

**Clothing and Fashion: Presenting the Indian Female Body in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

by

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**Abstract**

Exploring the clothing practices of Indian women in the first half of the twentieth century, this article analyses the sartorial transformation and gradual introduction of fashion in the context of Indian dressing largely through the fashion columns which appeared in the newspapers and magazines. The article maps how the discourse on clothing in India was framed within the language of nationalism but gradually more individualized notions such as taste, individuality, personality came to be associated with clothing. It shows that Indian women experimented with their clothing as much as men by incorporating styles from the west as well as reforming Indian styles to dress themselves. However, the modernity embedded within the new dressing style and life style of the elite and middle class Indian women was affected by themes such as tradition and modesty.

**Keywords**

Clothing, Fashion, Sartorial Reform, Dressing

## **Introduction**

Most studies on the history of fashion suggest that it hardly existed in earlier times, and this has led to a debate about its origin and development. Gilles Lipovetsky points out that fashion (as we understand it today) emerged in the west in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Elizabeth Wilson traces the emergence of fashion to the fourteenth century which marked the proliferation of more elaborate styles of men and women's clothing.<sup>2</sup> In order to trace a longer history of fashion and dress in the colonial India, I focus on crucial tipping points in women's clothing from about the nineteenth century. This article makes an attempt to trace the gradual emergence of discourse on fashion in India, largely through analysis of fashion columns addressed to the white, indigenous elite and educated women as they appeared in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian newspapers and magazines.

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 importantly, 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>3</sup> Are these trajectories traced by fashion in the west similar to those in Indian setting? If not, what were the crucial points of departure?

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>4</sup> 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. Due to the nationalist influence, cloth came to attain 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. It's symbolic presence in the political movements was undeniable<sup>5</sup> and hand spun/hand - woven cloth created its own caste, gender and class hierarchies.<sup>6</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 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>7</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century in India, the Indian newspapers and magazines began to carry regular columns on dress and clothing. For example; *Indian Ladies Magazine* carried columns called "Fashion Suggestions" over the period of forty years,<sup>8</sup> *Times of India* carried regular columns such as "Home Sewing" <sup>9</sup> etc. 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 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>10</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

for women. The interest of Hindi journals was in the reform of dress styles of women without forsaking traditional notions 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 then 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.

This article attempts to trace transformations of sartorial styles of Indian women in the colonial period, both within the private domain of the house and as women began entering public spaces.<sup>11</sup> In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, women in India sculpted new identities through such different registers as education, social reform movements, caste movements and nationalism.<sup>12</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>13</sup> Their study describes how women like Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Sailabala Das, Anasuya Sarabhai, Shakuntala Pranjpye explored new 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.<sup>14</sup> Those who were perceived as fashionable and imitated western culture were singled out for attention and critique.<sup>15</sup> 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 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. This article focuses largely on elite and middle class educated women. 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. These are among the questions that this article will attempt to answer.

### **Clothing and Mimicry**

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 was a difference between foreign clothing and western fashion.<sup>16</sup> 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. The terms western cultural influence and western fashion are often used interchangeably by the authors of journals and newspapers when they describe dress of the Europeans in their regular columns.

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. According to Tarlo, “the westernisation of Indian garments was a gradual and subtle process, far less controversial than the actual adoption of European garments themselves”.<sup>17</sup>

Being dressed in European clothes was not only a matter of self - representation but it was also the means by which one was judged by others. There were undoubtedly privileges 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 ask was the criticism against men imitating western clothes as virulent as the criticism towards women.

From the nineteenth century, a great deal of cultural criticism has been 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 were the men who were criticised.<sup>18</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 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 (*Ardhasikshita*). 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>19</sup> The critique of women presented them to be neglecting home and family. They were ridiculed for the new habits like 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 in the conservatives as well as the modernist discourse.<sup>20</sup>

A section of writers used clothing as means to promote 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 condition and therefore Indians should not adopt clothing style that would affect health adversely. 'vastron ka swasthya par prabhav' (Effects of Clothes on Health) pointed out that people in the west kept many clothes for different occasions.<sup>21</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 was 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 dhekiye yah ek garam desh hai. Yahan par fur, un chamde aadi*

*dvara bane huye kapdo ki tanik bhi avashyakta nahin hsi fir bhi 'nakal pasand' log kabhi nahi manege. Fashion ki cheese man kar ve videsh se hi*

*inko mangvakar istemal mein layenge. Hum bharat vasiyo ko keval dhoti,*

*bandi, kurta तथा angrakhe ki aavashyakta hai...'*<sup>22</sup>

Look at India, as it is a country with hot climate there is no need of clothes made of fur, wool, leather etc but still copy cat people will not mend their ways. Considering these items as fashionable, they will order these from the west and use them. We Indians need only *dhoti*, waistcoat and *kurta*.<sup>23</sup>

Similar concerns were also raised by another journal *Chaturvedi* which was noted for its nationalistic and conservative content.<sup>24</sup> Once more, western fashion and imitation were criticised:

*'Purushon ne bhi ab sahib banne ki khub nakal ki hai. Sir se pair tak sab bhash European ka ho gaya hai. Kahan toh yeh garam desh aur kahan sheet pradhan desh ki posish. Coat platoon tak toh ganimat thi, par hat ne sara gud gobar kar diya hai, kyunki khal ka rang toh badal lena in bhale admiyon ke hanth mein hain nahin, jo pakki nakal kar sake, tab log inko desi isai samajh sakte hain...'*<sup>25</sup>

(Men too are trying to imitate the 'sahibs'. From head to toe, they all are dressed up as Europeans. On one hand, it is a country with hot climate whereas the dress of the cold country. It was fine as long as they were wearing coat and pants but the introduction of the hat has spoiled everything. Since it is not possible for these 'wise men' to change the colour of their skin, and imitate totally so others can identify them 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 criticised in the popular magazines such as *Chaturvedi*.

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>26</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>27</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

*' jin Hindustani logo ne is videashi pahnavi ko grahan kar liya hai, unse use chudwana sadhya nahi hai, yadapi itna avashya ho sakta hai ki ve is poshak ke sath apni jatiyata ka koi chinha surakshit rakh sakte hai, nektai angrejo ka niji dharmik chinh hai jise issa masih ke cruse ka bohndh hota hai, ataev, Hindustani hinduon ko use chod de chahiye. Keval use chod dene se unke vetan mein sambhavat koi kami na hogi, aur na ve unche pado se vanchit rakhhe jayenge, sath hi ve samay padne par angrejo aur isayon se jinme nektai ka visesh prachar hai alag samjhe ja sakenge...'*

(For Indians who have already adopted this foreign clothing, it is not easy to make them relinquish such clothes. Nonetheless, with this clothing, they still can retain a mark of their caste. Tie symbolises a personal totem for the English 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 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>28</sup> Though Prasad 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.<sup>29</sup>

Another section of writers opposed all changes and transformations that threatened to democratize gender relations. Educated women were more strongly criticized than others.<sup>30</sup> 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:

*'Ardh Sikshita Madam', devi ji rat ko Mr. Champat Rai ke saath theatre dekhne gayi thi, is samay shrimati ji couch par shayan kar rahi hain aur bechare pati devta bibi sahibha ki agyaanusar "gulabi Jutiyan" par paolish kar rahen hain aur man hi man kah rahe hain jo meri is halat ko dekh kar hanse parmatma kare who bhi is halat mein fasein...'*<sup>31</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>32</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>33</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>34</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 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>35</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 responded against Mr. Menon, a writer who accused women of imitating the western woman, spending too much and not respecting the husband.<sup>36</sup> In the context of adoption of clothes, she says that they have been adopted in accordance with the changing times.<sup>37</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>38</sup>

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>39</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>40</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>41</sup> All India Women's Conference (AIWC) played a crucial role in development of women's movement since the time it was founded in 1927.<sup>42</sup> The members of AIWC focussed on 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 become an important concern. As we have seen, this was also the time when political women and ordinary women began participating in the national movement. All these changes lead to the redefinition of the roles of women. This change was reflected in women's writings and journals.

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>43</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 Krishanan 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>44</sup>

The editor of the magazine also appreciated the modern woman and her qualities.<sup>45</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>46</sup>

This kind of argument countered the approach which saw educated women as a threat to societal order. The appreciation of the 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 this change, and as the author explained, facilitated the breakup of old systems and unjust traditions. A 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. Suruchi Thapar argues that a modern woman was expected to bridge the existing gulf between the educated man and his uneducated counterpart, without challenging the gender specific roles.<sup>47</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?

### **Women and 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 question. How to be modern without being western? How could one change tastes and styles without renouncing Indian, 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>48</sup> In this the notions of refinement and modesty are culled from both western and Indian discourses. She notes Indian woman was moulded in explicit opposition to the spectre of 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>49</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>50</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 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 the 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>51</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>52</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>53</sup> Thus, western custom was rejected on the grounds of tradition. The specific concern expressed was about what parts of the female 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>54</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>55</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>56</sup>, and the second was deportment and carriage<sup>57</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>58</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>59</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 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>60</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>61</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>62</sup> Women were presented as adorning themselves for the men. Writer of *Chaturvedi* magazine commented:

*Isme koi sandeh nahin aj kal ke balak , balikaon ko fashionwali banne ka anurodh karte hain, ve apni striyon ko apne mitron se milne julne aur apni mandli ke sadasyon ke sath hans karne ityadi hi ko sabhyata samajhte hain parantu lajja mein hi hamari sabhyata hai jisse humko kisi dasa mein hath se na jane dena chahiye..<sup>63</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 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 influenced by European lifestyle and tradition. The writer appealed for 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: Woman and influence of the West (“Colourful balloon of new civilization brought by winds of the west”)**

**Source:** Kamla (1932)

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 it is to see them with the graceful Indian drapery?"<sup>64</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. These discussions invoked ideals like taste and presented it as essential element in dressing. However, taste is not only generated through dressing but it's an acquired skill which is determined by a variety of factors, such as education, socialisation, market forces etc.

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>65</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>66</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.

Fashion columns pointed out that Indian women's clothes were an inappropriate combination of colours for the sari, blouse and footwear.<sup>67</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>68</sup>

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>69</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>70</sup> New styles were allowed when it confirmed the ideal traditional image of woman.

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 Saththiyandhan (editor), Cornelia Sorabji, Sarojini Naidu, and Annie Besant.<sup>71</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 1920's, 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.<sup>72</sup> But from the 1920s, the new roles of women in the home, and in social, political and national life were stressed in the articles.<sup>73</sup>

In the context of fashion, writers were against blind imitation of western fashion. Most of the fashion suggestions were written by Sister Susie. According to her, fashion was the blind imitation of the people who were supposed to be leaders of the society and knew what was 'in' for clothes. She noted further that for people it

did not matter if a particular style suited the person or if it was producing a disharmonious effect but what mattered was whether they were in fashion.<sup>74</sup> Sister Susie's statement attacked some people for simply opting for one type of fashion.

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>75</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>76</sup>, makeup, footwear<sup>77</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>78</sup>



These qualities were searched 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 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>79</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>80</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>81</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 on 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>82</sup> Writers for *The 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 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>83</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>84</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>85</sup> This article also pointed out that in spite of uniformity of sari it was worn in different manners in different regions of India.<sup>86</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>87</sup> According to the author, the tight fitting bodice, gaudy and multi 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 disadvantages of 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>88</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>89</sup> Sari was also considered to be dangerous in the domestic sphere, when it came in the way of cooking.<sup>90</sup> Similar argument for not wearing sari was given by Hemanta Kumari Chaudhuri (1868 - 1953).<sup>91</sup> 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>92</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>93</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 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 to 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 seemed crucial to improve her appearance in public and that's why the dress reform was aimed at spaces outside her 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>94</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>95</sup> They believed that one should not be concerned about issues of modesty as any new form of cloth did not defy norm of modesty if compared to the custom

of women bathing in scanty sari.<sup>96</sup> One of the female writers did not mock women who followed western fashion.<sup>97</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 theme was also pointed by other writers in the magazine *Kamla*.<sup>98</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>99</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**

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 significant in this process since men were more easily corrupted, and women became 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.

However, this article explored the shift in Indian sartorial styles 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 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. This article 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. Through the 1920s and 1930s there were signs that women themselves were joining the debate, vociferously demanding adherence to reformed codes in some instances while others approved of choices made by women themselves. A new aesthetic which combined mobility with elegance and at the same time a particular Indian tradition was brought into being, which enabled women to participate in public life, without being threatened.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing the Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Steele, *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, Volume II, (London: Thomson Gale, 2005), p.17.

<sup>4</sup> Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.16-21.

<sup>5</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>6</sup> Robert Hardgrave, 'The Breast Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 5:2 June, 1968, pp. 171-87.

<sup>7</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>8</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 2, No 8, March 1929, pp. 434-435, Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, Volume 5, No 12, November, December 1932, p. 575.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Wyeth Spears, 'Home Sewing: How to make a smart dress Trimming', *The Times of India*, 23 April, 1929, p. 13, Ruth Wyeth Spears, 'Home Sewing: How to Make a Smart Dress Trimming', *The Times of India*, 23 April, 1929, p.

<sup>10</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p.47.

<sup>11</sup> Malavika Karlekar, *Revisioning the Past: Early Photography in Bengal-1875-1915*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Satyadev Vidyalankar, 'Mahilaon ki jagriti – parda kaise choda' in *Parda*, (Calcutta: Adarsh Hindi Pustakalaya, 1936), pp. 141-205.

<sup>13</sup> Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words: Women's Life Experiences from Western and Eastern India*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2008). This work adds to my understanding of how women negotiated with everyday self in wake of new developments. There are other works available which show about Indian women's subjectivities. Here, I have cited the example of this work as it narrates the experiences of women who were involved in politics and contributed to then going movements. Most importantly, their ideas were influential in shaping dressing of women too. For example; Sarala Devi Chaudhurani.

<sup>14</sup> Pundit Chandradeep Narayan Tripathi, *Strisikshasar*, (Summery of Women's Education) ( Calcutta: Hindi Book Agency, 1934), p.232, Chaturvedi Dwaraka Prasad Sharma, *Mahilahitaishini*, (Well - Wisher of Women) (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1924).

<sup>15</sup> Shrimati Poorna Deviji, translated by Leeladhar Chaturvedi, 'hamari kuprathayein', *Mahilaank, Chaturvedi*, volume 16, No 1,2, April May 1930, p.31

<sup>16</sup> I argue that there is a difference between foreign clothing and western fashion. Fashion as the term occurs in wake of mass production and markets where as foreign clothing was present even before the industrial revolution. These columns however, often blurred the boundaries between foreign clothing and western fashion. They were often used synonymously to criticize or describe the dress of the west.

<sup>17</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.

<sup>18</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards*, (England: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>19</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.

<sup>20</sup> Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, Volume 2, No 8, March 1929, p. 434, 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).

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Ravi Pratap Srinate, 'wasrto ka swasthya par prabhav', *Chand*, December 1933, p. 291.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> All the translation in this paper has been done by the author herself as per the style sheet.

<sup>24</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>25</sup> Shri Baijnath Chaturvedi, 'vayasano ki bharmar', *Chaturvedi*, November 1924, pp. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 53.

<sup>27</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'.

<sup>28</sup> Kamta Prasad Guru, 'vesh bhusha mein shistachar', *Madhuri*, volume 3, No 3, November 1924, pp. 502-506.

<sup>29</sup> 'The Fascination of Fashion', *ILM*, April, 1903, no. 10, pp. 314.

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. C. Besley, 'Social Intercourse Between English And Indian Women', *ILM*, April 1903, no. 10. P. 302. The author mentions that as an influence of Western education some Indian women have blindly rushed to model their life, manners and dress on western lines and in the process have lost their individuality.

<sup>31</sup> 'ardhasikshita madam', *Chand*, July, 1926.

<sup>32</sup> Aniya Loomba, 'The Long and Saggy Sari', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8:3, 1997, pp. 278 - 292.

<sup>33</sup> Editorial, 'sampadakiyavichar', *Chand*, 1926, p. 336.

<sup>34</sup> Indian women, 'An Informal Talk', *Madras Mail*, 1 September 1931, p. 11.

<sup>35</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>36</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 *Lakshmi bhayi*.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Sister Susie is 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 was actively involved in social work and a school was named after her in Poona. Cornelia Sorabji's family was also known for their contribution in social work. The primary sources also mentioned Cornelia 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>39</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 2, No 8, March 1929, pp. 434-435.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Shahida lateef, *Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities 1890-1980s*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990).

<sup>42</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).

<sup>43</sup> Manjari R Krishnan, 'The Womanhood of India', *ILM*, volume 5, No 9, May June, 1932, p. 400.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> K. Saththiandhan, 'Who is the Ideal woman?', *ILM*, volume 1, No11, June 1928, pp. 367 - 369.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 229.

<sup>48</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.

<sup>49</sup> Thapar, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 240.

<sup>50</sup> L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 4, May 1929, p.23.

<sup>51</sup> Indian Women, 'The Foreign Spirit among Indians', *Madras Mail*, 9 April 1928, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> L.P.S, 'Fashion notes for Indian women- Sleeveless styles condemned', *Madras Mail*, 4 May 1929, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> 'Foreign Spirit Among Indians', p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, volume 5, No 12, November, December 1932, p. 575.

<sup>57</sup> 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 3, May June 1935, p. 93.

<sup>58</sup> 'Foreign Spirit Among Indians', p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>60</sup> An Observer, 'Indian Women - An Informal Talk', *Madras Mail*, September 1931, p.14.
- <sup>61</sup> 'Foreign Spirits Among Indians- Coiffure', p. 9.
- <sup>62</sup> Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), p. 253.
- <sup>63</sup> Shrimati Poorna Deviji, translated by Leeladhar Chaturvedi, 'hamari kuprathayein', *Mahilaank, Chaturvedi*, volume 16, No 1,2, April May 1930, p.31.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 15 June 1929, p.28.
- <sup>66</sup> L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 4 May 1929, p. 23.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> The Satthiyanadhan 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.
- <sup>72</sup> By An Indian Lady, 'Social Intercourse between European and Indian Ladies', *ILM*, September 1901, no. 3. P.58, Sri Krishna Sarma, 'The Hindu Ideal of Womanhood', *ILM*, September 1901, no.3 p.65, By the Editor, 'Mrs. Besant on Indian Womanhood', *ILM*, , January 1902, no. 7, p.195. By an Indian Lady, 'The Indian Woman', *ILM*, November 1910, no.5. p.129.
- <sup>73</sup> K. Satthianadhan, 'Who is the Ideal Woman', *ILM*, June 1928, no.11, p.367, R.K. Mittr, 'My Ideal woman', *ILM*, February 1929, no.7, p. 345, H. Kaveri Bai, 'Thoughts of Ideal Womanhood', *ILM*, May and June 1932, no. 8, p.421.
- <sup>74</sup> Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, volume 2, No 8, March 1929, p. 434.
- <sup>75</sup> Sister Susie, 'Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 4, July and August 1935, pp. 135-137.
- <sup>76</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, February, 1932, p. 330.
- <sup>77</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions - Our Footwear Suggestions', *ILM*, January 1929, pp. 320-321.
- <sup>78</sup> 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 8, No 3, May June 1935, pp.93-94.
- <sup>79</sup> Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1991).
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.1.
- <sup>81</sup> Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 1, No 6, November- December 1934, pp. 247-248.
- <sup>82</sup> Safi, 'Dress Reform in India: Could European Women Wear the Sari?' *Times of India*, 13 April 1937, p. 14.
- <sup>83</sup> Mina, 'The Beauty of the Sari: Already Affecting Western Design', *Times of India*, 7 May 1936, p.15.
- <sup>84</sup> Joan Williams, 'The Fascination of the Eastern Sari: Simplicity and Symmetry of Line of Classic Styles of Ancient Greece' *Times of India*, 12 September 1932, p.13.
- <sup>85</sup> Sally, 'Beauty of the Sari: Has Stood the Test of Time', *The Times of India*, 22 October 1935, p.13.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup> R. Hurry, 'Ancient Origins of Modern Fashion: Dress of Indian Women', *The Times of India*, 25 October 1932, p. 11.
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- <sup>89</sup> 'The Conquering Sari - Most Graceful Dress in the World', *The Times of India*, 30 January 1936, p.13.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> Hemant Kumari Chaudhuri, 'Women's Dress', Malini Bhattacharaya and Abhijitsen'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>92</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.91.
- <sup>94</sup> *Mahila* was a monthly magazine in Hindi which was published in Calcutta. Its editor was Sita Devi.
- <sup>95</sup> Shri Mohan Lal Nehru, 'fashionable', *Kamla*, July 1940, pp. 9-11.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup> Shrimati Kiranmayi, 'mahilaon ko fashion kis ne sikhaya', *Kamla*, May 1941, pp. 6-8.
- <sup>98</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>99</sup> Savitari Devi Shukla, 'naya aur purana pehanava', *Kamla*, April 1939, pp. 44-45.