

SPECIAL ARTICLE

## Swadeshi, Khadi and Women's Clothing in Colonial North India<sup>1</sup>

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The swadeshi movement in many ways marked for the first-time controlled access of women to a political-public sphere. This undermined the neat divide between the private and the public, making customary demarcation of gendered spaces untenable, while simultaneously conjecturing women as mother-land and mother-goddess. There were other gendered connotations of the language and symbols of swadeshi. This essay studies one important strand of this by focusing on its meanings for women's fashion in colonial United Provinces (present day Uttar Pradesh, henceforth UP), where swadeshi rhetoric was appropriated in innovative ways by Hindu nationalists and caste ideologues, to dress up Hindu women (and men), largely middle-class and upper-caste, in particular ways. These writers wrote in the vernacular, making universalising claims about women's clothing, in relation to swadeshi habits. This had implications for a new language of sartorial morality, for modern bourgeois values of thrift, for caricaturing western woman and for Hindu revivalism. However, Dalits were not only excluded from this discourse; they were implicitly turning it upside down. The essay thus explores contradictory gendered meanings of swadeshi clothing. In the process, it endorses and strengthens one of Sumit Sarkar's central arguments in his landmark work on swadeshi that its history cannot be collapsed into narratives of anti-colonial nationalism alone, and that the struggle within was equally significant.<sup>2</sup>

Clothes veil the body. They are part of a cultural politics by which nations are produced.<sup>3</sup> They encode a game of modesty and sexual explicitness, of a denial and celebration of pleasure. They are a form of social control, mirroring social hierarchies and moral boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Feminists are divided on the meanings of clothing for women. Some argue that its opulent forms indicate women's slavish submission to fashion and consumerism.<sup>5</sup> Others posit that its implications are fluid and often empowering.<sup>6</sup> The first perspective misses the connotations people attach to their dress; the second marginalises the structural constraints and historical contexts in which clothing is selected. In this essay, I explore the precedents of some of these views in colonial north India.

Clothing played an active role in constructions of identities, families, castes,

classes, regions and the nation in colonial India.<sup>7</sup> Chris Bayly and Bernard Cohn reveal the power of cloth, where it was inscribed with new meanings by nationalists and became a key visual symbol of freedom struggle against the British rule.<sup>8</sup> Later adaptation of swadeshi by Gandhi imparted new meanings to it. Khadi became, according to Susan Bean, the 'fabric of Indian independence'.<sup>9</sup> Lisa Trivedi argues that it became a visual symbol of moral purity, marking individual bodies as distinctly Indian in relation to other visual symbols of regional, religious, caste, and class identification.<sup>10</sup> Rahul Ramagundam emphasises that khadi was fundamentally an attempt to dent the 'drain', as it was a distinctively 'third world' commodity of resistance against colonial exploitation.<sup>11</sup> However, it is Emma Tarlo's work that complicates the grids of use of swadeshi khadi by showing that there were no singular, homogenised and stable meanings to clothing choices.<sup>12</sup> Feminist historians posit that attempts at redressing women had a distinct relationship to idealised upper-caste middle-class wife, to sartorial morality, and to denigration of sexuality.<sup>13</sup> Charkha for women neatly fitted into patriarchal discourses around womanhood, domestic labour and controls over consumption.<sup>14</sup>

The vocabulary of swadeshi – reconstitution of taste from Manchester cloth to coarse swadeshi, valorisation of indigenous cloth as symbol of past glory, and scrutiny of consumption practices as indicators of patriotism<sup>15</sup> – flowered in UP in the 1910s and 20s. Its message particularly captured the imagination of urban high caste Hindus, professional service gentry and trading groups. A section of popular Hindi literature, didactic manuals, nationalist pamphlets, articles and cartoons, reverberated with swadeshi messages. Gendered dress discourses intertwined with such histories of the nation. They signalled that everyone could be transformed into firm nationalists, including ordinary women. In the 1920s, on Gandhi's call, many women from UP, previously alienated from mainstream movements, lent their support to the khadi campaign, taking vows of swadeshi and donating their jewellery for social and political causes.<sup>16</sup> Swadeshi clothing further created a feeling of solidarity among nationalist women, as they were called to weave their clothes and boycott British imports.<sup>17</sup> Exemplary songs were composed, with Grihalakshmi, the women's journal writing:

जियें तो स्वदेशी बदन पर बसन हो,  
मारेँ अगर तो स्वदेशी कफ़न हो

[While we live our apparel be of swadeshi,  
When we die our shroud be of swadeshi.]<sup>18</sup>

A poem published in another women's journal Prabha reiterated:

चल-चल मेरे चरखे प्यारे,  
पड़ी भंवर में भारत नय्या,  
तू ही जारे लगा किनारे.

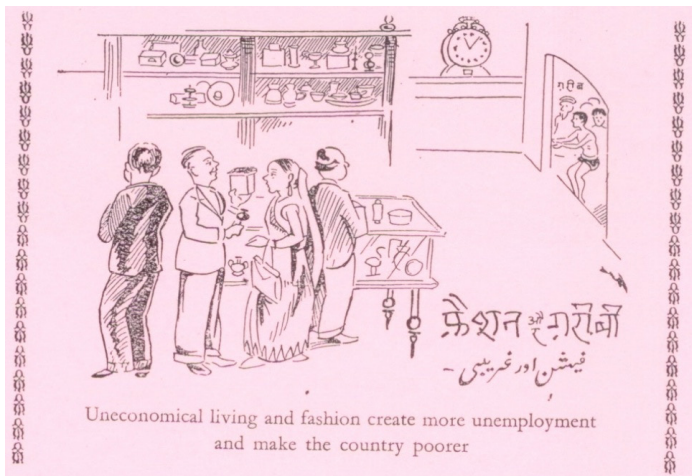
[Move on my charkha,  
India-boat has been caught in a whirlpool,  
You alone can lead it to the safety of the bank.]<sup>19</sup>

The semiotics of dressing became not only a powerful counterpoint to foreign consumer items but also a way to challenge internal and external hierarchies. In this fashioning of swadeshi however, women were particularly singled out, with their clothing coming under special scrutiny. The visual rhetoric, cartoons and poems composed during the period, while reinforcing the power of swadeshi, advocated women to be both its active proponents and one of its chief adversaries.

### The Modern Bourgeois Value of Thrift

Swadeshi language persuasively popularised a common economic collective, favouring thrift as a modern bourgeois value. It specifically appealed to middle-classes to instil in them an urban sense of economic responsibility and frugality. Women's fashion was particularly associated with wasteful expenditures.<sup>20</sup> Cartoons were published, which drew a straight line between uneconomical living and women's fashion (Figure 1).

Figure 1

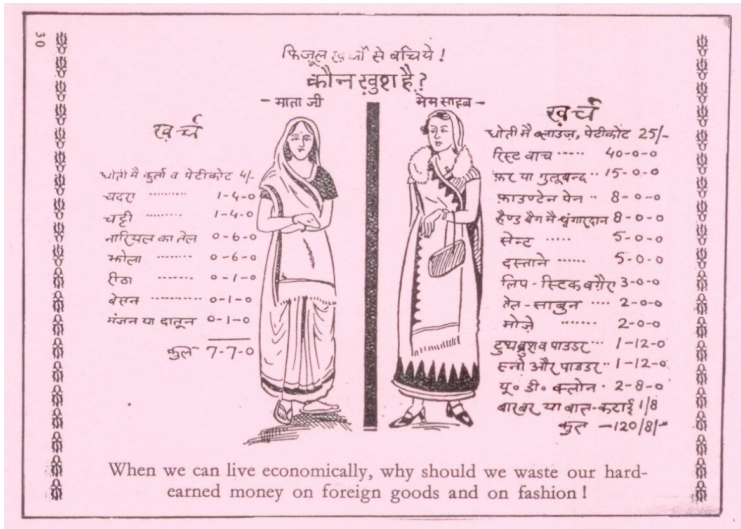


Source: *Cartoon Booklet, Containing 50 Interesting Cartoons on Swadeshi*, Allahabad, 1938: 45.

Caste manuals launched a diatribe against wasteful expenditure, linking it to kaliyug, a world of calamity, when women's over-indulgence in her body was foolhardy.<sup>21</sup> Swadeshi ideologues turned the argument that Manchester cloth was cheaper upside down and instead showed that fashion and foreign goods increased household expenditure tenfold. In contrast, swadeshi attire was geared at asceticism and utilitarian fashion. Shorn of ornamentation and ostentatious displays, it was based on simplicity. Replacing linen and silk with cheap, coarse fabrics, swadeshi signalled a thrifty household.<sup>22</sup> For example, a cartoon 'Avoid Wasteful Expenditure: Who is Happy?', illustrated a simple

Hindu ‘Mother’ who used indigenous items like hand woven sari, shawl, open-heeled sandals, coconut oil, cloth bag, nut, gram flour and twig of neem and her monthly expenditure was Rs. 7. The Hindu ‘Memsahib’s’ expenditure on sari, blouse, wristwatch, fur, fountain pen, handbag, scent, gloves, lipstick, soap, socks, toothbrush, powder and haircut were a whopping Rs. 120, signifying a 15-fold increase! (Figure 2)

Figure 2



Source: Cartoon Booklet, Containing 50 Interesting Cartoons on Swadeshi: 30.

Many cosmetic advertisements in newspapers of the period started laying emphasis on swadeshi brands like oriental soaps and hair-oils as more viable and cheaper options for women’s beauty. Yashoda Devi, a leading ayurvedic practitioner and a commercial sensation from Allahabad in early twentieth century, manufactured many such products. They were cheaper than their foreign counterparts and were also promoted as indigenous and healthier choices.<sup>23</sup> Women were urged to weave themselves into swadeshi economy of the nation. A reformist tract argued:

*In the past, many women used the charkha regularly for spinning and even earned a small living from it. However, even this small occupation has now dwindled amidst women. Thus, almost half of our population, i.e. about 15 crore women are there amidst us, who do no occupation and earn not a single paisa to increase the wealth of the nation. We urge women to adopt swadeshi, earn a living and contribute to the nation’s wealth.*<sup>24</sup>

Another article argued that weaving swadeshi cloth prevented women from fashion, gossip, fun and fights, enabled productive use of time, solved

unemployment, increased household savings and ensured nation's economic self-sufficiency.<sup>25</sup> Wooing middle-class women away from their fashionable desires, concerted attempts were thus made to tutor them in ways that would promote swadeshi, thrift and philanthropy.<sup>26</sup> Simplicity in clothing was not just linked to thrift. Plain and unadorned dress was further tried to crucial components of happiness, spiritual bliss, enhancement of natural beauty and a civilisational ethos.<sup>27</sup> Radiance and grace of women rested not on fashion but on modesty, courteous demeanour and righteous conduct. This brings me to a new language of nationalist and domestic morality that swadeshi clothing signified especially for women.

### **New Language of Nationalist and Domestic Morality**

As stated, the discourse of swadeshi was geared towards economic self-sufficiency, spirituality and domestic bliss, and internalised through women's clothing. The reformers and nationalists attempted to organise the wardrobe of middle-class Hindu women, reworking the right clothes, makeup and accessories for them, also revealing their moralising tones and anxieties. Women's clothing signalled an unviolated inner space, together with national identity.<sup>28</sup> While men had adopted western attires, it was their duty to see that women did not follow suit.<sup>29</sup> Swadeshi clothing was not only economically feasible; it signified return to past freedom through the bodies of Hindu women.<sup>30</sup> It was a cultural message to the West. Hindu nationalists introduced new norms of dress, making them longer and thicker, which immediately became 'indigenous' and 'traditional'.<sup>31</sup> Scholars argue that hemlines started dropping with the fervour of nationalist movement.<sup>32</sup> Hindu reformers attached a moral quality to modest clothing, with clarion calls for sexless propriety and good conduct. The moralism of dress reform was no less than an attempt to abolish fashion itself.<sup>33</sup> A leading writer explained:

*Some argue that there is no relationship between beauty and good conduct. They just crave for beauty: in forest and at home, in society and while alone, in temple and whorehouse, in milk and in wine, in sacrifice and in lust, in Sita and in Rambha.... I have serious objection to such uncontrolled power of beauty.... A woman's beauty is not in colours, jewellery, fashion or makeup, but in good conduct, swadeshi and simplicity. That provides us wholesome joy.... Thus, we rate Sita, Savitri and Ahilya above Rambha, Menaka and Urvashi.*<sup>34</sup>

Swadeshi, plain, thick and durable clothes were symbols of highest societal order.<sup>35</sup> They represented social control, effacing rather than enhancing the body, and by implication, the self.<sup>36</sup> Swadeshi ideologues took on the mantle of code enforcers. Wrote Gandhi:

*Boycott is impossible unless you will surrender the whole of your foreign clothing. So long as the taste persists, so long is complete renunciation impossible. And boycott means complete renunciation. We must be prepared to*



*be satisfied with such cloth as India can produce even as we are thankfully content with such children as God gives us. I have not known a mother throwing away her baby even though it may appear ugly to an outsider. So should it be with the patriotic women of India about Indian manufacturers....*

*The spinning-wheel...is presented as a duty, as dharma.*<sup>37</sup>

Swadeshi clothing particularly carried an edifying tone for women as they were to reform men to swadeshi ways. Went a poem 'Brave Wife's Request to Husband':

माँगा दो ऐ मेरे प्रीतम, मुझे चरखा चलाना है.  
मुफ्त में बैठने का अब नहीं प्यारे ज़माना है.  
विदेशी वस्त्र जो रखे उन्हें अब फूंक डालो तुम.  
बने कपड़े स्वदेशी अब यही दिल में समाना है.  
मुझे तो लाज आती है, विदेशी अब न पहनूंगी.  
बनूँ वालंटियरीनी मैं, मुझे झंडा उठाना है.

[My dear, get me a charkha....

This is no time to twitter.

Burn all your foreign cloth.

Cook your own swadeshi broth.

I feel ashamed, and will never wear the foreign tag.

I will be a volunteer, and raise the freedom flag.]<sup>38</sup>

Western dress was no longer a symbol of modernity, civilisation or progress. Rather, it brought alienation, discomfort and a civilisational crisis.<sup>39</sup> Swadeshi campaigners and reformers joined together in enacting the transitions from foreign cloth to swadeshi through the bodies of Hindu women, removing what they perceived as the vestiges of British imperialism. This quest to chisel out a distinct swadeshi identity required a regulation of women's fashion and a critical transformation in their sartorial patterns. Swadeshi pamphlets, books and articles espoused the need to educate women about the benefits of adopting swadeshi and eliminating wasteful ornamentation, and they called on volunteers to teach women a sartorial reform, which would liberate women and bring about a wholesale elimination of British rule. This, however, also meant caricaturing and demonising the perceived anti-swadeshi woman, the 'bad' housewife and the modern, 'Western' memsahib.

### **The 'Bad' Housewife and the 'Western' Woman**

The process of preservation went hand in hand with condemnation. A section of middle-class, upper-caste women, after all, was also identified as one of the biggest culprits in the use of foreign brands.<sup>40</sup> An article 'Lifestyle of Our Women', stated that powder from Paris, soap from Italy, toothpaste from London and thin saris from Manchester were in many women's wardrobes.<sup>41</sup> Fashion became a comment on sexual licentiousness, potent pleasures and dangers of unbridled women. A tract Bhishan Bhavishya equated women's fashion with enslavement to western values, leading to conspicuous consumption, sexual promiscuity and break up of joint family.<sup>42</sup> Narrated a

swadeshi poem:

विदेशी सारियां क्रेप वोह अधु मलमल.  
हिन्द के लोग गिरे देख उन्हें मुँह के बल.  
नारियां लाज से घूँघट न जो उठाती हैं  
पहन के इनको साफ़ नंगी नज़र आती हैं.  
डूब मरो तुम्हें लाज ना आती,  
पैसा और इज़्ज़त दोनों गँवा आतीं.

[Foreign saris of muslin and crepe,  
Make the Indian men gape.

Women, who never lifted their veil,  
Wear these saris and appear stale.

Drown yourself, you shameless goner,  
You lose both your money and honour.]<sup>43</sup>

Swadeshi advocates constantly worried about women in middle-class homes corrupting swadeshi ideals. A tract stated that women's insatiable craving for foreign goods symbolised the 'wiles of women'.<sup>44</sup> Reformist cartoons lampooned the spent-thrift 'bad' housewife who bothered her husband constantly, asking repeatedly for clothes and jewellery.<sup>45</sup> (Figure 3)

**Figure 3**



देवी जी पड़ोसिन के नए नमूने की सूड़ियों पर मुग्ध हो गई  
हैं। कचहरी से लोट कर पति-देवता बैठे ही हैं कि  
फ़र्माइश पेश है, बेचारे परेशान हैं !

Source: Vyanga Chitravali, Allahabad, 1930.

On the one hand, the bad housewife was amenable to jingoism of a patriarchal-reformist type; on the other, the educated, supposedly modern and westernised woman was caricatured, abused and replaced by a suitable swadeshi icon. The immoral, hedonist memsahib was part of indigenous discourse since 19th century, which was now combined with a critique of modernity.<sup>46</sup> Excessive education was particularly seen as leading to sexual licentiousness and dangers of unbridled women.<sup>47</sup> Such a woman, it was argued, dressed tartly, acted shamelessly and acquired fancy habits. She visited modern spaces like tennis clubs, parties and theatre, threatening swadeshi ideals of simplicity and service.<sup>48</sup> A poem titled 'Paschimi Drishya: Sabhya Biwi ki Chitthi' (Western Scene: Letter of a Civilised Wife), acutely expressed this:

सीखे मैंने डांसिंग ढंग,  
 और सिंगिंग है इसके संग,  
 बस अब देख दिखलाऊँगी,  
 और सीखूँ सिखलाऊँगी,  
 सदा सुन्दर तितली बनकर, उड़ऊँगी फूलों फूलों पर,  
 कभी थियेटर मैं जाऊँगी,  
 फूल तुरें ले आऊँगी.  
 [I learned dancing,  
 And singing along with it,  
 Now I will watch and show,  
 And learn and teach,  
 I will be a beautiful butterfly,  
 flying always over flowers,  
 I will go to the theatre,  
 And will bring sparks and flowers.]<sup>49</sup>

Went another poem:

मैं अंग्रेजी पढ़ गयी,  
 नहीं पर्दे में रहने की....  
 गेंद खेलने को जाऊँगी, मर्दानों में जी बहलाऊँगी....  
 पति अंग्रेजीदाँ जवान हो, क्रिस्तान या मुस्लमान हो.  
 I have learnt English,  
 I will not remain under the veil....  
 They will go to play the ball,  
 I will flirt with men....  
 Husband should be young and English,  
 And can be Christian or Muslim.]<sup>50</sup>

Chand, the famous Hindi magazine, carried a series of cartoons caricaturing the daily routine of a modern woman. She took bath at 7 am, dressed her hair at 8, fashioned herself at 9, went to college at 10, took a joy ride at 5 pm, listened to radio at 8, and read a novel at 12 am, ending with a question mark on time for household chores (Figure 4).



**Figure 4**  
**'Everyday Routine of the Modern Woman'**



Source: Chand, January 1938: 293-300.

Charkha, image of the last cartoon, significantly tied prolonged labour of cloth weaving to women's diligent work in the home. Swadeshi created a new language of distinction where the opulent 'bad' housewife was contrasted to the dependable woman that the nation required and fashioned. These efforts at cultivating a new nationalist woman marked an intricate link between citizenship, nationalism, gender formation and clothing.<sup>51</sup> Such assertions, however, became not only a form of social control and social organisation; codes of dressing also became a vehicle to maintain collective identities of groups, a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, a marker to differentiate between Hindus, Muslims and Europeans, and between castes.

### Hinduisation of Swadeshi Dressing

Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that swadeshi symbolism epitomised Hindu ideas of purity and renunciation from material wellbeing, for service of the nation.<sup>52</sup> Manu Goswami emphasises that swadeshi invoked a mythical sense of historical time and religious imaginaries, with a particularised space of Bharat as pure container of national culture and economy.<sup>53</sup> Constructing thus a nostalgic golden past, a swadeshi poem went:

कौनसा घर था जहाँ चरखे नहीं चलते थे,  
लाखों मन सूत इन्हीं चरखों से निकलते थे.  
ब्याह-शादी में था दहेज़ में चरखे का चलन,  
नारियाँ हिन्द समझती थीं सगुन.

[There was no household in the past where charkha was not run.  
 These charkhas produced yarn in ton.  
 Gifting charkha in dowry was widespread.

Hindu women considered themselves auspiciously wed.]<sup>54</sup>

Hindu vocabulary was crucial in shaping swadeshi sartorial decisions. In a meeting at Allahabad, Gandhi told women that under Ravan's rule, even Sita wore rough clothes of tree bark for 14 years.<sup>55</sup> On insistence of upper-caste women, deities in temples of Allahabad and Agra began to be dressed in khadi.<sup>56</sup> A swadeshi poem implored:

भारतवर्ष में जो फैशन था उसको दियो बहाई,  
 खदर और सादगी सब कहीं सबको पराई दिखाई...  
 गुलर अबीर अरु रंग विदेशी को ना मोल मंगाओ,  
 कपूर, केसर, चन्दन घिस कर सबको माथे लगाओ.

[Fashion of India has been swept away.  
 It is swadeshi and simplicity that hold sway.  
 Do not buy colours of Holi from abroad.  
 They are deeply flawed.  
 Apply camphor, saffron and sandal.  
 Light swadeshi candle.]<sup>57</sup>

Use of foreign goods was equated with murder of cows. Stated a swadeshi pamphlet:

जूते आदि खाल के बनते, खून में कपड़े दे रंगवाये.  
 गौ खून में रंगे वस्त्र को भारत में दे भिजवाये....  
 चिकना चमकीला कपड़ा जो बाहर से भारत में आये.  
 चर्बी कि मंडी लगती है तुमको सच-सच दिया बताये.

[Shoes made of hide and clothes dyed in blood.  
 Garments soaked in cow blood make India flood....  
 Smooth and glossy cloth comes to India from outside,  
 To tell you truthfully, product of wholesale market of cow hide.]<sup>58</sup>

Occasionally an anti-Muslim rhetoric accompanied this. Hanuman Prasad Poddar, son of a Marwari business family and editor of famous Gita Press of Gorakhpur, advocated swadeshi by urging Marwari women to adopt Hindu swadeshi glass bangles and boycott lac bangles made by Muslim manihars (bangle sellers), as they were foreign and alien. Most lac manihars were Muslims. He argued that women became impure by wearing them as they had to touch and be touched by Muslim hands.<sup>59</sup> Cartoons depicted the depraved Muslim manihar (Figure 5).<sup>60</sup> There were meetings in 1927 at Mathura, Khurja and Kanpur, where Hindu women were coerced to boycott Muslim bangle sellers and use swadeshi Hindu bangle sellers as a part of their national duty. Gomti Devi of Kanpur Arya Samaj said that to prevent this enticement, she had set up Hindu widows in the business of selling bangles.<sup>61</sup> Successful efforts were made to boycott Muslim manihars in Agra.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Hindu bangle-sellers reported

brisk sales.<sup>63</sup> As argues Sumit Sarkar, extremist nationalism often merged with Hindu revivalism.<sup>64</sup>

**Figure 5**



Source: *Vyanga Chitravali*.

Lisa Trivedi upholds a singular visual vocabulary of swadeshi campaign, sometimes glossing over internal contradictions.<sup>65</sup> However, scholars have cautioned against assuming that visual texts only confirm ideas already expressed in written form.<sup>66</sup> Sarkar highlights deep seated caste, class and religious ambiguities that swadeshi movement carried.<sup>67</sup> Emma Tarlo labours to show how Gandhi's vision of a simplified, shared, sacred national costume was never totally realised.<sup>68</sup> Women's ambiguous responses to swadeshi fashion in UP strengthen such arguments.

### Swadeshi Fashion and Women's Enigmatic Responses

The proliferation of swadeshi ideals, while supported by many middle-class urban women, also revealed a tense relationship in terms of the swadeshi definition of fashion aesthetics. Women were not just passive victims or unrestricted agents as they negotiated meanings of swadeshi fashion, embodying and contesting its ideals through their clothing practices. At a glance, the dictates of the nationalists were followed by many middle-class, reformist and nationalist women. Articles in women's magazines, like *Stri Darpan*, *Grihalakshmi* and *Chand*, took up the refrain of swadeshi, *seva* and sacrifice, and opposed fashionable dressing.<sup>69</sup> However, there were fissures from within as women writers faced the incongruity of defending drab swadeshi attire while also finding it uncomfortable and undesirable. Many women did not want to wear white cloth as it was associated with widowhood. Some chose to embroider, fix borders, dye or tailor their khadis to beautify them.<sup>70</sup>

Politically correct stances clashed with subterranean desires that pushed women in other directions. Jyotirmai Thakur, writing on beauty and fashion,

proposed an eclectic borrowing between east and west, and recommended the adoption of fashionable new clothes.<sup>71</sup> Stated another woman writer that fashion for her meant what made women comfortable, presentable and beautiful, and that women needed to be aware of trends in fashion and beauty and adopt what suited them the best.<sup>72</sup> Continued attention to bodily adornment was not simply a rehabilitation of femininity; it was related to local sartorial styles, standards of beauty, appropriate expenditures and women's moral and sexual rectitude. There was a complex interplay between swadeshi clothing, patriarchy, fashionable desires, carving of one's spaces, and yearning for good life. The 'gendering of the national subject' remained a contentious project.<sup>73</sup> Such ambiguities become more glaring in discourse around Dalit women's clothing, which was also tied to conversions.

### Dalits, Clothing and Conversions

In many ways, swadeshi established certain normative frameworks that marginalised the lower castes and rendered Dalits invisible. Clothing hierarchically distinguished women from one another. Dalit women had to endure humiliating dress restrictions, which were a way to mark them as inferior and sexually promiscuous. As elsewhere, among the Bhangis of Lucknow, women could not wear the bodice, gold ornaments, or nose ring.<sup>74</sup> A section of subordinated castes thus wished to garner dignity by hoping to dress in particular ways.

Clothing became an indicator to distinguish Dalit Christian women from their unconverted counterparts. Pictures appeared in popular literature portraying a naked, 'dirty' and unkempt outcaste woman and a fully clothed, sari clad, 'clean' and smiling Christian Dalit woman (Figure 6). Swadeshi clothing did not make much sense to Dalit women as they wished to use dress to transcend their position in systems of inequality. It was not the simplicity and roughness of swadeshi cloth that attracted them, but the power of 'foreign' dressing. In Dalit discourses, dress became a signifier of adapting to western norms, participating in modernity, acquiring respect in the public sphere, and putting the ignominy of their past status behind.

Figure 6



वाई चोर हिन्दू ( अछूत ) होने की अवस्था - दाहिने चोर ईसाई होने पर काया-बदल !

Source: Chand, May 1929: 51.

Reformist iconography too recognised dress as a terrain for contesting social relations and religious identities. Even while lamenting conversions, they acknowledged the change in demeanour and clothing that it brought about, suddenly transforming Dalits into elites. Cartoons published by Chand and Arya Samaj portrayed two outcaste women together: one converted and the other unconverted.<sup>75</sup> One cartoon, for example, visualised the converted outcaste woman walking ahead royally, carrying an umbrella, a purse, wearing a hat, skirt and high-heeled shoes, reflecting an elevated status. The unconverted woman walked behind head bent, bare-footed, carrying the child of the converted Dalit woman (Figure 7).

Figure 7



एक जाति की मेम और दासों अद्वैत का यह अन्तर,  
वह चलती छुता ले आगे, यह उसका बच्चा लेकर !

[See the difference between two women of the same species:  
One is an English madam and the other a servant-untouchable.  
The former walks ahead with an umbrella,  
the latter walks behind with her child.]

Source: *Vyanga Chitravali*.

Another had the Christian Dalit woman carefully sitting on a chair looking down while the untouchable took care of her dog, looking up (Figure 8).

Figure 8



[The Christian woman is the master of the dog, while the outcaste woman her servant. But they both were of the same caste; Hindus, please see carefully.]

Source: *Vyanga Chitravali*.

Yet another lamented the loss, showing the converted woman again in shoes, hat and umbrella (Figure 9).

Figure 9



[One has become a madam-lady, the other a fish seller. Blessed be the religion of Christ, which is all powerful.]

Source: *Chand, May 1929: 77*.



Swadeshi implied a fractured modernity. For Dalits perhaps it signified an antithesis of modernity. A section of converted Dalits therefore manipulated their material world of clothing to fabricate their identities and question the authority of their 'betters'. Clothes became a way to pronounce their new upwardly mobile status in the social hierarchy and also intricately tied them to modernity. The converted Dalit figure was an internal embarrassment, an 'inappropriate other',<sup>76</sup> whose sartorial style defied swadeshi logic. These women and men literally wore their difference on their bodies, signifying an uncomfortable anomaly in the swadeshi discourse.

### Conclusion

In UP, as elsewhere, swadeshi sartorial discourses were embedded in social, religious and caste divisions, exposing tensions at the heart of the swadeshi project. While swadeshi rhetoric encompassed all, in practice its ideal body politic privileged some over others, implicitly imagining certain women as eligible members of the campaign, while excluding the 'bad' housewife, the 'westernised' woman, and the converted Dalit woman. Unsettled dress questions remind us that the conception of an ideal swadeshi, who enacted herself through embodied practices, was constantly punctured by 'inappropriate' figures outside its ambit. Here, Foucault's notion of how bodies are dressed and managed through a panoptic lens is relevant.<sup>77</sup> However, the power of the panoptic may not be all-encompassing, and its disciplinary strength is often diluted.<sup>78</sup> The sartorial campaigns by the Hindu Right and the Muslim fanatics to dress women in particular ways, and resistances by different women to such coding suggest that the terrain continues to remain deeply contested, even though the contexts are different.

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