twentieth century .

## Chapter 5

### Styling the Uniform: Sport, Play and Vyayaam

The coming of sport costume sought to offer uniformity and equality to everyday clothing. Many studies on dress have focused on the changes brought by sport in the realm of everyday clothing. However, these studies mainly locate the dress reform brought by sport in the western countries from the late-nineteenth century onwards. Elizabeth Wilson shows that throughout the 1920s when education became a focus of the youth and adults alike it led to increased participation in sports such as swimming, tennis, golf and horse riding that became an important part of college sports programmes.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, there were dramatic changes in the clothing worn during participation in such sports. Similarly, Gilles Lipovetsky argues that activities such as golf, tennis, swimming, cycling, hunting, winter sports and automobile driving helped in modifying the women's clothing slowly at first, then much more quickly after the First World War.<sup>2</sup> To keep up with the new needs of women who were engaged in these activities, it was important to modify their dress for greater mobility, comfort and freedom. Along with the changes in the clothing of women, sport also made crucial contribution to the changing lines of women's clothing in general, by creating a new aesthetic ideal of femininity.<sup>3</sup> Anne Hollander argues that due to the effects of sport the image of slim and modern woman emerged.<sup>4</sup> She notes that, "feminine emancipation from many physical and moral restraints, the increasing popularity of sports for women, together with new possibilities of gaining employment and political power, all eventually contributed to this new physical ideal..."<sup>5</sup> This led to simple clothing for women.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, p.160.

<sup>2</sup>The cardigan sweater came in with golf; around 1890, the bicycle allowed for bouffant pants drawn below the knee and in 1934, summer shorts; at the turn of the century, swimming gave impetus to the innovation of sleeveless bathing suits with a rounded décolleté, followed in the 1920's by one piece suits left backs completely exposed. Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>4</sup>Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, According to the author, the strong appeal of female slimness in twentieth century was primarily the result of social and economic changes rather than development of aesthetic style.p.152.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



James Laver, one of the most prominent writers on dress studies, shows that sport clothing have a tendency to develop a type of their own. He argues that it was particularly noticeable in the case of tennis.<sup>7</sup> He describes how in the western countries, such as United States and England most tennis players had simply worn the summer clothes of the particular period, even if the skirts were long and hampering to the movements. But, a change was noticed in the 1920s. The tennis costume became shorter following the fashion of short skirts worn as everyday clothing.<sup>8</sup> However, by the end of this decade when the fashion of long skirts came, the tennis dresses remained short as it was considered absurd to reintroduce long skirts in what had now become a strenuous game.

In the context of male clothing, Laver says that men's clothes almost always begin by being sport clothes. He says further, once they are adopted for ordinary wear, they begin to formalize themselves to become smarter and better fitting- that is tighter and less comfortable. In the western countries by the 1840s what had originally been designed as a hunting costume had become 'evening dress' impossible for any active pursuit. According to Laver, it was therefore necessary to invent the 'lounge suit', and this in turn was formalized into what was known as city wear.<sup>9</sup>

Most of these historians argue that there were more dramatic changes brought by sport in male clothing as compared to women's clothing in the west during the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth century. Other historian on dress studies, Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast show that the men's clothes were more adaptable to sport.<sup>10</sup> Typical tennis attire for a man included knickerbockers, loose fitting short pants gathered at the knee, or cream or white flannel trousers with long sleeved flannel shirts, short silk ties,

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<sup>6</sup>Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion*, p.62. Lipovetsky discusses the shift to image of slim, modern women. In her work sports has been given credit for making crucial contribution to the changing lines of women's clothing by creating a new aesthetic ideal of femininity,

<sup>7</sup>James Laver, *A Concise History of Costume*, London: Thames and Hudson 1969.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.,p. 242.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>10</sup>Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast, *Fashion, Costume, and Culture: Clothing, Headwear, Body Decorations and Footwear through the Ages*, Volume 4, Modern World Part I: 1900-1945, Thomsan and Gale, 2004.

knitted hose and kerchiefs or sashes around the waist. A low-laced early version of the tennis shoe was coming into fashion. Paintings from the late-nineteenth century depicted British men playing in shirtsleeves, a shirt without a coat or with trouser hems turned up above the ankles, a sign that standards of etiquette were relaxing to allow for ease of movement.

These studies reveal the history of clothing mainly for sport in the European countries. The available studies on dress familiarises us with the themes generated for a discussion of the ideal costume for any sport and exercise. These studies show that the debate on sports clothing for women is interlinked with the questions of comfort, femininity and simplification of clothing in the west during the late –nineteenth to the twentieth century. However, there is a dearth of work which have studied sport in the Indian subcontinent especially on female sport. The works which are available mainly study history of cricket for Indian men. Women sports have been a neglected area in the scholarly works. There is limited discussion on sport clothing as well. So, this chapter seeks to fill this gap.

This chapter focuses on the role of sports in the dress reform which took place in India during the twentieth century in North India. It stresses on the changes which took place in Indian women's clothing from various classes. The public debates around sports, *vyayaam*, (exercise) generated the questions of health, comfort, freedom, needs of a modern woman, movement and these were combined with Indian tradition and morality. Moreover, the experience of sport, games and costume need not generate similar themes in the Indian context as the Indian women explored these much later than their western counterpart. The popularity of sport had grown in a few regions of India amongst some castes and classes. However, it was restricted to men alone. Women from a few royal families and westernised families began engaging in sports of various kinds by the early twentieth century. It was not that the Indians did not have a sport culture of their own. However, sports such as tennis, golf and cricket became more popular in India, due to the limited popularity of sport and exercise among women in colonial India, the experience of women from various classes in India was different too. However, some developments such as education, new employment and political power were crucial in stressing the importance of good health and sports in the Indian context. By the late 1920s the question

of sport and clothing began to be debated in the journals and newspapers which were circulated in the North India and other regions of India.

We have seen in earlier chapters that the western fashion and clothing styles adopted by the British influenced Indian dressing to a great extent during much of the early-twentieth century. The method of adoption of elements of western and Indian dressing was used to form new clothing styles. However, in the realm of sport clothing, the process of emulation was a much slower process in India during the first half of the twentieth century. More than adoption of western sports clothing, the question of sport and exercise costume itself seem an unfamiliar territory to be explored if located within the social condition of women in North India. For example, the prevalence of *purdah* restricted the entry of elite and middle class Indian women in public spaces until the late-nineteenth century. So, the question of sport and exercise seemed futile for them. However, the importance of health combined with exercise became one of the reasons to advocate removal of *purdah* by the 1920s. More than the question of sports and exercise, it was the question of good health.<sup>11</sup> The nationalist ideology appropriated the idea of a masculine body and healthy body for '*swaraj*' and these questions were debated during the 1920s among the nationalists and reformers, especially in Bengal.

By the 1920s, with the establishment of several women organisations in various parts of India, sports and physical education became a part of the women's movement.<sup>12</sup> Women participation grew in sports during the first half and accelerated by the 1930s with the physical education becoming compulsory in most of the schools and colleges. We find instances of women sports players and teams during the 1930s. In the early 1930s we see a focus on indigenous games and exercise for women in the journals and newspapers. In North India, women's journals had become an important mouthpiece of the elite Indian men and women. In the process of encouraging Indian women (various classes) to engage in sports and exercises, these platforms introduced the idea of clothing to be worn for these particular occasions. The discussion of sport clothing seems limited in the Hindi

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<sup>11</sup>'No Support to Divorce Bills, Bihar Women's Decision', *The Times of India*, 15 November 1938, p. 7.

Bihar constituent conference of AIWC in 1938 under Mrs. Anusuya Bai Kale condemned the *purdah* system as restraining women from attaining good health, education and culture and demanded its abolition.

<sup>12</sup>Partha Chatterjee, 'Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India.' *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4 Nov, 1989, pp. 622 - 633.

journals which were published and circulated in North India but there was focus on various sports and exercises. Most importantly, there were illustrations which were used to explain how to perform various exercises. These representations inform us of various clothing options which was suggested to the women readers in North India during the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, English newspapers and journals introduced the notion of western sports clothing to the Indian elite and middle class as well as the European readers in India. By the 1930s, the English print media began introducing the notion of Indian costume for women worn during sports too. Sometimes, the alternate models were western clothes and sometimes the Indian dress was modified for sports. However, as already pointed out the popularity of sports among women was not much. The narratives of the women written by themselves offer some instances of their experience of sport.

This chapter focuses on the moment of change which took place from the 1920-1940s when the sport and physical education became an important aspect of women's emancipation. The main objective is to study the costume suggested or imagined for the women players who took up English sports and played native games. What were the concerns in defining the sports clothing for Indian women who took up these sports? How was sport implicated in the fashioning of the new women and how was the appropriate dress defined accordingly to meet the needs as well as the Indian identity?

### **Sports and Development**

This section looks at indigenous sports and the origin of English sports in India. It traces how and why popularity of the English sports grew among Indians? Did costume worn during the games by Indians such as cricket, football and tennis bring any changes in the way Indian men and women dressed? Did indigenous Indian sports incorporate the concept of costume? We have seen that cloth has been a marker of distinction of various categories such as caste and class in the twentieth century in India. Did sports clothing create any space where dressing of the Indian men and women ceased to be marker of

these categories? What were the developments which accelerated popularity of sports in India? Did gender play any role in the politics of sports and sports clothing?

India had its own culture of sports before the British brought the English sports in India as early as 1721.<sup>13</sup> In India sports like wrestling, hunting, shooting and archery were famous and some of these were adopted by the British too. Sports like polo go back to several centuries during the Mughal period when they were known as *chaugan*.<sup>14</sup>

With the coming of British, various English sports became popular in India especially cricket. The first British sports club was formed for playing cricket in Calcutta around 1780. Soon other clubs were formed in Calcutta and elsewhere and games such as badminton, rugby, billiards were played. One of the most popular place Bombay gymkhanas brought together all kinds of sports under one roof in 1875 and simultaneously membership grew too. Initially, membership was restricted to the whites only. Many writers on sports such as Ramchandra Guha and Majumdar opine that the real transformation came after 1857 in the attitude of Indians towards physical culture. In Calcutta, Bengali middle class men found it imperative to devise an effective strategy to counter the colonial charge of inferiority. Mrinalini Sinha argues that second half of the nineteenth century in Bengal was marked by an attempt to revive the culture of akharas and gymnasium in order to cultivate and instill a sense of pride in the physical prowess of the Bengalis. In the 1880's, when nationalist resistance in Bengal was gathering momentum, the sporting field contributed in a large measure to challenging British supremacy. That's why the gymnastics class was made compulsory for all students of the college in 1891.

However, with formation of mixed clubs like Calcutta club (1907) and Willingdon Club (1918) mixed clubs it underwent change as the 'white' only policy was seen as an embarrassment by the British officials.<sup>15</sup> The formation of Indian clubs meant that sooner or later there would be encounters on the playing field between the 'natives' and the

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<sup>13</sup>Ronojoy Sen, *Nation at Play*, London: Penguin Books, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

British.<sup>16</sup> Matches of cricket were played and clubs were formed firstly by the Parsees (in 1848) and later by the Hindus (in 1861) and the Muslims (in 1883). Indians other than Parsees started playing the game for reasons more complex than simply trying to emulate the British or achieve social mobility within the colonial framework.<sup>17</sup> Boria Majumdar points out that while in Bengal games such as cricket and football were looked down upon as exclusive European preserves, indigenous sports such as wrestling were confined to lower classes. The educated middle class remained aloof from all kinds of sporting activities.<sup>18</sup> The focus on imparting physical education to women was a later development for women than their male counterparts. It took place by the first half of twentieth century in India.

What was the initial experience of the Indians men who took up British sports? What we know that by the late nineteenth century most of the games were popular in some cities of India. Cricket was the first game to attain popularity in Bombay. Other games such as football, tennis, polo etc acquired popularity too among selected sections of the Indian society. Initially, the British did not aim to popularize their games among the native Indians. Guha points out that during the late nineteenth century the British thought little of the attempts by their subjects to take up their national game.<sup>19</sup> However, due to various concerns such as imitating the British, nationalism and the community feeling of possession some sections in India did take up sports. All these reasons operated at different levels for various groups. For example; the reason behind the Parsee's early patronage was the desire of the newly emerging Parsee bourgeoisie to strengthen its ties with the colonial state.<sup>20</sup>

Sports played by the Indians men were mocked by the British. In this criticism dress of the Indians worn for the play and the style of the game became the prime reason. According to Guha, the British sneered at their Indian clothes and their technique. He

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>17</sup>Boria Majumdar, 'Politics of Leisure in Colonial India: 'Lagan': Invocation of a Lost History', *Economic Political Weekly*, Volume 36, No. 35, September 1-7, 2001, pp.3399-3404.

<sup>18</sup>ibid., p. 79.

<sup>19</sup>Ramchandra Guha, 'Cricket and Politics in India', *Past and Present*, No. 161, November 1998, pp.155-190.

<sup>20</sup>Majumdar, 'Politics of Leisure in Colonial India', p. 3400.

describes further, that a Bombay journalists made critical remarks about the Indians who were playing cricket. The journalist said in the 1870's that, 'some Hindu players interfered (when batting) their kilted garments with running and they threw the ball when fielding in the same fashion as boarding school girls.' Guha opines that slowly the Indians became proficient as they decided to discard the cumbersome dhoti for the cricketer's flannel trousers.<sup>21</sup> Figure 20 shows a group of Hindu



**Figure 20: 'Hindu Cricket players', in costume with cricket bats outside American Mission High School.**

**Source: Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian subcontinent, 1900 by Nursoo Dewjee Poopal.**

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<sup>21</sup>Guha, 'Cricket and Politics', p. 160.

men cricketers in the costume.<sup>22</sup> This image is dated around the beginning of early twentieth century. We see that the players wear *dhoti* as well as trousers. The debate around *dhoti* and game of cricket led to a famous controversy termed as ‘the dhoti war’ in the 1930s. The image belongs to the earlier period but it suggests that *dhoti* was worn as a sport dressing.

The Bombay journalist’s statement seems to share the sentiments of other British officials who equally criticized the new Indian players. The dress of the player was attacked at in more than one incident. Nevertheless, the *dhoti* was considered to hinder quick movement and running. In this case, the trousers were presented as a better option to play which the Indians adopted in this case. Available photographs from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century show that trousers were one of the popular modes of dressing which was adopted by the Indian sports players in the infantry, the local clubs and the royals. However, it was not adopted by everyone. There were some players who continued to play the game in the Indian dress *dhoti* and kurta till the 1930’s. As we know it was one of the popular modes of clothing in the early twentieth century in most of the regions of India.

We know of number of conflicts which took place during the 1930’s on the clothing issue. Boria Majumdar notes that number of Indians played cricket wearing dhoti and it led to clashes between them and the British.<sup>23</sup> According to her, on 3 January 1931 a match played between Mohan Bagan Club and the Calcutta Cricket Club was abandoned because the Indians were insulted by the British governor R B. Lagden (President of the club and captain of cricket team) on account of their clothing.<sup>24</sup> The Indians had refused to play and demanded an apology which Lagden did not give. As a result the match was abandoned.

National newspapers reported this incident which took place in 1931 as ‘dhoti war’. *The Times of India* carried articles on Lagden view of Indian dress for cricket and the response of Mohan Bagan Club to his criticism was reported too. These articles described

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Old Indian Photos: Historical Photographs of Indian subcontinent’, <http://www.oldindianphotos.in/search/label/Sports>, Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Majumdar, ‘Politics of Leisure in Colonial India’, p. 3401.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



the nature of the dispute which arose around *dhoti* and cricket. One of the correspondents from *TOI* reports Lagden's views in 1931: <sup>25</sup>

The Calcutta Cricket Club and I myself have been accused of refusing to allow Indians to play cricket at the Eden garden cricket at the Eden Gardens in what is called their "National kit"...that the Mohan Bagan Club decided to play in *dhotis* as a try on and with an intention of giving affront to their hosts in point of fact the captain and some other players of the Mohan Bagan team , I think five played in the recognized cricket costume and the kit of the remainder of the players varied to such extent as to give the impression to the onlooker that the C.C.C. were playing against a team collected on the spur of the moment instead of against one of the leading Indian clubs in Calcutta who for many years past had recognized the fact that trousers and a shirt are the most suitable kit for cricket. As regards to *dhotis* being suitable. I suggest to those cricketers non cricketers who may be interested that however well draped dhoti may be if a shirt is worn outside which is invariably the case when there is breeze blowing one ends of shirt flaps and therefore both to the umpire and wicket keeper the playing of cricket as it should be played becomes impossible. I do not think any reasonable man can argue that dhoti is suitable for Cricket."

We see that practical reasons were given by Lagden to discourage the Indian cricketers from wearing *dhotis* while playing during the 1930s. Wearing of *dhoti* by some of the Indian players was seen as a deliberate act of disrespect to the white hosts. According to him, the wearing of the short and trousers had been accepted as a costume for the game.

The Mohan Bagan Club's Secretary Mr. D. N. Guin replied to his criticism: <sup>26</sup>

In the first match last season between Mohan Bagan and Calcutta on the Eden, Gardens around at least two of the Indian players turned up in dhotis and no objection from the C.C.C. Similarly, in other matches this season including games against Ballygunge, some of the Mohan Bagan players were in dhotis without any objection from the opposing teams. " I may also say from my personal knowledge that during the last ten years Mohan Bagan as well as and other Indian teams when they played had some of their members in dhotis. It was left entirely to individual members to dress according to convenience.

Response of Guin was in opposition to that of C.C.C. secretary Lagden. To him the objection to the wearing of *dhoti* by few Indian players was unnecessary. He pointed out

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<sup>25</sup> Our Own Correspondent, 'Mr. R. B. Explains How the Dhoti Dispute Arose: Calcutta.' *The Times of India*, August 28, 1931, p.3.

<sup>26</sup> Our Own Correspondent, 'The Dhoti War: Mohan Bagan replies to Mr. Lagden', *The Times of India*, August 31, 1931, p.4.

that the act of wearing dhoti should not be understood as a way to insult the opposite team. The reasons cited by him showed that the Mohan Bagan Club and other Indian teams had a tradition when the players wore dhoti during the game. However, the reason behind this objection by the other teams around the clothing of the Indians leading to controversy needs to be located in the political ferment of the Indian subcontinent during the 1930s.

As a writer in *The Times of India* writes that, ‘whether Mr. Lagden raised the question as a point of interest, asked it in fun, or was making a stand for the traditions of Indian cricket, at the present time, with nationalist feelings always ready to surge to the brain on the first occasion, reasonable or otherwise, it would have been more tactful to overlook the point.’<sup>27</sup> He notes further, that it was preposterous of the Bengal cricketers to turn his remark into an affront to their national costume. Thus, the nature of the conflict was political and it was ensued because the symbol of dhoti represented the Indian culture.

However, there were many who considered *dhoti* as disadvantageous for the games. Madras official non Brahmin paper Justice opined that a *dhoti* was obviously not the best garment for cricket.<sup>28</sup> It said that *dhoti* was of no use if the player was allowed to catch the ball with it. Similarly, another writer K. M Ghoshal presented the *dhoti* as unfit costume not only for cricket but for any sport.<sup>29</sup> He opined that except for the persons who are obsessed with the fad that the dhoti stands for nationalism and must be worn for its own sake everyone agreed that *dhoti* was not suited for either cricket or football.

Similar other incidents took place six months later in a match between Vidyasagar College and the Calcutta Cricket Club. Perhaps, here there was no attempt to change the prevalent dressing which attracted criticism in the first place. Instead, the match was abandoned itself.

As we see that it was not that lack of prescribed sports clothing was the reason due to which the Indians players were criticized by the British. Within the Indian community of

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<sup>27</sup> ‘The Dhoti War’, *The Times of India*, 1 September, 1931, p.6.

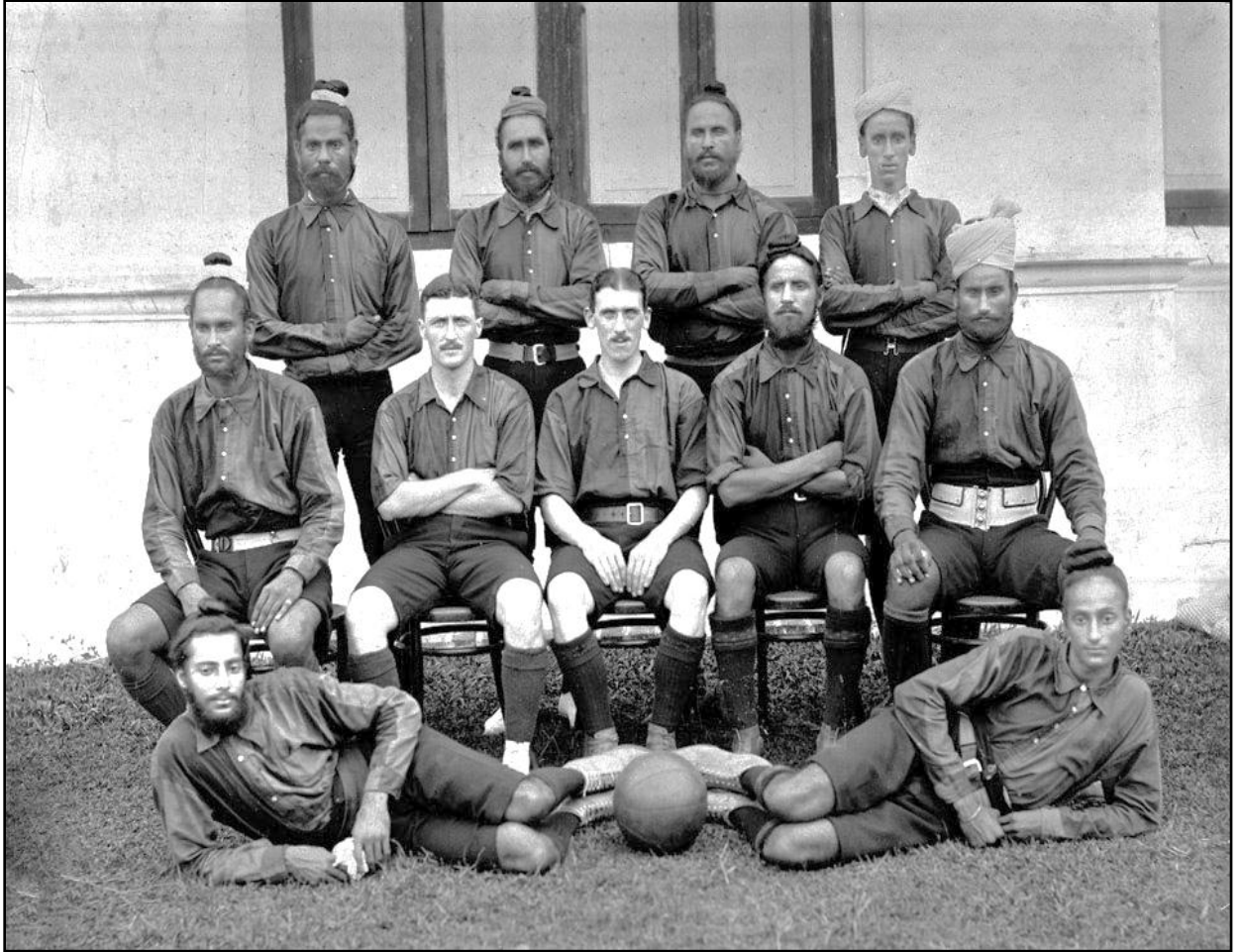
<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> K.M. Ghoshal, ‘The Dhoti: Its Many Disadvantages to the Editor’, *The Times of India*, 12 September, 1931, p.18.

players as well costume became a reason of discontent. In Bombay, Parsis were the first to adopt and popularize cricket during first half of the twentieth century. As the Parsis had a much more westernized life style they had begun to experiment in western dress before the other Indians. As a result, they ridiculed the Hindu Boys for their dress as well as style of playing who often played in *dhotis* and without shoes or boots.

We see how sports called for special clothing for some whereas others continued to dress in the indigenous dress for much of the twentieth century. For those who were westernized or were in contact with the British more seem to have adopted the similar sports clothing. Whereas, for many classes and caste the sports did not demand any special clothing did not seem to make any difference in the game. The above incident suggests that the game of cricket did not bring any considerable change as in dressing of most of the Indian ordinary players. The idea of comfort does not seem to appear in the discourse of sports clothing. We do see that the sports costume demanded a freedom of movement for better game. These ideas around sports clothing was one of the reasons to advice women for change of dress which appeared in the journals and newspapers. In the new dress comfort and mobility were the first things to be observed for sports. However, I will discuss this in later sections.

We see that the sports did not invoke uniform dressing for all in a similar manner. It was a choice which some made and some did not. According to Guha, one of the approaches to study sports views it as a relational idiom, a sphere of activity which expresses, in concentrated form, in sports the values divisions and unifying symbols of society. For some groups the unifying aspect of the sports appropriated the costume too. The members of a same team share similar clothing which is aimed at inculcating unity and instill feeling of competitiveness too. This aspect of sports clothing was enjoyed by the members belonging to various groups in India. The photographs show members of hockey, polo, cricket in similar uniforms of Indians and British in same team however, it was a later development. As we said that the intermixing of the Indians and the British happened only by the first half of the twentieth century. However, the British cantonment was the place where we find instances of intermixed groups in various sports.



**Figure 21: Football Team of the Twentieth Duke of Cambridge's Infantry, 1920.**

**Source: Online collection of the Council of the National Army Museum, London**

Other than the clubs, the British regiment and the cantonments were the favourite centre of sports in India. By beginning of the twentieth century many regiments had mixed football teams comprising both British and Indian soldiers. For example; a photograph (Figure 21) of the football team of the fifty second Sikhs (Frontier Force) posing with an inter-regimental trophy in 1921 and the twentieth Duke of Cambridge's Own Infantry during the same period, when at least half the team were Sikh soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>The Collection of the National Army Museum in London. Available at <https://www.nam.ac.uk/onlinecollection/detail.php?q=searchType%3Dsimple%26resultsDisplay%3Dlist%26themeID%3D14&pos=16&total=146&acc=2001-04-1-18> (accessed 10 June, 2016).

It is interesting to see that out of eleven players only two are British. What we see in the image is that there is uniform sports costume for all the players of the team. All the men in the image wear full sleeve shirt and half shorts. Some of them wear a belt too. It is crucial to note that the Punjabi players do not wear turban and have tied their hair in a bun. After the initial conflict in the late-nineteenth century over Sikh soldiers wearing a turban, a standardised Sikh turban had emerged. As we know that for the Sikhs the turban is an essential aspect of their identity. The standardised turban was different from the turban of the Punjabi Muslims and Hindu Dogras. The Sikh soldiers used to wear this new standardised turban but in the image only one player is wearing a turban. Whether it was a deliberate attempt to create uniformity in a group or not cannot be said as the members wear different accessories such as belt. The gestures and the gaze are different too. Nonetheless, the similar uniform projects a uniform status of all members. Bernard Cohn points out that in post-eighteenth century European army uniforms in which every individual is dressed like every other one of the same rank and unit, symbolised discipline and obedience of that troupe.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, one can assume that here uniform for a sport signifies equality as well as discipline.

We traced some of the functional aspect of sports clothing for men in the early twentieth century. Similarly, sports were becoming popular among females in India by the second decade of twentieth century. Initially, it was restricted to few women from the royal families. The Indian royals were one of the very first groups to take up sport in an organised manner.<sup>32</sup> As the royals went to the public schools where sport was an important part of the curriculum for much of the first half of the twentieth century they were enthusiastic about outdoor games and sports. In these schools boys were expected to take part in all kinds of activities, including athletics, polo, hockey, football, tennis, etc. Along with cricket, polo was one of the popular sport and it allowed them to mix with the British officials. Almost all the princely states Hyderabad, Gwalior and Jodhpur were patrons of polo. Even the girls belonging to the royal families were exposed to sport. The Maharaja of Scindia advised in his 'notes on Education and Upbringing of the Ruler' (1925) that children of both sexes should be taken out shooting once a week without fail

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<sup>31</sup>Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge*, p.5.

<sup>32</sup>Sen, *Nation at Play*, p. 74-81.

and when they have advanced in years they should, as a rule, be made to spend not less than a couple of weeks annually on tiger shooting. Ronojoy Sen points that this was a sort of environment in which Gayatri Devi, who originally belonged to the Cooch Behar Royal family of north Bengal and later married the maharaja, grew up.<sup>33</sup> She went on her first shoot at the age of five and shot a panther when she was twelve.

Several photographs are available showcasing Gayatri Devi's life.<sup>34</sup> We see that she was a figure of a modern fashionable woman during her times who defied the *pardah* system unlike Rajput maharanis of her times. She was equally talented in sport: was as an excellent rider and an able polo player. As her husband was one of the famous polo players, she played polo regularly. Her participation in various sports activities can be traced through the available photographs (Figure 22) which show her riding horse, driving car, playing tennis, playing golf, hunting and presenting winning prizes to polo players during the 1930s -1960's.<sup>35</sup> These images show her in various attire such as shirt and loose pants while playing golf, shirt and divided long skirts while playing tennis and at the same time she is dressed in expensive chic sari on other occasions.<sup>36</sup> We see that she adopted western clothing in her everyday life including for sport, but she retained the Indian sari in her dressing for most of the social events. The example of her experiment with western clothing for sport does not suggest that sport led to westernisation in clothing but certainly wearing sport clothes was easier for those who were already westernised and fashionable. Gayatri Devi and other royal and elite women were involved in sport to some extent. However, the popularity grew among other women by the second decade of the twentieth century but the process was slow.

What was the reason for the shift in the attitude towards women sports by the 1920s? According to Boria Majumdar, the origin of soccer in India was closely tied with the movement for women's suffrage and emancipation in colonial India.<sup>37</sup> With the

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<sup>33</sup> Sen, *Nation at Play*, p. 75.

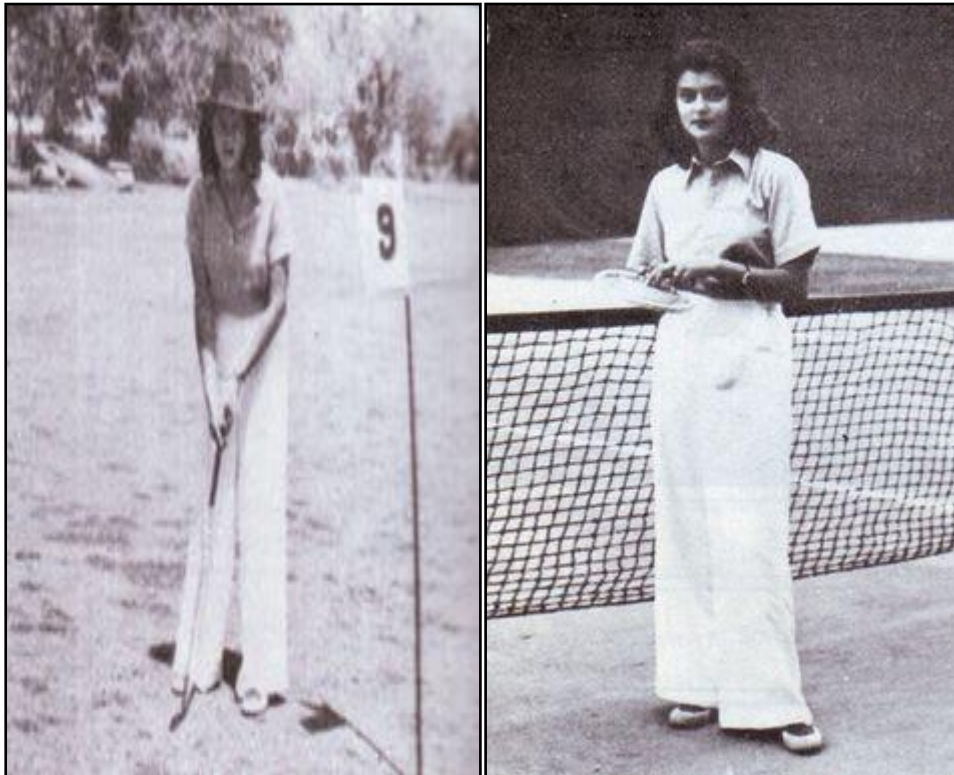
<sup>34</sup> <https://www.google.co.in/search?q=maharani+gayatri+devi+playing+sports&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiAtN3bw6DOAhX>

<sup>35</sup> <https://in.pinterest.com/peachseraph/maharani-gayatri-devi/> Accessed on 10 of June 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Gayatri Devi of Jaipur and Santha Rama Rao, *A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur*, Philadelphia : Lippincott , 1976, pp.62-63.

<sup>37</sup> Boria Majumdar, 'Forward and Backward: Women's Soccer in Twentieth- Century India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Volume 25, Number 1, 2005, pp. 204-213.

establishment of the All India women's Congress in 1918, the move for women's suffrage gathered momentum. With the establishment of the All India women's congress, attempts were made to give women a voice that had been absent throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 22: Maharani Gayatri Devi playing golf and tennis, 1940s**

**Source: *A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur***

The first All India Women's Conference on Educational Reform was held from 5 to 8 January 1927. The educated participants made physical exercises an important part of the curriculum for Indian women. Between 1928 and 1931, the conference also began examining social problems associated with women and girls. Physical education was made mandatory for girls in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies.<sup>39</sup> During this period

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>39</sup>Basu and Bharti Ray, *Women's Struggle*, p. 33.

only other religious bodies such as the Brahma Samaj, Ramkrishna Mission, Arya Samaj etc also took up the cause of women's education. The schools which were proposed in cities for girls during 1930-31 such as Bihar, Ajmer and Lucknow, focused on physical culture.

Around this time some women commentators espoused the cause of women's soccer, demanding better sports facilities for women. As part of this broader movement for emancipation, sport, especially cricket and football gained currency among Indian women. Vernacular tracts of the period commented on the virtues of these sports, claiming that sporting prowess would stimulate the movement for women's emancipation. By the 1920s things changed. While it was possible for the boys or men to go through regular physical drills in the akharas thus developing their sporting skills, women were not allowed to do so. This was because the akharas were considered a male domain and rigorous physical exercises for body building was considered opposed to femininity. Accordingly, women's football which was only starting to mature underwent a rapid decline.<sup>40</sup>

Brajarajan Ray who was considered father of Indian of Bengali sports journalism, tried to promote the development of women's soccer in the educational institutions and clubs of Bengal from the late 1920s. In this period the number of Indian sportswomen in Bengal was minimal. However, women from the English and Anglo Indian communities actively participated in sports like cricket and soccer. In 1928 Ray took an initiative in establishing the National Youth Association at Calcutta.<sup>41</sup> When one of its members Purna Ghosh, attempted to play soccer, she became the subject of ridicule in many sections of society. However, Anand Bazar Patrika, the leading Bengali Newspaper gave her considerable support by publishing her photograph on more than one occasion. As the traditional women's dress, the saree, obstructed freedom of movement, women had to

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<sup>40</sup>Fan Hong and J. A Mangan, *Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation: Kicking off a New Era*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



discard their conventional attire if they were to play the sport seriously. Rejection of the traditional attire provoked another wave of criticism in the province.<sup>42</sup>

Despite considerable opposition the first women's football tournament of the country continued for four years, eventually resulting in the formation of women's sports federation in 1938. By the third year of the tournament, some college women had discarded their sari and had started playing in shorts, a revolutionary development in colonial Bengal. However, such initiatives were short lived and women's soccer in Bengal had declined by the early 1940s.

The growth of women's soccer was limited and the traditional attire of the Indian players was considered as a hindrance. The newspapers and journals of this period in North India and other regions debated the question of sport and clothing. However, these debates mainly discussed clothing for games such as tennis. As we have seen only elite and royal women had access to these games. The tracts published in North India reveal a different story of women's play and sports in India during the first half of the twentieth century. We see that development of the women's movement and inclusion of physical education in schools for girls introduced various sports and importance of physical culture. Simultaneously, the popularity of sports generated the question of clothing for it as well among the Indian women during this period. This leads to our next section which will discuss the debates around the sports clothing which took place in the print media. We will trace how the sports influenced clothing styles of the Indian women.

### **From Sari to Skirts**

This section looks at the debates which took place around sport dress for Indian and western woman for English sports in the English print media. It traces various kinds of clothing suggestions that writers of journals and newspapers gave for sports and active life. What kind of themes was invoked in the dressing for the sports during the first half of the twentieth century? The debate of Indian dress versus western dress was extended to sport clothing as well. Most importantly, this section focuses on clothes advised for the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.87.

modern Indian woman who played English sport. What new items of clothing were introduced for these Indian women because of games?

We have seen in Chapter I how the English newspapers were introducing western fashion to the Indian readers during the early twentieth century. Similarly, western clothes were suggested for European women and Indian woman for sports. Gradually, the newspapers carried articles which discussed clothing for Indian woman. She was presented with many choices. One was to adopt western clothing, second to wear Indian sari and third to incorporate western elements into Indian sari for sports.

The 'active life' of a Indian working woman and a sports woman demanded a new form of clothing which was comfortable and allowed easy freedom of movement. As we have seen that few elite and educated middle class Indian woman played English games. So, the debates in the English newspapers and journals were aimed at the European, Anglo Indian, Educated Indians and the royal women.

These newspapers actively popularized western notions of sports dressing as early as the turn of the century. We know that Indian women experimented with various English games much later than western women. Dressing was a constantly debated site in the games in the west and the east and it continues to be so. Sometimes the conflicts which took place in the west around clothing appeared in the Indian newspapers too may be some times later in the year. One of the biggest controversies was around wearing of a short skirt by a tennis player in London in 1921. According to Lipovetsky, Suzanne Langlen caused a sensation in 1921 by playing tennis for the first time in a sleeveless white cardigan and a pleated skirt that came just below the knee.<sup>43</sup> She popularized this style by appearing in consecutive matches. Her contribution in popularizing the loosely hanging frock, short skirted and short sleeved was acknowledged in an article in *Times of India*.<sup>44</sup> The article advocated the dress which reflected feminine traits: 'apart from its practical advantages and it's stimulating effect on what we have called morale during the war, the regulation tunic style of dress compares favorable in appearance with the more

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<sup>43</sup>Lipovetsky, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup>'Women Tennis Players: Innovation in Dress', *The Times of India*, August 11, 1923, p.15.

orthodox feminine tennis garb'.<sup>45</sup> Her interview appeared in *The Times of India* (Delhi) in the year 1930 in an article titled 'What shall I wear? An Interesting Talk on sports Clothes'.<sup>46</sup>

She commented:

In setting out to design sports clothes that will meet every essential demand of the modern sportswoman, I work on two basic principles, freedom of movement and femininity. And it is this very searching after a femininity in line that incorporates perfect freedom that has made me almost fanatically opposed to the idea of the divided skirt for sports which designers try so hard to launch from time to time, no not even when handled as charmingly as Molyneux has known how in this summer's models in what he calls his 'pyjama skirt'. The principal is wrong therefore however cleverly the idea is treated the result can never be really satisfactory. Then again there are very few women who can wear a divided skirt with any kind of success so why waste our time trying to force it on an unwilling world? The whole idea of trousers for women is monstrous to me.

In the process of defining a sports dress for women we see that the tennis player sought both freedom and femininity in clothing. So, she discarded the idea of divided skirt or 'pyjama' skirt for women. Most importantly, she found the whole idea of a trouser for women monstrous. Other writers also considered the fashion of trousers for women disastrous. However, we know that this debate was targeted primarily at the European women, as around this time perhaps very few Indian women wore skirts and trousers. Nonetheless, the journals did popularize such items of clothing for women. Even by criticizing a form of dress like trousers and short skirt these authors were bringing the debate on sports clothing into the public sphere.

Proper dress for tennis and golf were suggested by Langlen in the 1930.<sup>47</sup> According to her, the material for tennis dress should be cotton and silk. For her silk was more preferred as it was more becoming. She suggested possible dress combination for the games; one consisted of a sleeveless blouse and pantaloons, a wrap over skirt pleated around the waist. This was supposed to give the wearer perfect freedom. Corsets were discouraged for the tennis player as well. A combination of dress was to be observed for golf dressing as well. We see that writers suggested observance of femininity, comfort

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Lenglen, 'What shall I wear? An Interesting Talk on sports Clothes', *The Times of India*, July 23, 1930, p.10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

and western dress for tennis. However, there were others who focused on western dress for sports but insisted that Indian women should retain traditional sari for other occasions. Safi, a writer from *Times of India* advised that Indian women should adopt European dress for day wear, business and sports but should wear their own traditional sari for an evening wear.<sup>48</sup> The writer discussed the trends in the dress reform in Bombay and said that others options were looked for Indian woman other than the sari. The writer felt that this was because sari was a handicap to active women and those who had to earn their livelihood. Even in the domestic sphere it was considered a danger: for there was the possibility of fire accidents. Thus, sari was presented as cumbersome and difficult to manage especially while stepping out of cars and for sports and games.<sup>49</sup>

One of the readers of *Times of India* claimed that European dress answered all three: comfort, beauty and expense.<sup>50</sup> In the year 1933, *Times of India* carried an article which was based on readers' opinions on Indian and European dress. Most of the writers (Indian readers) in this competition preferred the European dress over the Indian sari. The second prize winner of Rs. 5, M.M. notes that, 'in choosing woman's dress three important things are to be considered- comfort, beauty and expense. European dress answers all the three. For house wear (while cooking, washing, and for one thousand jobs of a housewife) for sports and other pursuits of modern life. European dress is both comfortable and suitable'.<sup>51</sup> We see that the European dress was presented as an ideal dress for house wear, while cooking, washing, sports and other pursuits of modern life. 'The sari was praised for its praise and dignity however, for active life European clothes won the day and one or two Indian readers went as far as to hope that one day the Indian woman would discard her sari in favor of more comfortable and hygienic dress.' This statement of the author suggests the preference of some of the Indian readers for western dress over an Indian one.

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<sup>48</sup>Safi, 'Dress Reform in India: Could European Women Wear The Sari', *The Times of India*, 13 April, 1937, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>'Indian and European Dress: Interesting Criticism by Our Readers', *The Times of India*, 10 October, 1933, p.13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, another reader, Asha who won the seventh prize in the same writing contest praised the Indian sari for the aesthetic beauty but preferred European dress for sports. She commented:

Although the Indian women's dress has a charm of its own, and gives its wearer a grace and beauty, for comfort and freedom of movement nothing surpasses the modern dress of the European woman. On a tennis court or any other field of sport, a woman clad in a comfortable short skirted dress of European style, has a greater advantage over one who is garbed in a none too convenient sari. The short skirt gives her a freedom of movement which enables her to run and move easily, thus making it more easy for her to play the game. On the other hand, the Indian woman in the sari is hampered by the long and narrow draperies she is wearing and consequently is not so well at ease as the other woman.

We see that here the western woman is presented as a model for the dressing style to be followed. In the process, the long and narrow drapes of the Indian sari are considered to be an obstruction to the game.

However, there were other voices too. One such in *Times of India* said that the sari was an ideal dress to meet the needs of an active woman who worked and played. However, a few modifications had to be made in the earlier existing style of sari and it had to be made shorter in size. Mina noted that the style of sari had changed because of new needs of Indian woman.<sup>52</sup> According to her, the change was in the size of nine yards sari to six yards sari. She noted:

Time is not the same now as it then was, when it was unheard of for ladies to work or shine in any other sphere except their own domestic one. Our grandmothers stayed put in the world of their homes and gloried in draping themselves in nine yards length, and therefore did not experience any inconvenience. Of recent years due to the efforts of the sportswoman, the office girl, and the hospital nurse who deemed it high time their dress was made more practical, has the sari been decreased to its present dimensions.

In this article the change in the size of Indian saris was noted and woman's activities outside the sphere of home were presented as one of the reasons for this change. The quote suggests that in the late 1930s women were wearing sari for sports or office work.

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<sup>52</sup>Mina, 'The Beauty of the Sari: Already Effecting Western Dress Design', *The Times of India*, 7 May, 1936, p. 15.

Some columnists in the *Times of India* wrote that the sari was the most graceful dress and felt that it was the ideal costume for Indian women. Rohini argues that between sports or sari Indian woman must choose one over the other, as the combination of the two was not preferable for a perfect game.<sup>53</sup> She presented the sari as the preferred ideal costume of the Indian woman over any dress worn for games during the late 1930s.

Indian women are today, taking to games and outdoor exercises; but the majority of them still adhere religiously to the Sari. I have even seen women attempting to play cricket in them, and in of course, as everyone knows, Tennis, Golf, and Basket Ball, as being the most important of the games that Indian women attempt, are usually tackled with a Sari. Except for few women like Leela Row and other well known sports women who are all “out there to play”. Does Sari hamper a woman from being a true athlete? I have known many Indian girls giving up taking lessons in tap dancing because they could not do so in Saris. It is the same in many other cases, and Signorina Valerio, the Italian star, marvelled at seeing some Indian women playing Tennis so well inspite of their “cumbersome clothes”, but she ended by giving some sound advice, “ if you want to be really good,” she said, “ give up the Sari. You can never reach a very high standard with all those clothes on – and probably she was quite right. No women can take the Tennis seriously if she wears the sari and Tennis when compared to the more severe games is but a mild form of sports. Hockey and Cricket cannot be played in Sari. In other words, unless the Indian woman gives up being shy and makes up her mind to take up athletics seriously , she is never “all out to play” and can never be a great sportswoman.<sup>54</sup>

Tradition becomes one of the reasons to adhere to the sari even while they played western games. The female readers were presented with two choices one to become modern and adopt dress of the European woman and other was to stick to the Indian sari. There were other writers who found the sari to be cumbersome and the short European frock was not thought decent for the Indian woman.<sup>55</sup>And there were others who preferred western clothes that gave women freedom of movement and especially for sports.

The *Indian Ladies Magazine* offered an alternative choice to the women who played sports. The debate on tennis clothing for Indian women appeared in *ILM* too but the writers suggested Indian women needed to retain their modesty and tradition. One could wear the Indian sari by observing a few things and it was an ideal dress for games, suggested these writers. Tennis was increasingly becoming popular in India too by the

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<sup>53</sup> Rohini, ‘The Sari and the Sport: One or other Must be Sacrificed’, *The Times of India*, 30 July, 1936, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> ‘The Conquering Sari - Most Graceful Dress in the World’, *The Times of India*, 30 January 1936, p.13.

mid 1920s.<sup>56</sup> *Indian Ladies Magazine* was one of the most popular journals in English for women and was published from Madras from the year 1901 to 1938. One such writer, Sister Susie, wrote columns on dressing, 'Fashion Suggestion' and this discussed what should be worn by Indian woman while they were playing tennis.<sup>57</sup>

Sister Susie comments:

Europeans can never understand how we Indian ladies can play tennis with saris. 'How do you manage to run with such long skirts?' they ask, or it must be very inconvenient for you to play with a sari on.' It is in vain that we shall try to tell them that a sari *when properly put on* does not come in the way. Nay such is the fashion nowadays that Indian men carried away with this idea, urge their wives to come forth in the latest and shortest kind of English frocks. A Sari as I said, when worn in proper style, does not come in a way. Of course, there were some ladies who insist on playing in a thick heavy sari, which prevents them from running! Some of them do not pin their sari to their shoulders, with the result that they invariably have to stop at odd moments during the game to hitch it up. Now this constant adjustment of one's clothes on the tennis court, in addition to hampering the player itself, does invariably put off her partner and her opponents. It takes their mind off the game. I know a man who once said to me, some Indian ladies have such a tiresome habit of constantly pulling up their sari when they play tennis. It is therefore necessary to dress appropriately when one plays tennis. It is also quite necessary to dress appropriately when one plays tennis. It is also quite unnecessary to give up wearing a sari for tennis, as it does not really come in the way, when put on properly.

We see that Sister Susie advocates the tying of sari in proper manner in order to avoid inconvenience during the game. This she thinks is the way in which Indian women players can best avoid western influence and dress appropriately for playing tennis. As opposed to short English frocks for Susie the sari was the best dress available. Sister Susie does not lay the reason for her dislike for the short dress.

This debate on what woman should wear went on till the mid 1930s. Emma Tarlo points out that finally it was suggested that the Indian woman could wear a blouse and a fairly thick white skirt, reaching about half way between ankles and knees and a thin half sari top, held in place at the waist with a gold belt.<sup>58</sup> This dress was selected as the best option as it was supposed to reflect 'the modesty of the sari' while at the same time

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<sup>56</sup> Helen Wills, 'A Famous Tennis Player Tells You How to Keep Fit: The Value of Exercise', *The Times of India*, 8 May, 1928, p.14.

<sup>57</sup>Our Fashion suggestions: A Tennis Costume for Indian ladies', *Indian Ladies Magazine (ILM)*, September 1928, Volume.1, No. 2, p.91.

<sup>58</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p.47.

allowing scope for movement.<sup>59</sup> According to Tarlo, rather than rejecting suitable Indian styles, Indian women found the means of adapting their habitual clothes to suit the occasion.

It was noted that along with other ideals, femininity in sports dress was desired for European woman and Indian women alike. Education, travel in public conveyances, watching public entertainment programmes, employment outside the home and sports were now permitted to the Indian woman in the 1930s. We have seen that this change demanded comfortable clothing. The signs of comfort, mobility and femininity were to be clearly marked in dress in active life, sports, work and nationalism. We have traced in Chapter I that the entry of the Indian woman posed new threats to the orthodox, conservative sections of the society. Some of the anxieties were reflected in the writings of the English and vernacular journals. It is known that the fashion of divided skirts and trousers were deemed dangerous and unattractive for they were supposed to lack feminine traits. However, we do not know how many Indian women actually wore such dress. The images of Gayatri Devi do show her in loose pants, trousers and coat while she was playing tennis and golf and hunting. However, these were probably from the late 1940s. We do know of women who wore male clothing not only trousers but dhoti as well, in the 1930s in Bengal. These women were Indian revolutionary women who were spotted in male clothing, such as Kalpana Dutta and Pritilata Waddedar. They were involved in the new forms of nationalism in the colonial period in Bengal around 1930s. They asserted their femininity and masculinity both in their dress and actions. An example of Kalpana Dutt's sartorial style was cited to show the latest fashion of wearing trousers among the Indian woman. The writer pointed out the disadvantages of clothing which did not distinguish gender.<sup>60</sup>

The notorious Miss Kalpana Dutt no doubt found male attire not only an effective disguise but a convenient costume for the active life she led for five years before her recent arrest by the Calcutta police. And the dozens of cashmere flannel lounge suits which sold so rapidly in the London stores this Spring shows that women realize how comfortable and serviceable these clothes can be. In the Crawford market, the other day, I

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<sup>59</sup>Fashion Suggestions, *ILM*, 1933, Volume VI, No. 3, p. 146

<sup>60</sup>'Male clad girls: What a young man thinks of them', *The Times of India*, 29 May, 1933, p. 13.



myself saw two slightly embarrassed girls doing their shopping dressed in trousers suits or “smoking suits” as some call them. One wonders what limits the modern girl will go to in her “craze” for wearing garments which hitherto have been the chief means of distinguishing one sex from the other...

These women were seen in male clothing sometimes and they used it as a form of disguise.<sup>61</sup> For most of the occasions they retained Indian clothing. It seems that the article uses the example of Kalpana Dutta was to critique women who did wear clothes which did not reflect gender difference. However, as we know, although the revolutionary women wore male attire, it was not for comfort and mobility.

We see how the discussion on sports clothing in various platforms presented alternate modes of dressing for Indian women from various classes. We see that by and large for sports woman, the Indian sari emerged as the ideal choice.

The image from the *Tasveer Ghar* archive echoes this choice of print culture. The calendar represents a woman in traditional Indian sari, wearing sports shoes, with a tennis racket and sipping a cup of tea (Figure 23).<sup>62</sup> As this image is a calendar poster we need to read it as such. The audience and the purpose of this image were no doubt different than those that appeared in the journals. These images were often designed to decorate homes and were issued by business houses to customers and friends, such images also circulated independently as posters suitable for framing. They were circulated widely in mid-twentieth century India and were used for decorating the walls of homes and offices alike across the middle classes.<sup>63</sup> This image was selected from the article which carried other images to show how the coming of modernity offered the new Indian woman leisure and autonomy in various fields, such as sports, enjoying music, reading books etc.

The dress of the woman is seemingly traditional. At one level it is the traditional costume worn by the Indian woman. But this way of wearing a sari with a blouse (three –quarter sleeve) also has a recent history. We have seen in Chapter 1, that the sari emerged as the

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<sup>61</sup> Kalpana Dutt, *Reminiscences: Chittagong Armoury Raiders*, Bombay: People’s Publishing House, 1945, p.51.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Chai Why? The Triumph of Tea in India as Documented in the Priya Paul Collection’, circa 1940’s, www. [http:// Tasveer Ghar Archive](http://TasveerGharArchive)

<sup>63</sup> Abigail McGowan, ‘Modernity at Home’, *Tasveer Ghar Archive*, p. 5

most suitable costume for the Indian ladies, symbolising national identity, tradition and modesty. The low laced white canvass shoes seem to be a new addition within the realm of sports costume. The background courtyard and the clothing of the woman in the representation suggest her elite status. Many elite women did experiment with different styles of shoes and footwear such as heels and wedges, during the early-twentieth century in India.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 23: Calendar image of a woman tennis player having a tea break (Chai Why? The Triumph of Tea in India as Documented in the Priya Paul Collection)**

**Source: *Tasveer Ghar Archive*, 1940**

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<sup>64</sup>Alkazi Collection of Photography and Hitesh Ranjan Photo Archive had collection of large number of photographs of women belonging to royal class and elite families and show women in different expensive clothing, fashionable styles in dress and footwear.

Autobiographies show how of elite households in India were influenced by the western ideals and the women in these families explored Victorian ideals of companionship, with various activities being done with their husbands. One such was sport. For example, Monica Gupta daughter of Jnanendra Nath Gupta (a member of elite Indian Civil Services ICS, Bengal Cadre, from 1911-1927), throws light on some of these aspects through her memoir.<sup>65</sup> Monica's mother Sarla Gupta was exposed to western traditions since childhood. Malavika Karlekar stated that due to exposure to western life in Europe it was easy for Sarla to fit into the role of an Indian ICS officer, combining judiciously her social obligation with a commitment to her extended family. Monica Gupta remembers in her (unpublished) reminiscences that she had a tennis court in her garden and that her mother very often joined her father at tennis as she was a keen player herself. Though it is difficult to generalize on the basis of a single woman's memoirs of a childhood long ago nevertheless, it gives an understanding of what was happening within homes and indeed at the level of individual consciousness.<sup>66</sup>

We see how this image (Figure 23) celebrates the image of the new modern woman and for our interest in particular, a woman who is engaged in sports such as tennis. As we have already seen that by the mid 1930s the image of the modern woman was celebrated in some journals and newspapers as opposed to the earlier criticism (during much of the 1920s) against women who took up education and new lifestyles.

Let me jump to the 1980s. Ania Loomba shows how earlier connections between female clothing and national identity are being currently reinflected.<sup>67</sup> She shows through a study of the recent advertisements that the image of the good housewife is being redefined- 'she could wear a track suit and sit on an exercise cycle.' She argues that keeping fit was the new requirement of a model wife.<sup>68</sup> We can read the above image in this context. The focus on fitness and involvement in activities such as sport was a new requirement of a model wife that can be traced back to the early 1930s in India. Nonetheless, this image

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<sup>65</sup> Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words, Women's Lie Experiences From Western and Eastern India*, London: Routledge Taylor and Francis, 2008.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-105.

<sup>67</sup> Ania Loomba, 'The long and saggy sari', *Women: a Cultural Review*, 8:3, 278-292.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.276.

reflects the larger debate which took place around sports clothing for women who played sports during the 1930s.

However, these discussions were aimed at defining the dress for women who played English sports only. Did the writers of vernacular journals focus on similar ideals in sports clothing? What about the indigenous games and what kind of dressing was deemed suitable for? What kinds of native games were played by ordinary women? There was a focus on physical culture in schools and it this interest deepened due to the activities of various women's organizations from the 1920s. We have seen so far that the sports discussion focused mainly on the elite women, westernized and European women. We need to look at what themes were generated by sport in the case of ordinary women. The vernacular journals targeted middle class women primarily as a lot of women could read Hindi by the 1920s onwards. The next section will focus on this.

### **Girl's Play and Exercise**

This section will look at the question of sport and costume for domestic middle class women through discussions which appeared in vernacular journals in the first half of the twentieth century. These tracts belong to the literary genre which emerged from the 1930s in particular which sought to develop a sense of self respect in women, as well as recognition of their roles in a family, society and nation.<sup>69</sup>To fulfil these old roles, framed in the language of emancipation, women were expected to be healthy and beautiful. We know that there was a focus on physical education in schools from 1920s onwards. All these factors created a space for Indian women to experiment with physical culture. There was an indigenous culture of native sports for women such as games, exercises and yoga from earlier times. Gymnastics was introduced for Indian women and dance was seen as a form of exercise too.

We explored how English sports were restricted to a few women but over time these games were played by other classes too. As some of these could be played in the inner

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<sup>69</sup>Shobna Nijhawan, *Women and the Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012.

courtyards, they did not require going out to play grounds. These writers who were writing in the 1930s in North India discussed domestic labor within the frame of exercise and suggested to the readers that it was one of the best ways to keep oneself fit. The discussion on costume for these games and exercises was limited but these tracts carried a number of illustrations which showed women involved in various sports. These reflect how sports shaped clothing styles of domestic middle class women in the 1930.

Some of the writers mentioned various forms of sports and games for middle class women: walking, swimming, running,<sup>70</sup> drills<sup>71</sup>, skipping rope (Figure 24 A and B) etc. There were some games that had to be played at home or in a big field. Jyotimayi Thakur was one of the prominent writers of U.P during the 1930s focused on the question of physical culture in her work. She describes a list of games in the chapter called “*Ladkiyon aur Striyon ke Khel*”. She acknowledges that there was a growing need felt for physical fitness due to education and introduction of sports in the institutions such as schools. According to her, the introduction of physical education in schools led to popularization of games and exercises among girls and women. The following is a list of games which she suggested:<sup>72</sup>

*Aloo chammach daud* (Spoon and Potato Race) - In this game women were divided into two groups. Then every player had to pick potatoes with the help of a spoon and collect them in a basket.

*Chor aur shah* (Thief and King) - In this game two groups of women were supposed to stand in two different circles. One girl was to represent a thief and the other a police. The woman playing the police was supposed to touch the thief and then was replaced by the thief.

*Andha Siti*(Blind Whistle)- In this game the things needed were two handkerchiefs, one rope, chalk and a whistle. One circle was to be made by all players and two women were

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<sup>70</sup>No author, ‘Paschhis varsha ki umra mein budhapa: fir mein solha varsha ki sundari kaise ban gayi’, Kamlini, April, 1935, pp. 228-236. This article claims to be based on actual experience. The narrative presents a story of a woman who was fragile because of sickness and gradually by swimming; walking and running regularly she benefitted and became healthy.

<sup>71</sup>Smt. Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Striyon ke Khel aur Vyayaam*, Prayag: Saraswati Sadan, 1933, p. 144.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-126.

blindfolded with handkerchief and one of them was to hold the whistle and the other was supposed to follow the whistle and catch the first woman.

*Asan jhapat* (Musical Chair) - One circle was made with chairs and there was music to be played. The number of chairs had to be one less than the number of players. Women were to walk around chairs and then when the music stopped then they had to grab one chair each. The one person who failed to sit on a chair had to leave the game. And gradually, one chair at a time were removed until one player was left.

The rest of the games are: *Koda Maar, chue billi ka khel, sidhi khood, fanda daud, cheel jhappatta, rassa kashi, bhed bhedia*.<sup>73</sup>

These were some of the ways women were advised to engage in sports through the discussion of play and exercise. As I have noted earlier, not much is said about what kind of dress is to be worn during these games but there were number of illustration in these tracts and journals informed the visualization of a sports clothing. Mostly, it was the continuation of the everyday clothing to sports field as well with minor modification in the dress.

To elaborate this statement further let us have a look at figure 24 A and B. We see four sets of representation in these figures. One is of women in short tunic with dumbles doing exercise; the second is of a girl skipping with a rope in a frock. The third is a picture of musical chair. Here we see women draped in sari playing the game. These representations offer us possible options of clothing for middle class women in North India during the 1930s. We see representations of both European and Indian woman doing various kinds of sporting activities.

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<sup>73</sup>These games might appear very simple, but I argue that these were influential in teaching concentration, mind control, flexibility, trust combined with the idea of fun and exercise. So, it seems that the motto of the games was not only physical activeness but mental exercise too. However, the purpose of these games as outlined by the author was entertainment and exercise for physical fitness, p. 114.

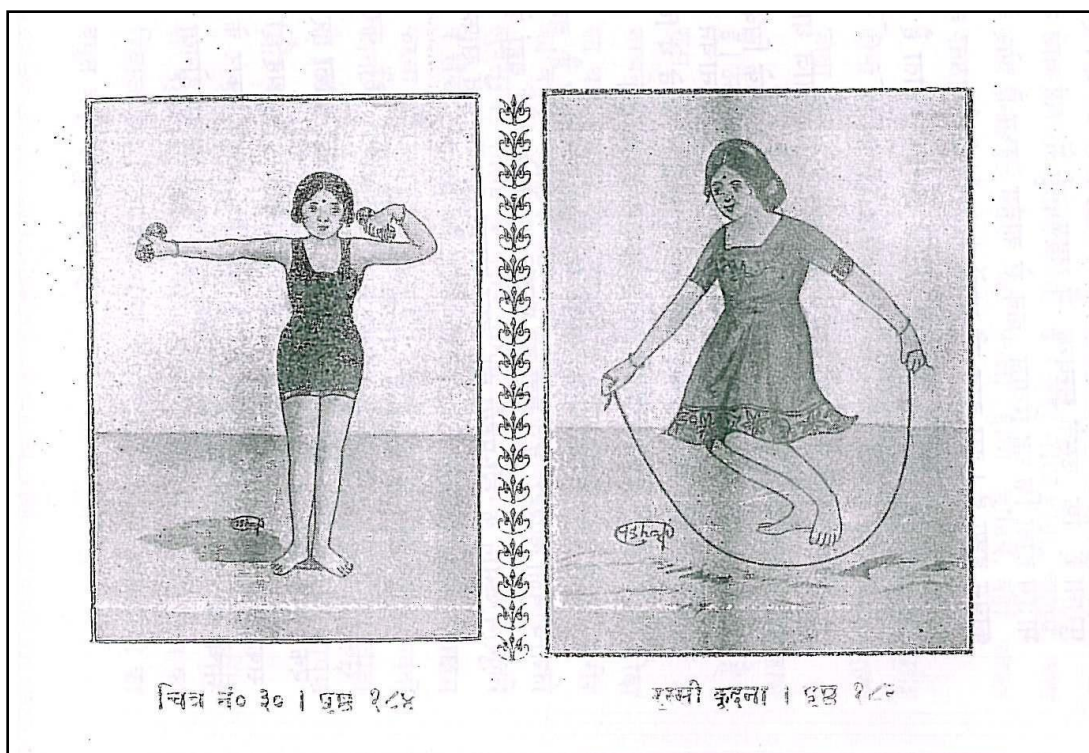


Figure 24 A and B: Exercise and skipping rope<sup>1</sup>

Source: Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Striyon ke Khel aur Vyayaam*, 1933.

Figure 24 A and B shows girls in short fitted tunic and frock for exercises. Clearly, some young girls did wear frocks with laces and frills especially from families who were influenced by western life style. The family photographs of Sarala Devi and others show them dressed in frocks when they were young.<sup>74</sup> But, perhaps, middle class girls wore them too.

The second dress for the exercise shown in the representation in this image is a tunic. This dress was worn by women doing gymnastics exercises. One of the interesting things to note is the combination of western attire with Indian features and Indian markers such as *bindi* on the forehead were used to represent the women/ girls exercises.

Moving on to Figure 25, we see that the dress is sari and frock. These games could be played within a bigger space at a get together or some such occasion. So, probably one

<sup>74</sup> Ray, *The Many Worlds of Sarala Devi*, p. 164.

could play it in the everyday wear too. We do see that some women have covered their head with the *pallu* of their sari where as others do not. We know that this was one of ways in which women observed rules of *purdah* in North India.

On games such as these writers did not define any dress code, but it is discussed in the context of gymnastic, yoga and drill exercises. On the question of clothing during drill *vyayaam*, Thakur suggests that there was a difference in everyday clothing and clothes worn during exercise.<sup>75</sup>

*Roj ke kapdo aur vyaayam ke kapdo mein antar hota hain, chahiye toh yeh ki ki vyaaam karne ke kapde hi aur ho yadi drill ke lie aisa na kia jaye toh roj ke kapdo se bhi kaam chal sakta hai lekin is baat ka khayal rakhna chahiye ki aise kapde pehne jaye jo bahut dheele aur latakte huye na ho aisa karna se kapde jamin par lithadte hi hain aur gande bhi hote hi hain aur saath hi drill karne mein uljhan bhi maloom hoti hain .*

The author says that while doing drills loose and hanging clothes should be avoided as they were uncomfortable for exercising.

The rules to be observed during exercise mentions restriction on a particular type of dressing. The regulations cited were:<sup>76</sup>

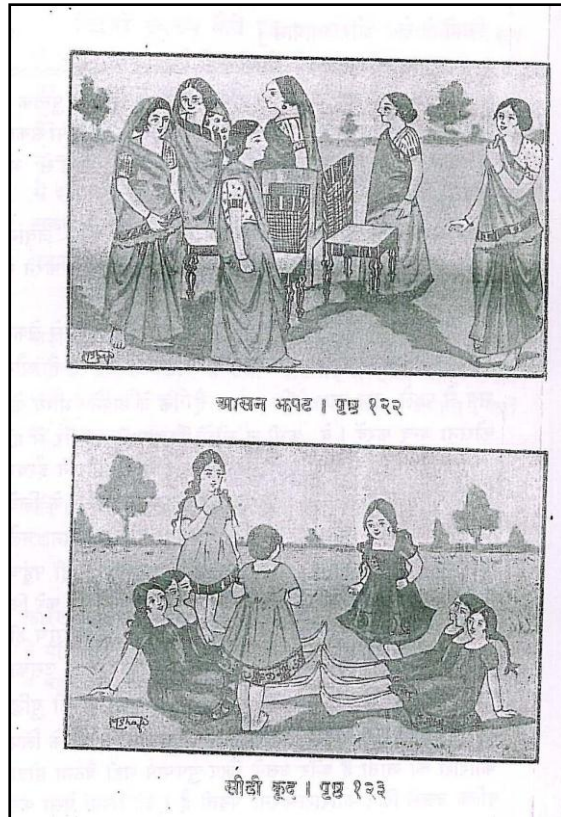
1. *Vyaayam karne ke lie striyon ko aise kapde pehna chahiye jo bilkul kase na ho, sharer ke aavashyak ango ko chodkar baki sabhi ang khule rahe, isse adhik labh hoga.* (During exercise women should wear such clothes which are not tight and loose so it will be more beneficial.)
2. *Pratah kaal surya nikalne se pehle ya saynkal ast hone ke baad khuli jagah par vyayaam karna chahiye.* ( One should exercise before sunrise or after sunset in open area)
3. *Vyaayam karne wali striyon ko kam se kam vyaayam ke samay koi zavar nahi pehanna chahiye.* (Women should not wear jewellery at least when they are exercising.)

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp.141-144.

<sup>76</sup>Thakur, *Striyon ke Khel aur Vyayaam*, p.129.





**Figure 25: Asan Jhapat and Sidhi kood  
(musical chair and jumping the stairs)**

**Source: Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Striyon ke Khel aur Vyayaam*, 1933.**

Thus, we see that these discussions on clothing create a notion of separate costume for sports. This costume was supposed to be different from everyday wear. It was supposed to be comfortable and loose and jewellery was strictly prohibited. Sport was not a time for ornaments. The photographs and illustrations of sports-women do not show them wearing any form of jewellery. For example, Figure 26 and 27 show two images of woman playing put ball and running. We see that the idea of comfortable and loose clothing was captured in the images as well. However, by and large, it seems that the sari was the represented as the ideal choice for any kind of sports. Figure 26 (chitra32) helps us to elaborate this argument further. It shows a woman attired in short sleeve blouse and a sari aiming to throw a ball. The sari is wrapped loosely around the waist with part of the pallav (end of the sari) tucked back at the right of the waist. Probably, the style of

wrapping sari in this manner offered this woman comfort and convenience. In most of these images women are not shown to be wearing any kind of footwear. Similarly, in most of the images no jewellery is worn except one bangle.<sup>77</sup> The representation shows that the body of the woman is slim and posture is firm, and this is visible in most of the images. Although, it seems that sari was one of the popular choices for the writers of the journals and the texts but the women were represented to be wearing different styles of sari for various games and sports.



**Figure 26 and 27: Navyuvation ke Vyaaam, Put ball and Running**

**Source: Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Striyon ke Khel aur Vyayaam*, 1933**

Figure 27 (chitra30) shows women wearing the sari too but in a different manner than the one in Figure 26. In such a form of tying sari the legs could be extended like in trousers, and this ensured greater freedom of movement. Here, the image echoes a woman's desire

<sup>77</sup>Please see Figure 26.

for open space and exercise which was stressed by few writers.<sup>78</sup> The clothing of the women in both the images suggests their middle class status. The plain and simple sari worn by the woman indicates that it must be cheap and affordable. While retaining the traditional sari, the form in which it was tied was modernized.

The identity of the women players as an Indian was emphasized in other images as well. However, there were other representations which did not necessarily show the women clad in sari. For example; *Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandu* showed women in two different sets of illustration to make waist thinner, to strengthen the legs and to tone up the body.

The image of the women in these figures became the signifiers of activities such as sports and exercise. They do not make any contact with the spectator. They have a depersonalized character, abstracted from their surrounding, mechanically illustrating an exercise. This particular issue of the Hindi journal carried four pages on exercises for women to tone up various parts of body. Another interesting thing to be noticed is that both the woman represent elite and middle class woman as suggested by the costume. The woman in Figure 28 (the figure on the left) wears a sleeveless tunic which does not go beyond the thighs where as the woman in the next image (Figure 29, on the right) wears knee length shorts and three quarter loose shirt. As already pointed out for the majority of Indian woman sari was a suggested as the preferred choice for various exercises or sports. Sometimes, even the elite woman restricted their options to sari as their sport costume. This issue 'mahilaank' addresses European/ Anglo Indian and Indian elite/ middle class women through distinctive dress/ costume styles: thus two groups, who might otherwise be considered to be antagonistic, were unified through the focus on health and exercise.

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<sup>78</sup>“Pacchis varsha ki umra mein budhapa: fir mein solha varsha ki sundari kaise ban gayi”, *Kamlini*, April 1935, pp. 228-236.

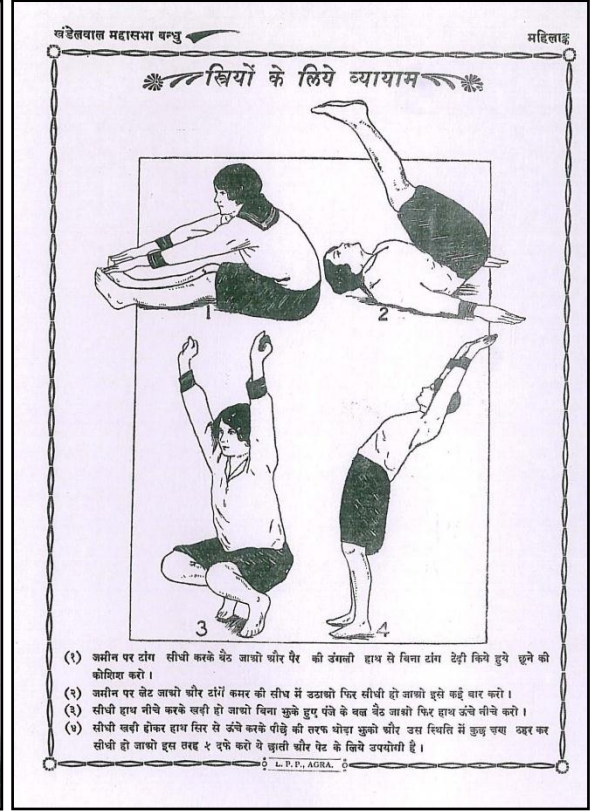
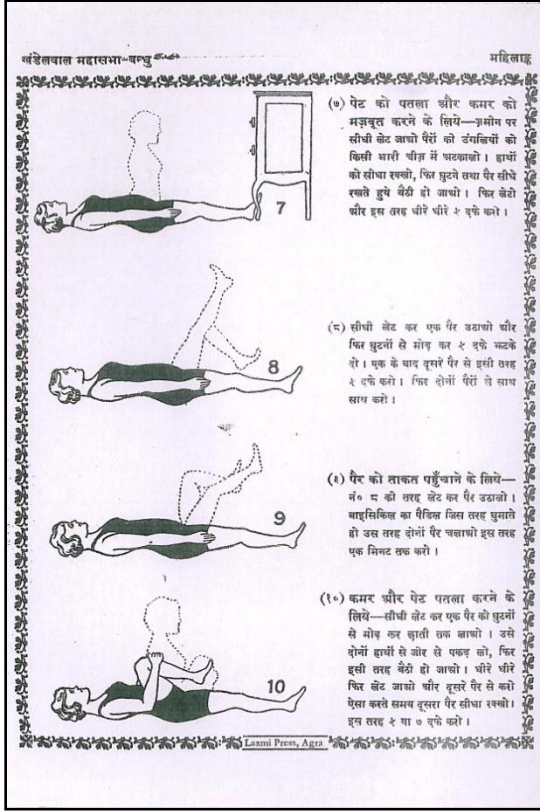


Figure 28 and 29: Striyon ke liye Vyayaam

Source: 'Mahilaank', Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandhu, December 1939

We see different types of games suggested for the women. However, these writers also saw domestic labor as a form of exercise. To labour at home was to do exercise. Exercise in form of the domestic labor varied from washing clothes to the grinding of flour. One such writer Prof. Ramswaroop Kaushal argues:

*Vyayaam- chuki kanyaon ki kasrat apne ghar ke kaam dhande hi hote hain, is karan sab kamo se pehle kasrat ke sambandh mein hi likhna uchit hain. Ladkiyo ki kasrat ke lie koi vishes khel niyat nahi hain aur jo hain unka hamari jati se chalan nahi hain. Isliye unhe apne ghar ke kaam kaaj ko hi apne kasrat ka sab se uttam sadhan janna chahiye.*<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup>Prof. Ramswaroop Kaushal, *Saheli*, June 1936, Sharda Mandir Limited, Nai Sadak, Delhi, p. 63.

(Exercise: Since domestic labor is a way of exercise for girls so we should firstly write about them. There is no specific game for girl's exercise that is why they should treat household work as a means of exercise.)

We see how the writer limits the realm of exercise to spaces within the home, and justifies house work as a form of exercise. The exercises to be practiced were tasks such as washing clothes, cleaning house, poultry and using charka. These Hindi journals took up women's issues, and gained popularity among female readership. Issues like the role of education, values and ideas about womanhood were discussed. According to Francesca Orisini, this kind of literature was termed as *stri upyogi* literature.<sup>80</sup> The writers presented use of charka and poultry work as activities which could keep one fit, and help one to earn money. The suggestion was that women could continue to contribute towards the nation by staying within home. So, locating the above text within the frame of these women specific journals one can argue that these writers (both men and women) focused on the nationalistic ideals and framed the realm of sports and exercise to redefine traditional roles for middle and lower class women. Women had to be fit and modern, but within frames defined by tradition.

As opposed to women's bodies being marked by domesticity, nationality and femininity they were also marked by class and urbanisation. In most of the Hindi journals and tracts published and circulated in north India, the high-class rich women became targets of criticism and they were considered to be lazy which led to bad health. The reason cited for this was negligence of housework due to presence of servants and influence of education. One writer commented on this kind of criticism, "*Sharon ke lagaw se striyon ka chakki pisna band ho gaya hain, jab se machine ke dvara pisne wali aata chakki chali hain tab se striyon ne ghar ki chakkiyon ka kam chod dia hain. Kiraye par pisne wali aata chakkiyon ne pisai bahut sasti kar di hain ki amir garib sabhi striyon ne apne gharo par pisna band kar dia hain...*"<sup>81</sup> (The love of cities has made the women despise the work of grinding at home as there are machines now. The shops have reduced the fair of grinding flour so all women including poor and rich have stopped grinding at home)

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<sup>80</sup>Francesca Orisini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 52.

<sup>81</sup>Thakur, *Striyon ke Khel aur Vyayaam*, p.53.

The coming of new machines, such as for grinding wheat, was cited as a reason for women leaving the work of grinding wheat and pulses on their own which according to the writer was one of the best exercises. As the writer says, especially the price of grinding wheat was reduced to a great extent in the cities so the task of using *chakki* was stopped both by the rich and poor women. For the writer this change meant less physical labor for women at home and so no exercise for them. Thakur notes that the work of using grinding machine, filling water was already house work for women and in the process of doing that, women already did some form of exercise and so they did not need to do any other exercise. According to the author, house work helped women keep their bodies in shape. Housework ensured a healthy and beautiful body.<sup>82</sup>

The effects of urbanization were discussed in other texts too. We see how the coming of machines and more job opportunities was seen as reducing the burden of housework for women to some extent. However, here the ‘leisure’ or comfort offered by the machines and several help such as maid servants and dhobis was discouraged. Thakur Srinath Singh’s work echoes similar argument as the middle class and the high class women were encouraged to take up house work and do physical labor to stay fit, and at the same time help the nation by generating income from doing household chores.<sup>83</sup> In his work rural and poor women were presented as models of hard work and fitness.

Similarly, celebrating rural women’s health Thakur commented in another work, ‘*Navyuvatiyon ko Kya Janna Chahiye*’: “*dehato ki striyon aur ladkiyon mein se shayad hi khabi koi bimar hoti ho, nahi toh sabhi nirog aur hatti katti dikhai deti hain. Iska karan keval yeh hain ki ve din bhar kuch na kuch kaam karti hain. Unke sharir khoob majboot aur tagde hote hain.*”<sup>84</sup> (Women and girls from villages rarely fall sick; they all look healthy and strong. The reason behind this is the constant work they do, so their body is strong and fit.) We see that along with invoking the image of rural women as models of fitness and health these discussions also generated ideals of good health. According to the

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid. p.61.

<sup>83</sup>Thakur Srinath Singh, *Yovan, Saundarya aur Prem: Bhartiya Dampantya jivan ki mahatva purna samasyaon par kuch gambhir vichar*, Sahitya Mandir, Daraganj, Prayag, January, 1930, p. 238.

<sup>84</sup>Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Navyuvatiyon ko kya Janna Chahiye : Navyuvatiyon ke jivan mein nitya kaam mein aane wali vividh prakar ki baton ki jankari ke lie sarvottam pustak*, Sahitya Mandir, Daraganj, Prayag, 1934, p. 10.

writer, the rural women had healthy and strong body and that it was acquired by physical hard labor. The writer argues that as opposed to these rural women the women who don't work at home are always sick with bad digestion. Reaffirming an ideal of women's domesticity, Thakur argued that women could be healthy only when they labored at home.

In the light of these debates which encouraged the housework as a form of exercise it is interesting to compare it with the description which outlines different ways to exercise, sports and games for the women readers in the same texts. Along with the description of games and exercises the illustrations to explain these are worth taking note of as these reflect how these writers were defining the dress code for sports and exercise.

The costumes vary from tight fitted sari, short tunic, shirts, short pants and frock as represented in these images. The discussion of the images seems crucial to understand the way in which sports clothing was represented and one need not conclude that these were the actual prevalent costume. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that some of these must have been used by the readers. Looking closely at the images we see that there were probably various costumes that were worn for games and sports. Most importantly, they create new taste in dressing especially designed for sports.

## **Conclusion**

Early-twentieth century books and journals focused on the idea of sports and in the process defined forms of new dressing for Indian women – elite and domestic middle class. Dress for western women was supposed to reflect comfort, mobility and femininity but for Indian women these ideals had to go along with a concern with identity and tradition.

We see how the popularity of sports was a slow process among women and so was the adoption of sports costume. Works on sport history in India have largely focused on men's sport and the question of women's involvement in sports during the colonial period is completely absent. This chapter hoped to fill this gap. We see that there was a

culture of native games and there was popularity of English sport too. However, professional sport for women gained importance very late. In the contemporary period as well we see that women's sport at the national level is an area that has been neglected and there has always been a lack of funding.

In the context of clothing, women were burdened with the responsibility of upholding ideals of modesty, identity and tradition. Women were motivated to build up their moral and physical strength to be healthy for the nation and to stay beautiful. So we see how even in the context of sport the burden of reform fell on the women. The anxiety of the reformer writers was reflected in the portrayal of rich women as lazy and sick: they wasted time in gossiping.

The focus on women's health and sports seems to be a significant development in this period. These were somewhat responsible for advocating removal of *purdah* as well. These vernacular texts acted as spokesperson for women's issues and offered a platform for debate on status of women. The very fact that these debates were taking place on a wider scale reveals that sport, dress and health acquired a significant place among the social issues that needed to be reformed. The question of sports clothing operated sometimes beyond the strictures of caste, class and religion; however, sometimes it operated within these realms. The space of sports was gendered as the reasons behind popularity of physical culture for men and women were different. The difference was extended to the realm of clothing as well.



## Conclusion

Most of the works on clothing in India have focussed on the impact of nationalism. The existing literature on dress in India has stressed on the changes that took place in the clothing of men and prominent political leaders. They show that dress reform was largely a male affair and very few changes took place in women's clothing. Women's clothing in India has escaped the historian's attention. There has also been a lack of focus on the questions of caste, class in studies on dress in India as well. The present study has attempted to fill this lacuna. Thus, it has explored the history of women's clothing in modern India. It seeks to understand why women and men from various classes, in particular elite, educated, middle class women made certain choices about their garment; how clothing styles were linked to issues of identity, modesty and modernity. Fashioning and presentation of a new self through the means of their dress was done by the Dalit community as well. The transforming sartorial styles had become important theme in public debates and was facilitated by factors such as changing consumption culture, modern inventions and sport.

Chapter I has focussed on the influence of nationalism on the clothing of Indian men and women. Through an extensive use of vernacular sources, I have looked at the way debates over clothing were driven by nationalist concerns. Within the domain of the national new ideals of fashion were worked out. I discuss how a debate over clothing styles and fashion allowed a critique of western civilisation. A gradual transition in clothing styles was made possible by mass production, and the use of new materials and designs. I have explored how new notions of taste and fashion were introduced by publicists, with essays appearing regularly in Hindi and English journals. These debates sought to define the Indian national by reflecting on what elements of western styles could be appropriately adopted and what needed to be rejected, and conversely what elements of Indian tradition ought to be celebrated. This chapter also focussed on dress reform movements which sought to define the appropriate dress for women, in the private as well as the public realm.

In Chapter II, the focus shifted to the study of notions of beauty as advertised by the newspapers and the journals. Clothing is not only what we wear but it is deeply embedded in the politics of appearance as well. In a way this chapter attempted to move away from the politics of nationalism and see how cultures of consumption changed the dressing styles and ideals of beauty. I have looked at a set of advertisements and images to explore their impact on the fashion and presenting one's body. I have argued that the advertisements generated ideas of a sacred, nationalised, erotic and conjugal beauty. In addition the advertisements projected gender disparities, in notions of beauty and clothing.

The relation between politics of caste and clothing has been explored in Chapter III. It studies the changes which took place among the Dalit men and women in the pre-independence period in different regions of India. This chapter sought to analyse the arguments on notions of purity and pollution given by the nationalist, religious and social leaders and the Dalits writers. The arguments for reform of clothing among the Dalits invoked notions of respect, individuality and the sense of a new self. Some of these reasons for reform of clothing were shared by other Indians as well. Whereas some were different like motivation for the adoption of western items of dress by the Dalits was different than from Hindu and Muslim communities. However, for the Dalits the process of change of clothing by adoption of other life styles was obstructed by the caste dictums imposed by the Hindus. There were strict restrictions on what Dalits could wear. They were forbidden from wearing certain items of clothing. Changes in the norms of clothing became issues of intense conflict.

Chapter IV looks at the variation of everyday clothing for different occasion in colonial India. New etiquettes of dress brought by the British officials influenced the everyday clothing. I show how clothing being occasion specific: newer norms developed specifying dress codes for in different occasions and different times. Along with this, this chapter sought to analyse the role of camera and sewing machine in changing styles of clothing, presenting oneself for the public and private consumption. Through the analysis of studio photographs and family albums I traced the significance of the camera in popularising the existing dressing styles and in explored that it was an important platform

for the Indian rulers, elites and middle class Indian men and women to present themselves. On the other hand, I trace the history of sewing machine and show how it impacted the social life of the Indian women and the Indian tailoring class. Most importantly, the chapter traced the new styles enabled by the sewing machines which was popularised by the journals through discussions on fashion and stitching.

Chapter V traced the culture of sport in India and explored how different print media defined dressing for various sport and exercises. It showed how different platforms discussed the appropriate clothes for sport. The chapter traced the difference in the attitude of the journals in projecting the sport and costume for elite women and for domestic middle class women in India. The Indian dresses for the women were redefined to suit the needs of a game. Western sport costume was introduced through various illustrations along with the discussions on Indian games. Unlike, the western countries where sport brought many changes in the feminine clothing, in India it did not take place at the similar scale. Nonetheless, the journals did create a taste for comfortable clothing which was enabled mobility and allowed easy movement especially for women who were working in offices, going to theatre and who were active sports women.

This study has emphasised that since the late-nineteenth century, efforts of the nationalists, reformers and women's movements in India led to several political, social and legal changes. As we know, the gradual spread of education, the impact of national movement, and greater currency of ideas about social reform allowed the entry of women into the mainstream media and politics. Schools and journals served as platforms where women's issues were discussed leading to increased self confidence among women. Along with these, the new consumption culture and ideals of modernity offered new opportunities to women from various classes and castes however at different levels.

The most crucial development which impacted dressing of the Indians was the arrival of the British officials when they brought in new styles in clothing and fashion. In the twentieth century most of these notions were popularised in the journals and tracts which circulated in the North India and other regions. The print and visual culture of India since the late-nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century has been analysed to study the sartorial changes of the Indian men and women. Changes in

clothing were taking place before this period as well, however because of the developments in print media and photography the discussions on clothing became part of the public sphere. Women's journals and journals issued by caste organisations voiced the concern of women and the 'untouchables'.

The discussions on women, her code of conduct and dressing were fraught with tensions. According to Francesca Orsini, such debates certainly did not propose equality. She points out that the values of 'Indian womanhood' - modesty, sexual chastity and moral purity, self sacrifice and nurturing - were conspicuously present in all the images examined, irrespective of whether they were created by female writers or male writers.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Suruchi Thapar takes note of the space provided by the Hindi Journals.<sup>2</sup> She says that the magazines illustrated the ambiguity women felt between the desire for individual self expression and reluctance to challenge existing role models and nationalist constructs.

I have shown how these ideals were the focus of writers and publicists. Women who did not symbolise these ideals were represented as 'bad' women. Women were not expected to associate economic independence with the neglect of domestic duties. The values of Indian womanhood were to be replicated in clothing as well. They could adopt certain western trends of fashion, but without losing their individuality, natural aesthetic sense and respectability. It was commonly emphasized that, unlike western women, Indian women were expected to look beautiful without vulgar exhibitionism, that is, without a display of the body that would attract the male gaze. Women were supposed to select those values which would facilitate the construction of their individual female identities as well as national identity. I have tried to show how twentieth-century nationalist and patriarchal voices redefined the roles of women and put forward the new ideal of Indian womanhood.

Along with the efforts of the nationalists and reformers the writers of the journals which were published in this period preoccupied themselves with the task of addressing the

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<sup>1</sup>Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, p.305.

<sup>2</sup>Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 237.

women's question. These journals introduced new styles of dressing, new forms of garments popular in London and Paris, ways of draping sari in different communities and subsequently they offered women alternative choices in matters of clothing. The fashion columns generated new tastes in clothing. Mass production of cloth and imitation of expensive materials allowed Indians to experiment with new materials, designs and styles. All these factors affected sartorial styles of men and women.

Thus, this study has emphasised that Indian men and women had a range of sartorial choices. To some women dressing conformed to patriarchal notions of tradition and modesty, while others challenged the prescribed dressing code for women by incorporating elements of fashion from the west, and yet others invented new styles, borrowing from trends in other states in India.

The dissertation has thus attempted to look at the different ways in which the question of fashion and dress was debated. It has explored how dress and fashion symbolised power, identity, and status. On the one hand dress served as an avenue through which women explored their sense of self, on the other, it became a site on which the identity of India itself was constituted.

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<i>Arogya Darpan</i>	-	Ahmedabad	1934	
<i>Baranwal Chandrika</i>	Triveni Prasad Baranwal	Kashi	1925-1931	
<i>Bharti</i>	-	Patna	1942	
<i>Brahaman Sarasva</i>	Shri Bharmadev Shastri	Kavyatirth	Itawa	1931-1934
<i>Chand</i>	-	Allahabad	1926-1937	
<i>Chaturvedi</i>	Radhakrishna	Agra, Kanpur, Lucknow	1918-1934	
<i>Gandhi</i>	Gandhi Garib Sangh	Kashi		
<i>Gandhi Marg</i>	Diwakar	-		
<i>Hindu Panch</i>	-	Calcutta	1922-1928	
<i>Kanya Manoranjan</i>	Omkar Nath Bajpaye	Prayag/ Allahabad	1913-1914	
<i>Kanya Sarasva</i>	Yashoda Devi	Prayag	1913-1914	
<i>Kamla</i>	-	Benaras	1939-1941	
<i>Lakshmi</i>	-	Gaya	1909-1915	
<i>Madhuri</i>	-	Lucknow	1924-1940	
<i>Mahila</i>	-	Calcutta	1935-1940	
<i>Manorama</i>	-	Allahabad	1926-1929	
<i>Maryada</i>	-	Allahabad	1915-1920	
<i>Jat Pat Todak</i>	Kaviraj Krishna Chandar		1928-1929	
<i>Jayswal Yuwak</i>	Baijnath Singh Vinod	Agra, Patna	1936-1934	
<i>Jyoti</i>	-	Lahore	1920-1930	
<i>Khandelwal Sandesh</i>	-		1934	
<i>Khandelwal Mahasabha Bandhu</i>	Hariram Gupta	Delhi	1937-1940	
<i>Khandelwal Hitaishi</i>	-	Agra	1914-1920	
<i>Nok Jhok</i>	Rajkumar	Agra	1939-1940	
<i>Manorama</i>	-	Prayag	1924-1928	
<i>Mahila</i>	-	Ajmer	1931	
<i>Mahila</i>	-	Calcutta	1938	
<i>Mathur Vaishya Hitaishi</i>	Shyam Sunderlal Gupt	Kanpur	1940-1942	
<i>Lakshmi</i>	-	Gaya	1906-1921	
<i>Saheli</i>	-	Allahabad	1930-1935	

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