

PARI DHANIKA

An Air-India Collection of Indian Costumes

INTRODUCTION

Air-India was one of the first commercial organisations committed to preserve our heritage. As a prominent patron of the Arts, Air-India has built over a period of forty years, an invaluable Collection which includes a wide range of classical and contemporary art and traditional handicrafts.

Items from the Collection are displayed at our offices, and are often reproduced on our publicity material to give a distinct Indian identity.

A travelling exhibition of Indian costumes, was originally conceived by Air-India in the 1970s, to reveal to the world another important facet of India's heritage — the craft of the textile weaver and the related arts of embroidery and jewellery.

This exhibition is unique as it represents styles of dress that are seen not only in museums, but as worn by the people in India today.

This Collection crosses geographical, historical, class and religious borders. It reflects clearly the diversity of the culture and the peoples of India.

Initially named 'Sringer', meaning 'adornment', the exhibition was shown at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., and the Commonwealth Institute, London. It also travelled to Australia, Italy, the USA & Canada in the 70's and 80's.

As part of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations, Air-India, with the assistance of Roshan Kalapesi, has refurbished and updated this Collection.

The Exhibition is now called 'Paridhanika', which means, 'that which is worn', and consists of sixty five costumes, grouped into seven sections, representing every Indian State and Union Territory.

FIRDAUSI J. JUSSAWALLA

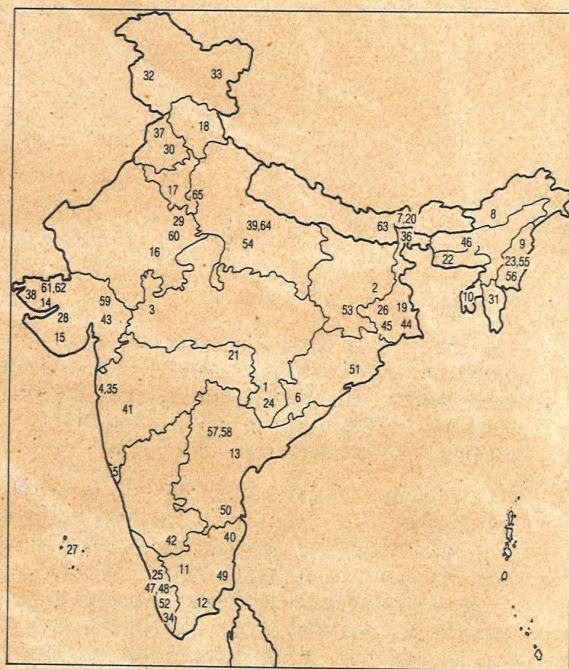
ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Of the many ways in which one could make a collection of the clothing worn by men and women of India, I decided to base the selection purely on design. Hence, each exhibit is chosen for its distinct style, either in its cut, or in the manner of its drape. However, they have been regrouped for reasons of display.

Every state is represented, but it has not been possible to include each of the historical regions, nor even to represent the varied types of people of the country. The most important textiles and embroideries are shown, and wherever possible, the important crafts as well.

Lastly, each exhibit has been acquired from the place where it is worn, at times literally "off-the-back" of the wearer. With exceptions, the costumes are of the period when the country gained its Independence, and consequently, difficult to find today, a half-century later.

Roshan Kalapesi



The Costumes on display are numbered to correspond with their place of origin (above). Please use these reference numbers to consult the descriptive notes which follow.

OF ANCIENT CULTURES

The word 'tribal' really does not apply to our people of 'ancient cultures'. They are not a 'primitive' people without a historical past. Hence, they are called 'adivasi', a word that means "inhabitants since the beginning..."

The descendants of those who witnessed the dawn of our civilization, ruled our country till the time their kingdoms were wrested from them. They sought refuge in isolated pockets of hill country and forests.

They remained there for centuries, outside the mainstream, their culture arrested and the people forgotten. However, we know of their "sense of nationhood", that they had evolved their own social and political systems, and stern moral codes which laid great stress on personal integrity and social responsibility. With their innate sense of artistry and diligent craftsmanship they have enriched their world and ours.

Most adivasi are classified as Proto-Austroloids and Mongoloids, but there are a few groups of Negritos and Nordics as well.

1

The Gond, a major group of the Dravidian family, are perhaps the most important, historically, of the non-Aryan forest dwellers. They ruled the area of central India till the coming of the Mughals. Later, with the rise of the Marathas they were driven away even further.

A Gond woman's above-the-knee 'sari' can be worn with the upper end also wrapped around the hips, leaving the torso bare. Muria Gond girls wear few ornaments, more often they tuck a flower behind the ear. The small wooden combs in her hair have been carved and gifted to her by admirers. Yet, when she decides to marry, all combs other than the ones given by her husband-to-be, are returned.

The anthropologist Verrier Elwin, who for many years lived among our adivasi wrote, "It is not altogether an advance that the fresh fragrant hibiscus in the hair or behind the ear should have yielded to heavy ornaments of brass, and silver!"

2

Of very ancient lineage too, the Santhal like the Gond and Bhil, fled to the hills, but later returned to live on the plains of present day Bengal, Orissa and Bihar.

Like all ancient peoples the Santhal too believe that in the beginning there was only water. Then 'Thakur Jiu', God, created animals. "First the aquatic crab, crocodile, whale, alligator, tortoise...." followed by land animals from whom ultimately evolved Man.

Her dress is a cotton sari also wrapped around the hips but worn just below the knees. Though fond of ornaments, she can mostly afford only the cheaper metals, and imaginatively uses flowers, feathers and shells to decorate herself.

3

'Bhil' is the Dravidian word for 'bow', the characteristic weapon of one of our ancient peoples, possibly pre-Dravidian. According to legend, Valmiki, author of the epic "Ramayana", was himself a Bhil. They too escaped to the mountains of central and western India, but soon returned to the rocky lowlands of present day Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Wearing a brief loin-cloth and a 'feta' or head-wrap, and always bare-footed, he wraps himself in a cotton 'chaddar' or sheet, to keep warm during the cold nights.

Extremely fleet of foot he races through the forest, jingling a special iron rod meant to keep animals away. Yet, as the hunter, he stealthily stalks his prey, and swiftly uses his bow and arrow. For recreation he may play a bamboo flute.

4,5

The ancestry of the Koli, especially the sea-faring Son Koli, is hard to trace, though they could have been Bhil. Occidental books describe them as "bloody and untameable plunderers, pirates of the sea", but we know them today as our fisherfolk.

Mooring their boats in inlets and bays along the west coast right down to Goa, they are among the earliest settlers of Bombay, when the 'city' was a group of seven marshy islands. A temple built on one of these islands, dedicated to their Goddess 'Mumba' gave the city its name 'Mumbai', spelt 'Bombay' in English.

The women wear a short 'Kashta' sari wrapped around the hips with the pleated front drawn between the legs and tucked at the waist in the back. The short, fitted bodice or 'choli', is knotted attractively in the front.

The square loin-cloth worn by men, is folded diagonally and tied with a string at the waist. The outer corner falls in front like an apron, while the inner one is drawn between the legs, and tucked at the waist in the back. Usually bare-topped, the jacket and red cap are of wool, and worn on cold nights at sea.

6

The language and culture of the somewhat "wild and rugged Bondo" links them to that large Proto-Austroloid group who had an advanced culture even in Neolithic times.

The briefest in women's wear, this striped hip-cloth, a mere hand-span wide, is woven from 'Kerang' fibre. Barely covering the hips, it is secured at the waist now by a metal chain. There is no upper garment instead a deep cascade of beads covers the bosom, while the neck rises from a pile of stiff alloy-metal necklets. The shaven head is bound with strips of palm leaves and beaded head-bands. Though the ears are pierced at three points, she may wear only one pair of earrings. Alloy-metal bangles cover her fore-arms. Rings and anklets are rarely used.

7

The Lepcha are a pre-historic animist people, living in villages of the Himalaya foothills. They call themselves 'Rongtul' or 'Mutlanchi', which translates as "dearest people of mother earth". Tibetans know them as ravine folk, 'Rangpa', while the Nepalis who dominate Sikkim, call them 'Lapche', submissive ones, as they are timid. Loving the solitude of their forest, most of them live as farmers, close to nature.

Their shawl, 'paji', of striped cotton, is worn knee-high, pinned at the shoulder. Only while hunting do they wear on the left side, a wooden guard with a stringed bow and a little box containing 'poison'. Their long scanty hair is worn braided, except when appearing before their elders.

8

When the mountain peaks of the easternmost range in Arunachal Pradesh blush a soft pink, it can be said that the sun has risen in India. Aptly called "the land of dawn-lit mountains", the state shelters many ancient people and their cultures.

The Apa Tani wear black jackets with an all-over pattern in white diamonds with a few orange stripes. The nether garment is a narrow strip of material looped over a cane waist-band, which once was very intricate in design.

Men and women wear their hair in a knot on the forehead, secured by a bamboo pin. The finely woven cane cap has a special loop to accommodate this knot.

9

The word 'Naga' in the Cachar language, means 'young warrior'. In the past, young boys were part of a significant and vital institution called a 'Morung', where each generation was trained and moulded to face the future. From the age of six the youth learnt not only to serve, to build, to defend but also to sing and dance. Kamaldevi Chattopadhyay wrote, "It was inevitable that Baptist missionaries who came here in 1881, would ban what they called 'heathen' institutes, without trying to understand its finer implications for society. A loss which has become even more apparent today."

All that they wear is a simple loin-cloth and a shawl. This woollen shawl woven by the womenfolk, has a hand-painted panel depicting the exploits of the wearer, who is a warrior. A hat, a Dao belt and ornaments made from wood, leather, cane and decorated with animal teeth, red-goat hair and black human hair, are used only for special occasions.

10

Fiercely independent in spirit, the Tripuri are of Mongolian origin whose ancestors migrated to this region in ancient times.

The Riang are skilled weavers. Every woman works daily at her own 'loin-loom', to keep her family well-clad. The men, however, weave excellent cane and bamboo baskets and furniture.

Once she wore only the half-metre wide 'panchara' a hip-wrap, but now, she covers her bosom with a 'riha', — a breast-band. The first 'riha' is said to have been woven in the 13th century by Queen Jayantha-Raja-Kumari, and worn only by royal women. Today, every woman, under her well-arranged rows of silver bead and coin necklaces, wears the 'riha'. Of her ornaments, the helix and the plug-lobe-earrings are distinctive, but the wide silver amulets and wristlets are simple in design.

OF VILLAGES

History invariably has by-passed our villages. Villagers saw or met only the agents of their rulers who came either to buy their produce, or to collect their taxes.

Conquerors too, eager for commerce, established their courts, their banks, their factories and offices only in the cities. Roads and railways linked city to city, or at most city to 'hill-station', built to escape the scorching city summers.

Four out of every five Indians live in rural India. This vast agrarian population includes cattle, sheep and goat herdsman, as well as weavers and craftsmen. New roads to the interior have ended their isolation, but also brought an onslaught of urban culture that is changing the aesthetics of a people known for their sensitivity to beauty of line, and originality of form and colour. It is imperative to find ways to prevent this living culture from being relegated to museums.

11

While many theories are advanced about the origins of the Toda of the Nilgiri Hills, if we judge by their appearance alone, they must be descendants of the ancient Romans.

Draped over one shoulder, the toga-like 'Puthkuli' is embroidered between the woven red stripes of the front panel. The hair style too is Roman — thick ringlets worn shoulder-length or longer. However, under the Puthkuli, she wears a 'dhoti'.

Toda culture is akin to that of the local Malbari people, and their religion too is close to Hinduism. However, being a pastoral community, the dairyman is the priest, and the dairy the temple, which unfortunately is forbidden territory for women.

12

The Emperors of Greece and Rome traded with ancient Madurai, a cultural centre and the capital of the Pandya rulers. As the general trend for people from the villages is to go to the cities in search of a better life, the Nadaar people have come in large numbers to live in the city of Madurai.

Her ankle-length sari is draped to form a fan at the waist. Distortion of the body is extinct in India. However, the Nadaar still enlarge their pierced ear lobes by inserting rolled palm leaves, in increasing numbers at intervals, till they are able to wear several 'pambadams' or heavy earrings. Eventually, this weight elongates the lobes till they even touch the shoulders.

14, 15

The closely knit pastoral people of Kutch, especially the Rabari, Ahir and Kanbi farmers, are noted for their most characteristic chain stitch embroidery or 'ari-work', commonly called Kutchi embroidery. A profusion of colours and shiny 'abla' used on the dress of the people and trappings of animals, contrast strongly with the monotonous of the stark desert landscape.

Only children and young women wear vivid colours, the older women, perhaps dictated to by a shortage of water, wear black. A material woven from cotton and silk yarn called Mushroo is used to make the girl's 'gagra'. The skirt border and the blouse 'kapda', is embroidered in 'ari-work'. The blouse is backless like her mother's. She need not wear an 'odhna' at this age, but if worn it is usually of coloured silk.

The tall Ahir are said to have migrated to this country from ancient Syria, but retain no links with that country. The boy wears baggy pants called 'vanjani', and a jacket or 'kediya'. The distinctive embroidered white bead and shell ornaments he wears as a child are also worn by young girls.

13

They belong to the world family of gypsies. Camp followers of the armies of Asaf Khan in the 16th century, they came to the Deccan Plateau and settled in the Banjar Hills. Hence, in Hyderabad, they are called Banjaras.

Their particular ornament is two heavy silver, bell-shaped pieces attached to the ends of a chain, which is strung over the head and looped through the hair over the ears. The necklaces and rings are made of silver coins, the amulets trimmed with 'cowries' — shells. Many bangles, once of ivory, cover the fore-arms. Brass rings on every toe and brass anklets are also worn.

Usually the dress is made of red or green cotton, with horizontal appliqued bands, embroidered with pieces of reflective mica or 'abla'. The backless bodice has strings at the side seams which tie across the back. The head-cloth or 'odhni', is embroidered as well.

16

This migrant group lives in both Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Rabari cowherd, who brings milk to the cities of Gujarat, wears a sleeveless embroidered waistcoat with a coloured dhoti. However, in Rajasthan, one sees the Rabari at fairs like Pushkar, wearing a white dhoti and an 'Angarkhu', a hip-length tunic.

Both wear turbans, but the young prefer red or saffron colours, while elders only wear white. Their chain earrings are of silver or gold. The footwear is heavy, strong and very essential, as it is not possible to walk barefoot on the hot desert sand with its thorny Bawal bushes.

17

Of Aryan stock, the Jat migrated and settled in present day Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and also in Pakistan. They may be Muslim, Sikh or Hindu, but they all wear 'gagras' — full gathered skirts. However, it is the style of the upper garment, as well as the print design of the material, which differs and indicates the region they come from. The multi-gored gagra sways seductively as they walk, and in folk literature is called the 'ghera ghummale', which when translated means, 'spaciously sinuous'.

In the past the woman has been her husband's "bank", as his profits were used to buy silver ornaments, and worn on her neck, ears, nose, forehead, arms, fingers, ankles and toes. With banks opening in our villages today, this practice is dwindling. The ornaments now are no longer as heavy nor worn in such profusion, as in the past.



18

The serene apple-growing valley of Kulu of present times was for ages the channel through which ebbed and flowed people living to the north of India.

These hill shepherds wear a white woollen 'Chollu', a many-gored coat, with its under-arm panels gathered into the cummerbund. In olden times they wound a very long, twisted rope at the waist, readily available to rescue lost sheep.

The use of straw footwear too is confined to women. Most men wear city-made leather shoes. The cap is distinctive, as is the soft woollen shawl.

19

The Bengali village of Dhoniakali in the Hoogly district, is the home of several families of weavers. The sari worn here is a 'Dhoniakali'. Of white cotton, it has a traditional red border. Draped in a Bengali style, the household keys are knotted at one corner of the 'pallav' the breadth-wise border, thrown over the left shoulder. Only in this century has the village woman begun to wear the brief, close-fitting blouse, the 'choli'. The ornaments that must be worn are bangles of ivory, iron and gold, as well as a gold chain. At dawn, on auspicious days and certain other occasions, she can be seen blowing a conch to announce the day or to welcome guests.

20

The British rulers of India in 1860 encouraged the King of Sikkim to grant a lease of land to some Nepali traders. They in turn brought in agrarian Nepalis, who introduced the terraced system of cultivation in Sikkim. Large tracts of hilly terrain brought under cultivation began to yield their most important cash crop — cardamom.

Today eighty per cent of the population of Sikkim are orthodox Hindu. Nepalis wear a double-breasted coat, the 'chow bandi', which fits snugly upto the waist, and is worn over a narrow pair of pants. Every Nepali carries a sharp knife, the 'kukri', in a leather scabbard, which he uses skilfully.

21

The folk people of Maharashtra once anxiously awaited the story-teller, the 'Vasudeva', to come to their village. He is replaced today by urban forms of entertainment.

With a 'chipla' in the left hand and a 'tal' in the right, the Vasudeva dances and sings as he walks barefoot, from village to village. The easily recognized, conical

peacock-feather cap is worn over his own turban. Usually he dresses in a kurta and dhoti, where the lower edge of the front pleats is drawn between the legs and secured at the waist in the back, forming a 'draped' pant. He performs in a knee-length coat 'angarkha', with 'churi' sleeves neatly gathered from elbow to wrists. A folded white cotton shawl is thrown over his shoulders. A red cummerbund, and two sandalwood 'malas' — necklaces, are added and he is ready to perform.

22

The Khasi Hills once received the heaviest rainfall in the world, especially in Cherapunji. People here built homes well above the ground, on stilts to avoid the damp.

The old Khasi saying: "From the woman, springs the clan", and "boys are temporary inmates, as they are lost when they marry" indicates that women led the clans. The husband, considered only a 'Shong Kha', a begetter, could not participate in family ceremonies. With the introduction of Christianity, their roles have changed. Westernisation has set in culturally too as Scots and Welsh names have been adopted. Materials like floral prints, ginghams and plaids have replaced the old weaves and designs, but many still retain the traditional style of dress.

23

Hundreds gather in the popular colourful market place of Sadar Bazaar in Imphal, where there is a brisk trade in textiles and basketry. However, the Manipuri are best known for their great tradition of dance and theatre.

The striped sarong woven on a narrow loom, has a decorative border in the 'akaibi' design of the lotus and the bees. The fine white cotton, especially starched stole, is draped over the head and shoulders. The attractive filigree necklace is made by twisting and shaping a continuous length of wire, and sealing it at definite points. The delicate earrings are set with their favourite stone, the ruby.

OF FOLK AND RITUAL DANCE

In rural India singing and dancing is recreational, festive or ritual, and forms part of daily life.

As dusk falls, villagers seek each other to discuss their day, smoke their pipes or savour their drink. The young also gather to chatter or to sing and dance in their daily wear. But there are the festive days or special occasions for which the dress is enhanced by adding headwear and ornaments.

The Persian poet Rumi wrote: "Whosoever knoweth the power of the dance, dwelleth in God." Through the centuries the ritual dancers have imaginatively enhanced their presentations and elaborated their costumes. Their dance deteriorates, however, on urban stages, for it takes the understanding and natural response of a rural audience to inspire the dancer to give his best.

24

In the very heart of India is Bastar, the home of the Gond, noted for its residential 'learning institutes', the 'Ghotuls'. Here boys and girls sleep in strictly supervised and separate dormitories, but this aspect has often been misrepresented.

One favourite subject at the Ghotul is the dance. Noted for their movements depicting animals and birds, the Maria Gond dances the 'Gaur' Bison dance. His turban is fitted with bison horns, tiger claws and cowries. Hollow metal anklets filled with pebbles, add sound to the strong beat of his drum, which is made from a hollowed-out tree-trunk.

25

In rural Kerala, there are several Bhagavati temples built by the animist Parayan. These temple courtyards on special days, become arenas for dance spectacles. This is usually a re-enactment of the defeat and killing of the demon Darika by a triumphant goddess Bhadrakali. It is performed by thirty to fifty 'people-keepers' of the shrine, disguised as various demons and evil spirits. The cotton 'lungi' is now covered by coloured cotton frills replacing the fronds and leaves used earlier. Also worn is an iron belt with bells and metal anklets. Paints and metal breast-pieces, a necklet, nose and ear plates cover his body and face. The circular head-dress has peacock feathers at the back. Dried grass is tied to the limbs just above the joints.

The Lava is their drum dance. The dress, with its curious cap and cross-straps worn on the bare chest, can be compared to none other. Cotton pants, under a short white hip wrap and a fringed, black, triangular waist-cloth, complete this dress.

26

In Puruliya village certain men take special training for their mask dance, the folk form of Chhau — which recreates stories from the Indian epics. This costume of the character 'Ravana', is styled to allow the vigorous body movements of bold steps, jumps, leaps or spins common to the 'Tandava' form of the dance. The black velvet dress has silver zari embroidery. The wide, ten-headed papier mache mask, several wooden hands and gungroos on the feet complete the dress.

28

The historically ancient part of North Gujarat has had successive waves of settlers who are Greek, Bactrian, Scythian, Arab, Pathari, Mughal, European and African. The 'Bharwads' are shepherds, who came to India around the 8th century and have now turned to agriculture.

They wear an attractive smock, a 'kediya' with long, push-up sleeves. The 'chorno' or pants, are fitted below but baggy above the knee and secured by a belt or a cummerbund. Gold helix-plugs peep from under his turban. The 'joda' — footwear, of hard, country leather are cast off, as dancers energetically whirl and leap, while striking 'dandiya's', sticks of metal or wood to punctuate the beat of the music.

27

Forming part of the Indian Union are two groups of islands. The first, the bay islands of Andaman and Nicobar are off the East coast. They are a gleaming string of three hundred emerald isles. Its dangerously dwindling indigenous population can trace their ancestry to Paleolithic times. They live mostly in the nude, or at the most wear imaginative and decorative items without definite shape or form. The second group is the Lakshadweep off the West coast — thirty-six lush green islands, outlined by creamy white sandy shores. The most important one of the ten islands that are inhabited is the Minicoy, with its 'ancient people' whose language is called Mahal, written in the Divechi script.

29

Rajasthani women are noted for their vigorous dance. With wide skirts flaring and swirling, they spin around, in their favourite dance, the 'Ghoomer'. In contrast the 'Panihari' is danced with earthen pots balanced on a beaded 'edhoni' on the head, making it necessary to have smooth footwork, with greater emphasis on fluid arm movements.

By tradition, the dress is of printed cotton in shades of blue or green, as dictated by the season. Her gored skirt, the 'gagra' and fitted 'kanchli' over which is worn the sleeveless 'kurti', are similar to the style worn by the royal women. The difference lies in the richness of the material and its ornamentation.

30

Punjabi men often wear the lungi-like 'tamba', usually of checked cotton, under a 'kurta', a shirt, and a waistcoat embroidered with mother-of-pearl buttons.

This vigorous harvest dance necessitates that the turban be tied down. Seeing the gold and silver embroidery on the dress of others who come to city festivals influences him now to embroider his own outfit as well.

A gold bead necklace, a steel bangle which all Sikhs must wear and 'gungroos', or bells, tied to one ankle complete the dress. He may carry in his hand a percussion instrument — the 'chimta' or the wooden 'kathoo'.

PAGDIS

Caps and hats of every kind are worn by both men and women the world over, but the tradition of wearing a precisely draped turban or pagdi, has lasted the longest in India.

By the 5th century women had discarded the heavier turban, for the lighter shawl and 'odhna' to cover the head. The making of pagdis for men however, was to turn into a form of art. Wooden blocks or actual shapes of a wearer's head, carved in wood, were used by professional 'drapers' called in to style and drape the pagdis. Pagdis, usually wrapped in cloth were being stored in cupboards, however, hat boxes made from metal, or wood that are elaborately painted or fully inlaid with ivory chips, or decorated in many other ways were popular too.

At the turn of this century, the most elaborate pagdi was worn by the Mir of Hyderabad, using seventy-three metres of the sheerest gauze. Even though occidental influences were making men turn out in Western-style suits, many still wore their pagdi with their suits.

The first group of turbans are from our "Towns and Cities". Commonly worn in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The man's headwear either indicates the region he comes from or the religion he professes or the profession he follows.

In the second group we see turbans of "The Royal Past" as used by stage and film actors; we see them in historical productions, in Marathi, Bengali, English, Hindi or one of the regional languages. The material draped may not be as expensive as in the original pagdi and the ornaments fake, but the style and design of each pagdi is usually authentic.

31

Most migrants who crossed our Eastern borders, came from north-east Asia, but the Lushai of Mizoram are from the Chin Hills of Burma. An untranslatable term, "Thawangaihua" — an ancient code, is still followed by the Mizos. It means "to be hospitable, kind, unselfish and helpful to all men". Though Christian now, they often continue to call God by the name their ancestors used — 'Pathain'.

The dress is a 'puanchei', a lungi, worn with the 'kawarchei', a long-sleeved blouse in a checked material woven with cotton and wool yarn. While dancing, a cane head-band decorated with feathers and 'cowries' or shells, is added.

The dance requires quick nimble steps in-between and over, with one or more pairs of bamboos being clapped to the rhythm of the music of singing, by those squatting on the ground.

OF TOWNS AND CITIES

It still is possible in the rural areas to find groups of people who are dressed identically. This does not happen in our towns and cities, as those who live in it are drawn from many regions, and differ by race, religion, language and culture.

Today, however, another form of uniformity is appearing. Most men living in towns and cities, as well as in some of our villages, wish to wear the 'uniform' shirt and pant. It is the woman who still persists with the traditional dress.

Yet, eventually, as it has happened in many other Asian countries, the 'old' may give way to the sweeping tide of the 'new' as urbanisation proliferates.

32, 33

Proud to be Kashmiri, both Muslims and Hindus have lived in such amity that they have shared many traditions, even dressing in an almost identical manner.

From the Middle-East to the Far East, the pant has never been a purely "male" garment. The Kashmiri woman wears the 'salwar' — pant, and a shirt the 'pheran', which has a typical Sassanian embroidered-neckline and square armholes. Two heavy bell-shaped 'jumkhas', or bunches of rings, on the ends of a chain, hang from the head in line with the ears. Called 'Kaan-awaz' — sounds to the ear, they are an ornament typical of this region.

To keep warm they carry a 'kangri' an earthen pot filled with live embers of coal covered with wood ash. The loops of its cane carrier are used to bind to the waist, under the 'pheran'. Kashmiris live in the valley and plains of the state. Another group, the Ladakhi people reside in Kashmir's beautiful but barren snow-deserts, cut off from the world during its winters. They are Buddhist with a culture akin to the Tibetan.

Dark coloured robes are worn, to best absorb the heat of the sun. This aristocratic woman wears a distinctive hat trimmed with fur, with a sweeping 'tail' encrusted with turquoise stones. Semi-precious stones are also used to make their ornaments. Boots are necessary, and used throughout the year.

34

In the first century after Christ, his disciple St. Thomas preached on the Malabar Coast. Legend holds that he converted seven Brahmin families at the time. This began the story of Christianity in India. Though they called themselves Syrian Christians, there was no Christian influence in their way of dressing. It is the later Christians, exposed to western culture by missionaries from Europe and America, who change their dress style.

The woman usually wears a white cotton lungi — 'mundu', with a fan-like drape at the waist, and a blouse of a set pattern — a 'Chatta'. When stepping out of the house a 'chaddar' — 'kavani' is draped over the body. The ornaments are of gold and similar to those worn by Hindus of the region. The exception is a tiny pendant on a chain, the 'minnu', engraved with the double-cross of the Orthodox Church.

35

In the 9th century Persia, the followers of the religion founded by Zarathushtra, had to escape. They went to Europe, North India and China but did not survive. A thousand years ago another group of Zoroastrian priests and their families, came by sea to Gujarat. Generously given refuge and the freedom of worship by the local Raja Jadi Rana, it ensured the survival of that religion.

First called 'Parasika' in Sanskrit, they are the present day 'Parsees' a minute community concentrated in Bombay.

Their priests still wear the traditional Persian dress of fine white cottons. Their 'jama', an ankle-length coat of Persian design, is influenced by the Rajput 'jama', hence the original ties — 'kus', on the left side are moved to the right. Under it he wears a 'lehga' a loose pyjama, a kurta-like 'sudra' with a waist-cord, the 'kusti', which is used to pray with.

A pagdi, a 'pichori' — cummberbund, and 'joda' — footwear, complete his dress. Occasionally he carries a shawl in wool or silk.

36

The town of Darjeeling, in North Bengal, is the home of some of the conquerors of Mount Everest. One finds that besides the ancient Lepcha, there is also a large community of people from Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal, many of whom are Sherpa mountaineers.

The Buddhist woman wears a silk blouse under a redesigned sleeveless, Sikkimese dress, called the 'bakku'. On the striped apron worn only by married women, hangs a bunch of silver 'orifice' cleaners. Typical knee-high embroidered-felt boots with thick leather soles are worn, and at times the traditional fur-trimmed hat. Her turquoise-studded silver amulet always contains a prayer scroll. When she prays, she rotates her silver prayer-wheel.

37

Sikhism was promulgated in the 15th century by Guru Nanak, as a reaction to reform certain aspects of Hinduism. He preached that there was but one God and sought the abolishment of idols and the caste system. However, there still remain many common practices between the two religions.

When a girl-child is born, the women of the family start embroidering beautiful 'phulkari' shawls which are to be given to her at the time of marriage.

Among her bridal finery are a 'kurta', a 'salwar' and a 'dupatta' — head-cloth, all decorated with 'gota-work' or gold-braid embroidery. Her ornaments are of gold or silver except for the ivory bangles, to which are tied several pairs of bell-shaped gold or silver 'kalidas' that are gifted to her.

38

Neighbouring Arabs visited India ever since shipping began. However, only after the 8th century is there evidence of small Muslim settlements on our Eastern shores, from Kutch to Kerala. The Moplahs of Malabar, however, are among the early Indian converts to Islam.

India has the second largest population of Muslims in the world, second only to Indonesia.

The woman's dress is of red silk that is finely tie-dyed in black. The upper garment, called the 'aabho', is worn over a loose 'salwar' and covering her head is an 'odhna'. Worn on special occasions, this dress is embroidered in heavy zari gold threads, at the neck, the 'salwar'-cuffs and the 'odhna'.

39

Lucknow is a historical city, associated traditionally with great musicians, singers and dancers. The patrons were landed gentry who generously spent time on cultural pursuits.

The finely embroidered cotton 'angarkha' may be worn over a white cotton 'kurta' and 'churidar' or with Aligarh pyjamas. The embroidery for which Lucknow is noted, is called 'chikankari'. As it is worked on the reverse side, it appears as a 'shadow' on the right side. He wears the typical Nagra on his feet and also an embroidered white cotton cap.

40

Everywhere in the world, except in India, the draped dress has given way to the stitched garment. Our weavers may take credit for that. South India still has many old and renowned weaving centres for both cotton and silk handloom fabrics. This sari is woven in the silk centre of Kanchipuram. On its golden 'pallav', are old Sanskrit motifs — the double-headed eagle 'Gandbherunde', used by early Aryans. This eagle, as well as the swastika in reverse, were adopted as emblems by the Nazis in Germany, to lay claim to an Aryan ancestry.

Only in four states in India — Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, do women wear the 'kashta' sari. In this drape, material is drawn between the legs from the front pleats and tucked in at the back-waist to form a 'draped-pant'. Ayyangar women wear nine-metre-long saris, but the 'pallav' end covers the 'kashta', which is not visible, as in the Maharashtrian style of drape.

42

Some say the Coorg people are descendants of the Aryans from the Indus Valley. Others say that they are descendants of the Scythian who formed a part of Alexander's armies.

The women drape their sari unlike others, with the pleats at the back, and the 'pallav' drawn around and over one shoulder. Now, a fitted blouse, a 'choli' and a scarf is also worn. The jewellery is similar to that of the women of Malabar.

They have no tradition of weaving. Their saris can come from any major weaving centre, like Kanchipuram and Varanasi. This 'sari' however, is a 'Tanchoi' a brocade weave brought to Gujarat from China by three 'Tan' brothers named 'Chhoi' in the 19th century. Later this technique was taught to the weavers of Varanasi, which now produces our best brocades.

44

In India, groups of weavers make it a 'family' tradition to weave saris in a particular design. In the district of Bankura, the tradition is to weave the 'Baluchar'. The word itself means "the sandy banks of the river". The distinctive feature of the 'pallav' is a central rectangle, having different 'mango' motifs. This is surrounded by figures, or scenes from the Hindu epics, or figures of Nawabs or Rajas, or at times, a contemporary scene. To portray the arrival of the first train in India, in the 19th century, this sari depicts a scene of English couples sitting in railway compartments.

The Bengali style of wearing the sari is the one most commonly used today, whether the woman is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or Parsi.

41

This traditional silk sari being woven in Paithan is called a 'Paithani'. Usually eight metres long, it can be several metres longer, with the excessive front pleats trailing between the legs. A shorter sari clings to the thighs, and is more pant-like, making it easy to ride, to climb mountains or to tackle any kind of work in the fields or at home.

The designs of her gold ornaments are traditional, and made at the old ornament-making centre of Kolhapur. Of particular interest are the amulet and the belt, woven from fine gilded silver wire. The mesh gives flexibility to the ornament, as it can increase or decrease in size.

The well-known 'chappals' crafted in Kolhapur, and called 'Kolhapuri', are designed to give special support to the feet.

43

The 'Patola' is a wedding sari of a community in Gujarat, which has an intricate weaving process. The threads of both the warp and the weft are tie-dyed at definite intervals in a set pattern. Only when these threads are woven together, does the pattern emerge. Usually geometric in design, there could be motifs at regular intervals as well. This laborious double-ikkat weave originated in the 4th century in Patan. In Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, we have the single 'ikkat' weave, with only the warp thread tie-dyed in the pattern. Early traders popularised the design in Japan, where today they are computerised and printed by machinery.

Gujarati girls often wear a shorter sari, partly exposing their embroidered under-skirt the 'chanyo'. Their backless choli — 'katori', is cut in such a manner, that it also serves as a foundation garment.

45

To many, Bengal is Calcutta, once the second largest city in the world. The capital of India in the early days of the British Raj before New Delhi was built, currently it is "The City of Joy" and best known abroad as the home of our Mother Theresa and her Sisters of Mercy.

The urban Bengali, faithful to his traditional culture, for the wedding ceremony, wears the sculpted 'shola pith' head-dress — the 'topar'. The bride wears a diadem, the groom's 'topar' is conical. The lower edge of the front pleats are frilled specially, by moulding the moistened edge of the dhoti around the seed of a particular fruit. The footwear, 'mojris', are of embroidered muga 'silk'. The 'darpan' or metal spoon, is carried in his right hand and used during the wedding ceremony, to cast incense into the 'agni' — the ritual flame.

OF CLASSICAL DANCES

The anonymous classic "Natya Shastra" is an enthralling study in the science of dramatology, attributed to the great Muni Bharata, who lived about 2000 years ago. It has chapters on every performing art, besides one on costumes and another on make-up.

Chapter IV of the book deals with dance, and has been the inspiration for creating the classical dances of India. Later, gurus in praise of Bharata decreed that a dance should contain 'BHava' mood, 'Raga' melody and 'Tala' or rhythm.

47, 48

Stories from the great epics, the "Mahabharata" and "Ramayana", are the themes for the spectacular Kathakali ballet. Danced to the pulsating and vigorous rhythms of the Chendu and Mandalam, it is the singers who hold the performance together. There are no sets or properties, just a brightly lit arena — the courtyard of a temple which becomes the stage. The cast is dramatically introduced using a curtain. This 'curtain look' is called Tiranoku.

The numerous characters are visually differentiated by the elaborate, symbolic head-gear and distinctive make-up. The dress itself consists of a wide billowing, layered skirt and a jacket. The ornaments, carved from light-wood, are covered with 'gold leaf' and studded with coloured stones, peacock quills, pith, glass bangle bits and tufted wool. Five elongated silver nails are worn on the fingers of the left hand by the character playing Krishna.

Performed only by men, this is essayed only after they have had years of physical training, rigid discipline, meditation on the theme, as well as a study of music and the art of mime. The dancer must depict a gamut of human emotions and emotional conflicts, with facile movements of the eyes and facial muscles. As in folk dancing, movements depicting birds and animals are most expressive in this dance form.

46

Assam was once a large state bordering China, Tibet and Burma. It was the 'gateway to India'; had established trade centres and was well known for its culture, craftsmanship and wildlife.

Then Assam, after Independence, was regrouped into seven states, often referred to as "the Seven Sisters". Today it contributes greatly to our economy through tea plantations and oil refineries.

The woman of Assam wears a 'mekhala', a lungi, and a 'chaddar' draped as a half-sari, over a blouse which has replaced the old bosom wrap — the 'riha'. Their special ornaments are a crescent-shaped pendant, and the wide, three-cornered wristlets in silver — 'gamkharu'.

49, 50, 51

All the classical arts in India, especially those of South India, are centred in or around the temple. With the exception of the 'Rajnartaki', the court dancer, the great performers of the past were all temple 'Devdasis', 'handmaidens of God'. In old writings, seven classes of Dasis are mentioned. "Those who are either gifted or sold to the temple, or those who offer to hire themselves to the temple, or who come out of pure devotion, or were enticed, or presented as gifts by noblemen. But the 'Rudragaurikas' or 'Gopikas' the last class, are accomplished women, who are able to read and write, and paid by the temple to sing, dance and play a variety of musical instruments."

All dancers wore a choli with their traditional sari. For reasons of convenience, these saris now are cut and stitched, though still retaining the original draped look. Flowers in the hair, body ornaments and 'gungroos' on the ankles are all essential accessories.

The Bharata Natyam costume is worn with a belt, amulets, bangles and necklaces. Upto seven specific pieces of jewellery adorn the head itself, besides flowers. The bells on the ankles are necessary. The Kuchipuddi costume is made from the local Ikkat silk sari, but lays stress on the 'jada', the plaited hair. It may be covered with flowers, or with twenty-seven delicately hinged pieces, symbolising twenty-seven stars. Tied to the end of the jada, are three round bells, representing the three worlds — 'tribhuvana'. Sets of three smaller bells hang under each larger bell. All the ornaments traditionally were made only from light-wood.

The Odissi dancer, unlike the Bharata Natyam and Kuchipuddi, ties a piece of material across her bosom for support while dancing. The ornaments of the Bharata Natyam dancer are of gold, with or without stones, but the Odissi dancer wears ornaments of silver, often silver filigree, typical of her state of Orissa.

52

The Malayali Nayyar society of Kerala is matriarchal, and has a classical dance form dedicated to its women. Though a Temple dance, the rhythmical and voluptuous movements give it its name, Mohini Attam — "Dance of the Enchantress", — Mohini is the celebrated seductress of Hindu mythology.

She wears the Nayyar dress of the lungi — 'munda' and 'vesta', both in white cotton with a gold border. For the dance it is belted at the waist, to accentuate the lines of her body. Her ornaments are like those worn locally: the 'thoda' earrings and the long coin necklace, 'kashimala'. The hair is knotted to one side at the back of the head and decorated with an ornament or merely a circlet of jasmine flowers. Today the Mohini Attam dancer may wear a stitched costume and ornaments similar to the costume of the Bharata Natyam dancer but that is not traditional.

53

Dance existed in one form or another from ancient times in the state of Seraikella. Its princes, however, did not merely patronise this dance but became its exponents as well. Members of the royal family in the early part of this century sophisticated the dance form but refined its costumes and masks as well. In 1937-38, Prince Suvendra, the lead dancer, with his company did a triumphant tour of Europe, presenting it as a classical form of dance.

The use of a mask in a classical dance is unique, though its use in the folk form is common. This is the dress of 'Ratri', night, a female character danced by a man, as no woman takes part in these dances. Usually stories from the "Mahabharata" and "Puranas" are depicted but at times contemporary events are also included.

54

The Kathak dance was based on the "Natyashastra" as well, but since North India unlike the South was exposed to other cultures, it changed considerably. A century and a half ago however, Hindu gurus revived the early classical form in Lucknow, and the dance regained its sway in the princely courts of the time.

When Muslims began to dance the Kathak, its music and especially the costume changed radically. Not a 'gagra', 'choli' and 'odhna' but an 'angarkha'-like dress with a gathered skirt, was worn with 'churidars'. A fitted, embroidered waistcoat which fastened under the bosom, was added. An embroidered cap with a plumed jewelled pin or a silken stole was draped on the head over the 'tikka' and 'jummar' ornaments.

55, 56

According to an 18th century legend, Maharaja Jaisingh of Manipur, had a dream in which he saw a beautiful dance. Calling the gurus of his court, he related this dream and gave a detailed description of the beautiful costumes worn by the dancers. The dance thus created was called 'Manipuri'.

A 'Po-Loce', a blouse, of green or red velvet is worn with a red or green embroidered skirt, 'Pot Loce'. At the waist the white rolling 'poshowan' or peplum is tied. Ornaments are made from zari and beads embroidered on cloth. A woman also plays the male role of Krishna, but instead of the skirt she wears a dhoti. The very distinctive head-dress has a peacock feather fan and a cascading frond made from stiff white paper.

OF THE
ROYAL PAST

The Princes of India patronised many men of talent. They freed the craftsman-artist from his burden of being the 'provider' to his family, gave him the choicest materials to work with. Having the leisure to create, the 'karigar' craftsman, produced some exceptional work. Many of our prized antiques and art objects, as well as our textiles, costumes and ornaments were made by these nameless but great craftsmen of the royal courts.

Part of this heritage has found its way into the stately homes and museums of Europe and America.

Descendants of those who built our famous temples and monuments still live and work in the same vicinity. It is a depleting population, producing deteriorating craftsmanship. The return of the 'golden age of craftsmanship' will depend on who will patronise our arts and crafts again.

57, 58

At the death of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, his Turkish Governor of the Deccan declared himself the first Nizam. The seventh and last ruling Nizam of Hyderabad State, was considered to be one of the richest men of his times. These costumes belong to members of the royal family.

The mid-calf-length fitted coat a 'sherwani', has a woven belt with a silver buckle the 'baglus'. A specially draped turban the 'dastar', is the usual headgear, but the red Turkish 'fez' once became very popular. The footwear is a pair of pointed slippers called 'charavi'.

As per Muslim traditions, women live in a secluded part of the house — the "zenana". This leaves them free to dress comfortably in flimsy garments of net or muslin in summer. The kurta and salwar being of the usual cut, it is the particular manner in which the 'dupatta' is draped a 'khada dupatta', which establishes her Hyderabad origin.

59

In 1880 a member of the royal family of Jodhpur in Rajasthan designed these riding breeches, which were to become popular in India and worn the world over. Called 'Jodhpurs', they were worn with a coat, a shorter version of the 'achkhan'.

The Maharaja of Danta used this outfit especially for riding, but also to go on royal hunts — 'shikars'.

With it one could wear a pith 'topee' and boots; alternately, a Rajput 'pagdi' of multi-coloured, tie-and-dye 'mothara' muslin, and traditional Indian footwear, or just plain laced shoes with strong soles.

61, 62

The Princely States of India were as good as the men who ruled them. On a visit to the drought-prone State of Kutch in the 1920's, Mahatma Gandhi said he happily could not find anything wrong with their ruler.

Maharao Shri Khengarji III exacted no payment of taxes. To counter the water scarcity he built dams in his state. More important, the early free ports at Mundra and Mandvi were becoming silted. He scientifically located and constructed the new port at Kandla which to this day provides work for the people, and secures the importance of Kutch as a major trading centre.

The Maharani wears a 'lengha', — skirt, a backless 'Khemko' and slippers — 'sapat', embroidered in fine 'ari work', a chain stitch also used by Kutchi villagers. All these items have become heirlooms as no one is willing to do such fine embroidery any more.

The Maharao, when a teenager, wore this gold embroidered 'jamo' with a silken 'cummerbundo'. An 'uparni'-shawl an embroidered 'topi' and 'mojris' on the feet, complete his dress. The ornaments worn by the Maharani and the Maharao are in Rajasthani 'Minpakari' enamel work on gold set with pearl, precious and semi-precious stones.

Each piece worn by both the Maharani and the Maharao is traditional in design.

60

In 1728 A.C. the remarkable astronomer-prince, Sawai Jai Singh planned and architected the city of Jaipur, built in delicate pink stone, and 'Rajput' architecture. His greater triumph, however, was the building of the 'Jantar-Mantar', an observatory. Its almost surrealistic-shaped stone structures were made with such singular precision, that their shadows, cast by the sun, gave and continue to give, accurate astronomical data even today.

The Hawai Mahal is another elegant building. It is from behind its trellis-work facade, that the women of the royal household, unseen, would watch parades on the street below.

This ceremonial dress, handed down from generation to generation, is embroidered with coloured silks, and threads and spangles of gold-dipped silver, called 'kasab' and 'tillis'. The eighteen gore skirt is worn with, a sleeveless 'kurti' over a fitted 'kachli'. The 'odhni', nearly a sari-length but wider is draped over the costume.

63

It is believed that in the 13th century, a Tibetan prince named Guru Tashi, inspired by a divine vision travelled southwards with his five sons to the Valley of Denzon in Sikkim. However, the history of Sikkim as a state, commenced only in the 17th century, when the family moved to Gangtok and the great-grandson of Guru Tashi Punstok, was consecrated as the first King.

In 1975 it became the twenty-second state of the Indian Union.

This dress of the Princess of Sikkim consists of a 'chuba' or 'namza', a robe of antique Gujarat brocade, worn over a pure Chinese silk blouse. The 'zompa' or 'sapcha', the embroidered boots, and a fur-trimmed brocade hat are used for the outdoors.

64

One of the most attractive garments in our country is the 'garara', a divided skirt. It is said that the daughter-in-law of the famous King Tipu Sultan wore some exquisite 'gararas'. But some were extremely wide 'farshi', with over eighty gussets, and others so heavily embroidered that unless assistants lifted her skirt, she was unable to walk or even move.

Having received, for their good services, a jagir from the Mughal Emperor Jehangir, the family took the name of Jehangirabad. This 'garara' belonging to the Rani, is an elegant 'farshi garara'. More than floor-length and trailing, it has twenty gussets to each half of the divided skirt. With it she wears a sheer blouse and a fine 'Benarasi' silk stole. During winter the sheer blouse is replaced by a brocaded or an embroidered silk 'saluka' a fitted hip-length jacket. Her ornaments have the 'chand-sitara' moon and stars design. The 'jummer' and 'tikka' she wears on the head are typical ornaments, worn by the Muslims.

65

From ancient times in India, a shawl has been presented to a person who is being honoured. However, the Mughal court established a custom whereby a 'choga' — an overcoat was bestowed on the person as a mark of honour.

This choga is of Persian design, made from soft Kashmiri wool with gold 'kasab embroidery'. As robes of honour, they often were encrusted with precious and semi precious stones. Adopted universally by Nawabs, Rajas and Maharajas, they could be made from heavy gold and silver brocades as well.

Most people in our land, have the gift to be able to use their hands with great dexterity and artistic skill... Thus we find a world of unmatched handicrafts around us. Besides making the ornaments or cloth for the dresses, man has shaped his utensils from metal, wood, or clay. He had created his own symbol of worship, as well as toys for his children... He has fashioned his instruments for hunting man or beast... and instruments for making music. All these items displayed here reveal to us the man and his inner being...

Roshan Kalapesi

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgments for contribution of costumes to:

The State Governments of

Andhra Pradesh
Bengal
Bihar
Gujarat
Haryana
Himachal Pradesh
Kerala
Lakshadweep Islands
Madhya Pradesh
Maharashtra
Meghalaya
Mizoram
Punjab
Rajasthan
Sikkim
Tamil Nadu

also to

Yamini Krishnamurthi
Sanjukta Pannigrahi
Kanak Rele
Mrinalini Sarabhai

and to the former

Maharajah of Danta
Rani Saheb of Jahangirabad
Maharani of Jaipur
Maharani of Kutch

Collection of Costumes,
Research, Catalogue text : Roshan Kalapesi
Exhibition Design, Graphics: RJB Design.
Co-ordinator: Firdausi J. Jussawalla,
Air-India.

© 1993 Roshan Kalapesi