

CLOTHES

About clothes also, Sikhism is not fussy. There are no taboos about our apparel. Sikh history tells us that Guru Nanak Dev, during his long missionary travels, wore different clothes according to the different countries, he visited; the adage being, “while in Rome do as the Romans do.” Guru Nanak Dev wore Hindu mendicants robes in such a way that would attract people while visiting Hindu holy places in the east during the gathering at the pilgrimages at those places. When visiting Mecca and the Muslim countries in the west, he put on the dress which the *Hajjis* wear during their pilgrimage. It is worth noting that while going to the north to Kailash and Tibet, he wore skins and furs. The various dresses that the sixth and tenth Gurus put on can be seen even today. Some of them are of the best material then available worn mostly by the highest class of gentry. I was amused to come across a self-appointed preacher who was insistent about the *kachhehra* being of a particular length, of a particular coarse cloth and of a particular cut. Such people only invite ridicule. They who work under such an obsession should see the sixth Satguru’s *kachhehra* at Daroli near Moga. It is made of an expensive cloth and has stripes in many pleasing colours.

Some people attach sanctity to nakedness as if disrobing takes one direct to heaven. In India people were accustomed to wearing as little clothes as possible. Perhaps it was due to the hot climate. They used to take one long cloth, one end of which was tied around the loins while the other was thrown over the shoulder. The rest of the body was all bare. We have learnt to wear clothes,

evidently, after the Muslim invasions of India began and the effect of Muslim culture became evident. *Churidar pajama* of straight cut, *salvar* and shirt are adopted from Muslim fashion; while the *churidar pajama* made diagonally from a piece of cloth, was copied and adopted from a French fashion during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign when he employed some French Generals.

There are still some sections, who observe this clothelessness with religious strictness. Amongst the Hindus, there are certain rituals which can only be performed with just one long cloth called *dhoti*. To have a *Ved Path* with proper observations of *maryada* can only be done wearing an unsewn cloth around the body. This precludes a Sikh from doing *Ved Path* like that because a Sikh cannot part with his *kachhehra* (underwear) which has to be sewn all through. Even amongst the Muslims, it appears that when they go for *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, they have to disrobe and put on special *Hajj* apparel of just a sheet of cloth. Amongst the Tibetans also, it is observed that in their original Tibetan dress their right arm is kept naked.

In Sikhism, no such sanctity is attached to any particular dress or clothes, much less to any clothelessness or nudity but unhappily some people have started to take cover under this way of un-covering the body to make an impression upon people and exploit them. If one uncovers his legs, he claims to have become a saint. If the shirt is taken off, he gets promoted to a higher class of saints. May Satguru be thanked that he has enjoined upon the Sikhs not to part with their underwear, *kachhehra*. Otherwise, some of these masqueraders would have taken to nudity as the most effective and fruitful way to impress others, like a class of Hindu mendicants who parade about in total nudity. But the Satguru has very strongly warned against such false and deceitful appearances.