

CHAPTER 19

Fashion and Empire in Early Modern South Asia, c. 1500-1800

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What (*not*) to wear? A *mirza* should never wear brocade or cloth of gold; these are beneath his dignity, intended for adorning domestic spaces, not the body. In winter, a shawl – plain or imprinted with gold and silver leaves – would keep out the cold over garments of Indian material fastened with pearl buttons, ‘for pearl is natural while other jewels have to be cut.’ In summer, ‘when he sits on a wooden seat with a white covering, he should wear the silver-threaded cap round the head and ears [...] and a silver threaded upper garment (*bala-band*).’¹ From its initial use as a title for princes or noblemen, *mirza* had become the watchword of (courtly) refinement, denoting a gentlemanly bearing by the seventeenth century. Flushed with cash through burgeoning trade, the Mughal Empire reached its zenith; home to an increasingly cosmopolitan nobility whose ranks had increased rapidly, an expanding population of theologians and administrators, and a prosperous mercantile elite.

To gain a surer footing, *dastur al-amal* (advice literature, manuals) could be consulted, authors guiding these social elites in the proper execution of their duties, whether accountancy techniques for bureaucrats or equine management and farriery for the gentry.² Penned in

¹ Aziz Ahmad, ‘The British Museum *Mīrẓānāma* and the Seventeenth Century *Mīrẓā* in India’, *Iran* 13 (1975), 99-110, here 105.

² Najaf Haider, ‘Norms of Professional Excellence and Good Conduct in Accountancy Manuals of the Mughal Empire’, *International Review of Social History*, 56, special issue 19 (2011), 263-74; Jagjeet Lally, ‘Empires and

Persian in the mid-seventeenth century, a *Mirzanama* ('Book of the Mirza') now deposited at the British Library is the source of the tenets of sartorial advice, above.³ To be a real *mirza* was not a matter of 'merely pinning flowers to one's [turban] [...] and strolling through a garden', but to be fully transformed: to stand in the garden and 'inhale and imbibe the fragrance of the flower', metaphorically and literally.⁴ In this is evidence of an archetypal early modern sensibility – a belief in the power of self-presentation, if not the process of self-fashioning.⁵ But what of fashion itself?

India is said to have clothed the early modern world. Indian textiles were a long-standing medium of exchange in the intra-Asian spice trade before the coming of the Europeans, thereafter also becoming a medium of exchange in the Atlantic slave trade, not to mention objects of desire in their own right in Europe.⁶ If this 'world of goods' – the new forms of fashion and material culture spurred into existence by unprecedented long-distance trade – is now identified as one of the hallmarks of a 'global' early modern period, then India certainly

Equines: The Horse in Art and Exchange in South Asia, c.1600-1850', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35/1 (2015), 96-116, here 100 and 106-07.

³ Ahmad, 'Mīrzānāma', 99.

⁴ Ibid, 100. For discussion of the purpose and use of such books by the anxious newly-elevated social elite: Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42/1 (1999), 47-93, here 72-84.

⁵ For a placement of India(ns) within the early-modern world of the 'self': Jagjeet Lally, *India and the Silk Roads. The History of a Trading World* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2021), 125-59.

⁶ J. Bohorquez, 'Linking the Atlantic and Indian Oceans: Asian Textiles, Spanish Silver, Global Capital, and the Financing of the Portuguese-Brazilian Slave Trade (c. 1760-1808)', *Journal of Global History* 15/1 (2020), 19-38, for a recent example of such scholarship, one that examines India's role afresh within the framework of the 'global South' and contains a digest of the wider literature (especially fn. 3 and 10).

played a critical part in this development.⁷ Yet the burgeoning scholarship constitutive of global material culture studies still tends to see Asia as the progenitor of developments brought to fruition in other places, not least in Europe, and Asians as producers of many of the consumables or ‘things’ transformed into ‘fashions’ by other people, namely by Europeans.⁸ Did the locus of inquisitiveness, innovation, and the love of novelty lie in Europe, possibly fuelled by the encounter with the ‘Other’ if not entirely resulting from endogenous developments, or did the uptick in mobility after c. 1500 engender experimentation and change in non-European contexts, too?⁹ Can we even speak of such a thing as ‘fashion’ in pre-modern south Asia?

Unpicking the very necessity of posing such a prior is illuminating. In the first place, ‘Oriental’ societies were held by the eighteenth century as a sort of mirror to western progress and cultural achievement. India, for instance, was imagined as a land of petty despots, peopled by bare-breasted women and wandering *fakirs* caked in ash and cloaked in animal skins when not entirely naked, the very picture of the monstrous and barbarous ‘other’.¹⁰ Represented by such *topoi* in illustrations to travellers’ accounts and engravings, for example, India was thus

⁷ Indian (and Chinese) productions were even central to what has hitherto been seen as quintessentially ‘English’, - namely, the country houses and interiors of Britain’s gentry – such was India’s place in early modern material culture: Margot Finn and Kate Smith (eds.), *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857* (London: UCL Press, 2018).

⁸ See most recently: Evelyn Welch (ed.), *Fashioning the Early Modern. Dress, Textiles, and Innovation in Europe 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Note, however, work on the Pacific Ocean and Russia that is contributing to a decentring of material culture studies away from Europe; for a summary discussion: Lally, *Silk Roads*, 158-59.

⁹ Carlo Marco Belfanti, ‘Was Fashion a European Invention?’, *Journal of Global History* 3/3 (2008), 419-43, begins to examine this issue, with a brief and impressionistic analysis of the Indian context on 422-26.

¹⁰ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129, 136.

frozen in time as it was rendered for comparison and entered the European popular imagination. Religion was critical to this development.¹¹ India – or, rather, Hindu society, for that was misapprehended as authentically Indian – was static, steeped in ritual, stagnating under the weight of ancient custom and tradition; thus, hardly the space for cultural innovation, let alone fashion.

Such tropes were already being interrogated before the ‘material turn’ in history, but another major problem continues to plague historians wishing to study Indian dress and fashion: a relative paucity of sources, especially when compared to their counterparts working on European societies.¹² The surviving examples or even remnants of Indian dress date mostly from c. 1800, or else consist of older flat textiles from which Indian clothes might have been fashioned, not to mention Indian textiles made up into European garments.¹³ Indeed, *textiles* and *craft* – rather than *dress* and *fashion* – are paradigmatic of how the Indian case has been understood; traceable to the lament of the late nineteenth century about the state (and fate) of India’s so-called ‘traditional’ industries and ‘crafts’, not to mention associated preservationist discourses and collection practices that focussed on the art of the weaver or printer rather than the tailor.¹⁴ Yet, for their part, historians of India have not been especially curious about fashion

¹¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe’s India. Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 22-26, 38-40, and – for an analysis focussed on Bernard Picart's output of 1723-37 on Indian religion – 103-143.

¹² Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters. History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), represents a canonical contribution to the interrogation of these tropes.

¹³ Take, for example, the excellent collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, some sense of the scope and content of which can be found in the catalogue to a landmark recent exhibition on Indian textiles: Rosemary Crill (ed.), *The Fabric of India* (London: V&A Publishing, 2015).

¹⁴ This is not to say that India’s royal collections, or the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad, could not be mined and studied more deeply and examined in conjunction with other visual and literary sources, the value of which is so

or even material culture. Those working in south Asia, most especially, for numerous reasons shunned as frivolous the study of consumption – let alone material culture and fashion – in the decades after Independence.¹⁵

Against these odds, this chapter strives not so much to produce a survey of a large body of work on fashion and dress, as knit together ideas from a diverse and disparate scholarship. At its height, the Mughal court (1526-1858) was the preeminent cultural centre on the Indian subcontinent. This chapter focuses on the Mughal Empire as well as those polities at its edges with which it had relations, and its ‘successor states’. The first section starts by sketching the sartorial transformation – crudely, from draped to stitched – underway before the Mughal conquest, occurring under the aegis of the rulers of Delhi Sultanates and other Muslim dynasties, then examining the changes in what the emperor and the elites wore during the high Mughal period of the late sixteenth to late seventeenth centuries. The second section journeys beyond the Mughal court, in part because changes in dress affected elites outside that rarefied space even at its zenith – evinced by the appetite for the sorts of guidance provided by *mirzanama* texts – but also because the emperor and his court never quite exercised cultural

stunningly demonstrated by: Ritu Kumar, *Costumes and Textiles of Royal India* (London: Christie’s Books, 1999). On the colonial collection of ‘specimens’ and craft discourses: Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Saloni Mathur, *India by Design. Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁵ The reasons for this neglect have been well-described in a volume that aimed to turn the tide: Douglas E. Haynes, Abigail McGowan, Tirthankar Roy, and Haruka Yanagisawa (eds.), *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010). Compare the disinterest of ‘professional’ historians, tasked with writing histories of the new Republic, with more popular works, such as: Charles Fabri, *A History of Indian Dress* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1960). Compare this neglect by historians with interest among historical *anthropologists*, such as Cohn’s famous essay on cloth, clothing, and colonialism, or Bayly’s contribution to Arjun Appadurai’s interest in the ‘social life of things’: Cohn, *Colonialism*, 106-62; C. A. Bayly, ‘The Origins of *Swadeshi* (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930’ in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (ed.), Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 285-321.

hegemony. This fact became apparent when the power of the imperial centre waned from the late seventeenth century, resulting at once in the codification of Mughal sartorial styles even as these were subtly altered with local twists by regional powerholders, not to mention the appropriation of new styles by the burgeoning middle layer of society. The concluding section evaluates how best to describe these shifts and the value of thinking with ‘fashion’.

Dressing in Style at India’s ‘Islamicate’ Courts, c. 1500- c. 1700

The codes contained within the *mirzanama* genre emphasised the importance of connoisseurship and cosmopolitanism, such attributes possible in consequence of the prosperity of the Mughal world and its increasing connectedness with other parts of Afro-Eurasia.¹⁶ The fussiness of the *mirza*’s life was thus novel, the result of the more hierarchic and formalised codes of masculinity that had come into being by the mid-seventeenth century in reflection of a court culture increasingly oriented around conspicuous consumption as a marker of authority. Thus writers of archly satirical *mirzanama* texts, such as Mirza Kamran, lampooned the aspirations of parvenus and mocked the foppishness of their gentlemanly mores.¹⁷ To better understand these shifts in fashion and style in Mughal India, therefore, we must first situate the changing presentation of the *padshah* (the ‘great king’ or emperor) and his court.

¹⁶ Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Kingdom, Household and Body History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar’, *Modern Asian Studies* 41/5 (2007), 889-923, here especially 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, especially 84.

A distinction, albeit a rather crude one, can be made between ‘Indic’ drapery and ‘Islamicate’ clothes of cut and stitched cloth.¹⁸ In north India, several centuries of rule by Muslim dynasties from central Asia – the succession of five sultanates ruled from Delhi – brought into political life at large many of the technologies of administration and cultural forms of the Islamicate world: a paper-based bureaucracy, the use of the Persian language, and garments made of cut and sewn fabric.¹⁹ An example of a sultanate-era Indian cotton tunic (*kamiz*) survives because it was worn as a talisman, covered in all the verses of the Quran – inscribed in coloured ink and gold paint – and thus preserved by successive recipients (Figure 19.1).²⁰

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.1

In south India, three successive Hindu dynasties ruled the Vijayanagara state for almost three hundred years until the mid-seventeenth century. Hardly a ‘Hindu bulwark against Muslim conquest’ – as these dynasties were portrayed in colonial historiography – the contact between their rulers and the Muslim courts of the north left, in fact, an indelible and deep impression.²¹ Of numerous impacts, ranging from military technology to the material culture of the court,

¹⁸ Cohn, *Colonialism*, 130-31. For explanation of the more open-ended and flexible terms ‘Indic’ and ‘Islamicate’ – consciously used in place of Indian/Hindu and Islamic/Muslim – see: David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, (eds.), *Beyond Turk and Hindu. Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁹ Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22-24, and *passim*.

²⁰ For another example of the same period, in poorer condition: Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 134-1873.

²¹ Phillip B. Wagoner, “‘Sultan among Hindu Kings’: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55/4 (1996), 851-80, here 851-53 for a survey of these historiographical ideas.

Phillip B. Wagoner argued that ‘the most profound’ were ‘in the system of men's court dress’ in Vijayanagara and its dependencies.²² In place of lengths of cloth tied at the waist and an uncovered upper body, courtiers – when performing political rather than private duties – wore *kabayi* (a term derived from the Arabic *qaba*’).²³ This was a long tunic of plain white cloth – probably of cotton, perhaps silk – with a circular neck, a slit opening down to the chest to enable (dis)robing, long and fairly fitted sleeves, and tied at the waist with colourful sashes. This was worn in the Islamicate world as an outer-robe over a *kamiz*. On their heads, they wore *kullayi* (derived from the Perso-Turkic *kulah*): a conical cap with a rounded top around one and a half times the height of the head made from a brocaded fabric, the pattern of which was variable, including geometric designs or floral (for example, lotus) motifs. Among the Hindu rulers of the Malla kingdom in Bengal, but also in such places as Ceylon and Siam, a similar process had taken effect by the seventeenth century, part and parcel with the re-articulation of political authority with reference to those ‘Islamicate’ idioms of kingly power that became increasingly familiar due to the sway of Muslim rule over the subcontinent and across the Indian Ocean.²⁴

On the eve of the Mughal conquest, therefore, many – but certainly not all – of India’s major royal courts were already part of an Indo-Islamicate or Indo-Persianate world, with sartorial transformation a conscious and visible manifestation of political and cultural

²² Ibid, 853, 856-61.

²³ Ibid, 868-71, for code-switching, i.e., between Indic and Islamicate dress in the private and public domains, respectively.

²⁴ Asher and Talbot, *India*, 219; Amelia Peck (ed.), *Interwoven Globe. The Worldwide Textile Trade 1500-1800* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 19-20 and 26 for illustrations of other Asian monarchs in stitched clothes (made of Indian cotton textiles) and accompanying discussion.

(ex)change.²⁵ At the same time, there was also a flow of long standing in the opposite direction, from India's major textile centres to central and west Asian courts and bazaars.²⁶ A sale recorded in 1589 between a merchant from Multan in Punjab and a Samarkandi nobleman, for example, included the following: Bengali handkerchiefs, napkins, coarse and fine calico, Khairabadi chintz, and Gujarati silk brocade.²⁷ And the fashion in Safavid Iran for silk velvets woven of metal-wrapped thread with figurative motifs – including flora, fauna, and human figures – sparked imitation in Mughal workshops over the seventeenth century, the cloth used for domestic spaces and clothing.²⁸ Indeed, once rule by the Mughal dynasty was placed on a surer footing and enlarged under Akbar (r. 1556-1605), imperial power became imbricated in the patronage of such specialist textiles in imperial workshops (*karkhanas*) – as the Delhi sultans had also done – and weaving centres, for this was part of the exercise of wise and good kingship, while robes of honour imbued with the emperor's sacred touch played a central part in ceremonies of ritual investiture or gift exchange as elsewhere in the Indo-Islamic world.²⁹ Such ceremonies might include as many as seven items: a turban (*pagri*), a long overcoat or robe (*jama*), a *qaba*, a close-fitting coat (*alkhaliq*), trousers, a tunic or shirt, and a sash or scarf (*kamar band, patka*).³⁰

²⁵ See, also: Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation. Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 61-87.

²⁶ Lally, *Silk Roads*, 1-19.

²⁷ Muzaffar Alam, 'Trade, State Policy and Regional Change: Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial Relations, c.1550-1750', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37/3 (1994), 202-27, here 205-06.

²⁸ Crill, *Fabric*, 62-63.

²⁹ Ibid, 103-06; Tripta Verma, *Karkhanas Under the Mughals from Akbar to Aurangzeb. A Study in Economic Development* (New Delhi: Pragati Publications, 1994); Stewart Gordon (ed.), *Robes of Honour. Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003). On the connection of weaving, clothing, and Islam depicted in a Mughal painting: Crill, *Fabric*, 9-10.

³⁰ Cohn, *Colonialism*, 115.

As the shadow of God on Earth, the emperor Akbar was not only the font of justice but also the *insan-i kamil* (perfect man), his body – and by extension his household – the exemplary centre for the kingdom.³¹ A cursory examination of Mughal paintings gives credence to the view that there was little change in court dress from Sultanate times; the Mughals largely gave up wearing the leatherwear suitable to the cooler climes of their homeland in central Asia – and abhorrent to some of their new subjects – in favour of Indian cottons, deepening their movement into the Indian sartorial ecumene thereby.³² A new relation was being drawn between notions of ‘manliness’ and imperial service but, rather than stimulating a shift in attire, these were visually enunciated with reference to existing items of clothing. The ‘strength of a man’s waist and back were critical markers of his manliness, in a way which parallels the English sense of “girding the loins,”’ Rosalind O’Hanlon notes, ‘but also goes beyond it’, for a man ‘who was *kamar band*, “waist bound up,” signified one ready for action, service and battle.’³³ These newly-articulated metaphors for the virile and valorous serviceman gave new significance to the sash tied at the waist over the long tunic, and into which a dagger could be securely lodged.³⁴ In a picture of a young man at rest – engrossed in his book but ready for combat, combining the ideal of the *mirza* and the warrior (*ghazi*) – can be seen the short-sleeved Timurid variant of the tunic likely worn by the Mughal dynasty’s founders and also in fashion in Persia, but which would give way to the Mughal-style *jama* (robe), itself probably an

³¹ O’Hanlon, ‘Kingdom’.

³² Kumar, *Costumes*, 38.

³³ O’Hanlon, ‘Manliness’, 64 for discussion, which draws on the writing of Muhammad Baqir Najm-i Sani, an émigré who left Iran for India around the late sixteenth century, working under the patronage of Jahangir at the Mughal court.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

adaptation of the *jamias* worn by Rajputs during later Sultanate times.³⁵ On his head, the youth wears a turban of a chequered cloth, different sorts of which were produced all over India (Figure 19.2).³⁶

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.2

A closer inspection reveals subtle changes; less in their forms or styles than in the quality of craftsmanship and the materials used in the making of clothes worn by those presenting themselves at court. They were a reflection of changes within the composition of the nobility, which became more cosmopolitan but also a far more elaborately layered hierarchy by the end of the Akbarid era than before (or in comparison to other Indian courts, described below).³⁷ There was a global dimension to this too: the greater connectedness of various royal courts – the Ottoman and the Habsburg, the Mughal and the Safavid, these, in

³⁵ Jos. J.L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Frontiers and the High Roads of Empire 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 2002), especially 39-40, for contrast of the *mirza* and *ghazi* ideals. Gommans has, as part of his analysis, applied Norbert Elias' famous 'civilising process' to the Indian context, an evaluative review of which can be found in: Jagjeet Lally, 'Introduction to the Third Edition. Afghans and their History between South Asia and the World' in Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (Delhi: Manohar, 2018). See: Cohn, *Colonialism*, 131, for discussion of pre-Mughal Rajput dress.

³⁶ Regard, for comparison: 'A Youth Reading' (Mughal court, c. 1610, by Muhammad Ali), Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., F1945.93.

³⁷ John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58-78.

turn, with the English or Portuguese – prompted mimesis and rivalry, or the ‘competitive kingship’ of early modern monarchs, to paraphrase a recent contribution by Jeremy Adelman.³⁸

In a masterful painting of an allegorical scene, we see an imagined audience (*darbar*) given by Jahangir (r. 1605-27) to his contemporaries, thus permitting a comparison of the dress worn in different courts (Figure 19.3).³⁹ The Mughal emperor, seated on an hourglass, wears a turban of chequered fabric on his head; his head, neck, wrists and fingers all dripping in jewels; his waist girded in a jewelled belt. In an almost Indic style, he wears no *kamiz* and is topless – the contrast of his skin against the darker-coloured circles of his areolae just discernible – but for a long Islamicate tunic of an extremely fine, sheer Indian cloth. Underneath, he wears only loose trousers of a two-tone striped fabric, the artist’s skill in painting the layering of these materials in miniature a match for the weaver’s magic on the loom. Because of the injunction against Muslims wearing pure silk against the skin, the fabrics are probably the finest cotton or a cotton-silk mix.⁴⁰ In favouring the Sufi, who wears traditional robes made of heavier-weighted material (wool, most likely) in duller colours, as befitting his renunciation of worldly concerns, the emperor overlooks the three kings present, including the Ottoman sultan and King James I of England.⁴¹ The figure at the bottom left is dressed in a Mughal-era *jama* likely

³⁸ Jeremy Adelman, ‘Mimesis and Rivalry: European Empires and Global Regimes’, *Journal of Global History* 10/1 (2015), 77-98. See also: Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, eds., *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, (eds.), *Global Gifts. The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³⁹ For discussion of this picture: A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign. Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 207-09.

⁴⁰ Bayly, ‘Origins’, 290.

⁴¹ Jahangir’s disdain for the merchants whose interests James I’s ambassador represented matched the Englishmen’s refusal to abandon – in the hot climate of north India – their European clothes: Cohn, *Colonialism*, 112-13.

an Indian raja under Mughal authority or the artist himself, for his robe is fastened to the left (customary for Hindus at court) rather than the right (as for Muslims), these tie fastenings becoming decorative features in their own right in this period.⁴² Other seventeenth-century imperial miniatures show that the *jama* had become a standard component of court dress, the emperor singled out in *darbar* scenes by the superlative craftsmanship of his *jamās*, sometimes made of threads of precious metals, for example.⁴³

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.3

The fabrication of the emperor's attire – rather than its form, colour, or decoration – and his 'accessorising' with exquisite jewellery thus placed him at the apex of imperial society; his nobles dressed as befitting their rank.⁴⁴ His clothes also changed with the seasons, incorporating heavier fabrics in winter, and upon the occasion. Jahangir wrote in his memoirs of a new sleeveless, thigh-length jacket of an Iranian style he adapted for the Mughal court, possibly for riding.⁴⁵ As for the rest of the imperial household, the maintenance of *pardah* (literally 'screen', referring to the seclusion of the female household) has not only meant that pictures of specific women are relatively rare, but also that artists constituted images of women from idealised forms. Yet, the pictures that survive give a glimpse of the attire of Mughal elite

⁴² Cohn, *Colonialism*, 131. For an extant example: 'Lappets' (north India, c. 1740-60, cotton), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IS.110-1950.

⁴³ This is also evident in portraits of favoured nobles produced under imperial patronage, an unusual – for its incorporation of four separate full-body portraits by different artists – example from the 'Shah Jahan Album' in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 55.121.10.29.

⁴⁴ On the ranking and ordering of clothing received at the imperial court itself: Cohn, *Colonialism*, 117.

⁴⁵ For reproduction of such a riding jacket and discussion: Crill, *Fabric*, 108-10.

women. This was a variation of men's dress, often incorporating a length of fine fabric over the head or draped about the arms and shoulders and distinctive forms of headgear.⁴⁶ A late seventeenth-century Rajput picture from Bikaner of a lady at her toilette draws into one frame several different dress styles seen in Mughal imperial pictures (Figure 19.4). There is the bejewelled and bare breasted central figure, with her carefully-teased tresses of a style common to many pictures; to her left, her lady's companion wearing a long *jama* of delicate fabric over a short-sleeved *choli* (bodice or blouse) and loose trousers; and the attendant at her feet wearing more Indic dress – a *choli*, either a *sari* (a general term for a length of cloth draped about the body, often with a *pallav*, the often ornately-decorated end piece sometimes drawn over the head) or a skirt and separate head-cover.⁴⁷

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.4

If the Mughal court ought also to be understood as the cosmological centre of the realm, as A. Azfar Moin has so powerfully argued, then the emperor's outward appearance – not least, his sartorial choices – were neither incidental nor frivolous. They reflected prevalent ideas about sacred kingship, existing as material revelations of the *padshah*'s duty in the earthly and otherworldly domains. Take, for example, Humayun's selection of the colour of his clothes based on ideas about the correspondence of different days of the week to different planets and

⁴⁶ For an exquisite early seventeenth-century picture, see: 'Court Lady' (Mughal, c. 1620, attributed to Bishandas), Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C, F1984.43.

⁴⁷ For an analysis of the picture, see:

<https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/tour/women-in-south-asian-art/slide/10393> [accessed: 13 April 2020]. Compare with the pictures and accompanying discussion in: Crill, *Fabric*, 106, 118-20.

colours, as detailed in the *Qanun-i Humayuni* ('Canons of Sovereignty') penned by the historian Khwandamir (d. 1537). Tuesday, for instance, was 'associated with the bloodthirsty Mars (*bahram-i khun asham*), and its colour has redness (*hamriyyat*) in it', and so the emperor wore 'red on the throne on this day, and evildoers received their due and the doers of good, peace and security.'⁴⁸ These ideas about the relationship of the chromatic-cosmological cause to earthly effects were novel, their invention the result of Humayun's interest in astrology and alchemy, not least in consequence of his patronage of the Shattari Sufi order in northern India, whose leaders drew on popular, elite, and more esoteric Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit intellectual traditions.⁴⁹

Humayun's interest in what, even at the time, was disdained by his critics as magic or occult knowledge was sparked before his ascent to the Mughal throne; evinced, for example, by his patronage in 1529 of a book by Muhammad ibn Ashraf al-Husayni al-Rustamdari – the *Javahirnama-yi Humayuni* – on gemstones.⁵⁰ Its format followed older works in wide circulation and frequently copied in the early modern Indo-Persianate world.⁵¹ It listed the types of stones and their auspicious properties in keeping with current Islamic science, which 'regarded natural substances as part of the manifold strange and wonderful forms of nature

⁴⁸ Moin, *Millennial*, 121 for citation, and 121-23 for discussion.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 79 and 101-23. Note that esoteric knowledge – including of magic and the occult – were not a relic, preserved in India but abandoned in 'Renaissance' and 'Enlightenment' Europe, but were pervasive and proved durable in the early modern world at large, in both popular and educated circles. See, for instance: Michael Hunter, 'The Decline of Magic: Challenge and Response in Early Enlightenment England', *Historical Journal* 55/2 (2012), 399-425.

⁵⁰ Arash Khazeni, *Sky Blue Stone. The Turquoise Trade in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 47-48.

⁵¹ Ibid, 10, 31-38.

(*'aja'ib al-gharib*).⁵² Precious stones of the *haft rang*, the seven celestial colours – turquoise blue, night blue, black, green, red, ochre, and white – of Persianate tradition, had become ‘embedded in the culture of kingship and empire across Islamic Eurasia and known as [victorious stones] adorning conquerors and kings.’⁵³ Turquoise was especially praised in the (post-) Timurid Islamicate world, where it was connected to kingly power and thus control over its sources and mining the object of imperial rivalry between the Safavids, Uzbeks, and Mughals.⁵⁴ True ‘to Timurid sensibilities’, Arash Khazeni notes in a study of the stone, al-Rastamdari’s text also ‘deems turquoise as having the best properties – an imperial stone favoured by royals, such as King Solomon.’⁵⁵

Many aficionados will find this surprising, for use – in particular – of pearls, diamonds, rubies and spinels, emeralds and nephrite (jade) is more prevalent in surviving examples of Mughal jewellery and *objets*, visibly depicted in paintings of the imperial family and the nobility, and also commented upon by contemporaries.⁵⁶ Jahangir’s superlative interest in the natural world meant he was drawn to all manner of strange and wondrous (*'aja'ib*) things, emeralds being no exception, this passion also shared by his successor, Shah Jahan (r. 1627-58).⁵⁷ The discovery of Colombian mines and the growth of a global gemstone trade connecting

⁵² Ibid, 134.

⁵³ Ibid, here especially 14, 36.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 42-47.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 48.

⁵⁶ Kris Lane, *Colour of Paradise. The Emerald in the Age of Gunpowder Empires* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 140-41, for the observations of European lapidaries and dealers. For the *mirza*’s preference for rubies and pearls: Ahmad, ‘*Mīrzānāma*’, 104.

⁵⁷ ‘Shah Jahan Holding an Emerald’ (Agra, 1631-32, by Muhammad Abed), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IM.233-1921.

the New and Old worlds at once increased the availability of emeralds and made possible their working by Indian craftsmen into fineries for the imperial elite as never before.⁵⁸ With their green colour of long-standing association with Islamic Paradise and the Prophet, they were worn in the Jahangiri and Shah Jahani eras on or near the body, or used in objects handled by the emperors themselves: plumed aigrettes and strings of stones for adorning turbans (*kalgi*, *jigha*, *sarpech*), necklaces, pendants, rings, belts, prayer beads, the hilts and scabbards of swords, and even a goblet.⁵⁹ If popular and esoteric knowledge about the apotropaic powers of precious stones were drawn into Humayun's *Qanun*, for example, it should be of little surprise that these beliefs also percolated more widely via the advice literature.⁶⁰ 'He should consider it obligatory to wear a dagger or *jamdhar* [an Indian dagger]', wrote the author of the British Museum *Mirzanama* in a concluding section on the security of person, continuing that: 'He should regard as obligatory the wearing of rings of ruby, emerald, turquoise and cornelian on his fingers, as they have different [protective] properties.'⁶¹

The evolution of ideas about sacred kingship over the high Mughal period – the result of a shifting engagement with diverse bodies of learning and their practitioners – necessarily entailed changes in the emperor's self-presentation. The subtle shift in significance and favour from turquoise to emeralds is one example; the changing style of facial hair sported by the emperor is another. In north India, O'Hanlon notes, facial hair 'was closely associated with

⁵⁸ Lane, *Emerald*, 143-60,

⁵⁹ Some of the most awe inspiring and impressive seventeenth-century examples are to be found in the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar: a carved emerald pendant (JE.185.2003), an emerald wine cup (JE.180.2003), and two breathtakingly-inscribed large stones (JE.86.2002, JE.181.2004), the latter of 217.8 carats.

⁶⁰ On Hindu ideas about kings as controllers of the Earth and its products, and of precious stones as concentrated essences of that Earth, making them potent symbols to kingship: Cohn, *Colonialism*, 116.

⁶¹ Ahmad, 'Mirzānāma', 106.

warriorship’, with ‘folk and literary celebrations of battle very often depict[ing] warriors chewing or twirling their moustaches as a sign of martial rage.’⁶² Akbar and Jahangir had both worn neatly-drooping whiskers of a rather Indic style. Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, however, wore beards intended as outward presentation of their inner piety as Muslims, for Islamic tradition – in keeping with the Prophet’s statement that beards should flow freely but moustaches cut – had emphasised beards as markers of true belief.⁶³ Whatever the true depth of feeling belying these changes of appearance, the very fact of these changes, and their being captured in portraiture for posterity, is testament to a conscious process of self-fashioning and to the power of self-presentation.⁶⁴

Dressing for Success in the Long Eighteenth Century

The notion of the emperor as the perfect guide (*murshid-i kamil*) or perfect man, and his court as an exemplary centre from whence notions of proper conduct flowed downward and outward, was a fabrication of the centre, a technology of imperial ideology and control. The role model authors of *mirzanama* texts had in mind might as likely have been a nobleman as the emperor; rather than radiating from the court centre, developing notions of style and taste emerged in multiple sites, produced by numerous actors on slightly different rungs of the top of the social

⁶² O’Hanlon, ‘Kingdom’, 915.

⁶³ Ibid, 915; Moin, *Millennial*, 212.

⁶⁴ Note that the opposite process was underway among the *fin de siècle* Ottoman elite, who wished to show their secularism and break with Sultanic conservatism and religious orthodoxy, as lately demonstrated by: Avner Wishnitzer, ‘Beneath the Moustache: A Well-Trimmed History of Facial Hair in the Late Ottoman Era’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61/3 (2018), 289-326.

ladder, including the author himself.⁶⁵ More broadly, the centre's power has long been taken for granted but lately taken to task by historians such as Munis Faruqui and Farhat Hasan. By examining princely households as alternative loci of power to the emperor's court, and studying not the exertion of the centre's power but its bargains and negotiations with powerholders in the provinces, they have effectively 'decentred' authority in the Mughal world, demonstrating its dominance without hegemony.⁶⁶ If the topography of power was less hub-spoke and more lumpy during the heyday of Mughal rule, it would become lumpier still as the empire 'decentralised' from the late seventeenth century before its control gradually slipped away over the eighteenth. Indeed, the significance of each of the above-noted points for a study of Indian fashion becomes apparent if one examines the Mughal long eighteenth century, a time of some dislocation and conflict, but also of creativity and cultural vibrancy. This period saw the mushrooming of kingdoms and states, large and small, some old but many of much newer pedigree and ruled by men recently elevated from rusticity, as well as the rapid expansion in the numbers and fortunes of functionaries – bureaucrats, bankers, theologians, and other learned specialists – undergirding this transformation of the landscape of power and authority.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ahmad, 'Mīrzānāma', 103, where the author acknowledges an *amir* (imperial noble) as the source of one point of advice, for instance.

⁶⁶ Munis D. Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c.1572-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 12-41 and *passim*.

Advice literature formed a flourishing set of genres through the later Mughal period, therefore, catering to the aspirations of everyone from noblemen to magnates.⁶⁸ As this literature grew, it also diversified, reflecting the flourishing of vernacular cultures in the courts of numerous (new) regional kingdoms. There was a new marriage between the Mughal idiom and local styles, one reflective of the new balance of power between the two, which was as true of dress as of art, architecture, and literary production.⁶⁹ In south India, as Lennart Bes has shown, sartorial change did not stop with the adoption of ‘Muslim’-style stitched garments and conical caps in Vijayanagara.⁷⁰ Through a process of emulation, these became fashionable in the new Hindu kingdoms emerging from the weakening of the Vijayanagara state from the late sixteenth century, such as Madurai, Ikkeri, Ramnad, and, more indirectly, Tanjavur.⁷¹ Then, over the seventeenth century, there was another shift toward dress typical of contemporary Indo-Persianate styles and Mughal grandeur: turbans replacing conical caps, the wearing of large quantities of gold and gemstones, the bearing of (finely-crafted and elegant) weapons, for instance.⁷² (South Indian royal women’s’ attire, according to Bes, did not undergo any major transformation over the early modern period, remaining ‘traditional’ or ‘Indic’). Yet, the rulers of these kingdoms looked not only to their predecessor or their neighbours – the Persianate Deccani sultanates, such as Bijapur – but also to the styles of the expanding Maratha state. This

⁶⁸ Some, including Ranjit Singh, even collected Mughalia or else referenced Mughal styles and renovated Mughal physical structures: Susan Stronge (ed.), *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), 63-73.

⁶⁹ The latter have been well-studied; for a synthesis, see: Asher and Talbot, *India*.

⁷⁰ Lennart Bes, ‘Sultan among Dutchmen? Royal Dress at Court Audiences in South India, as Portrayed in Local Works of Art and Dutch Embassy Reports, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 50/6 (2016), 1792-1845.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, especially 1836-38, where Bes’ findings also complicate and texture those of Wagoner, described above.

⁷² *Ibid*, 1808-09, 1811.

was itself a successor both to the Deccani sultanates of the south and to the Mughal Empire, the Maratha state's ascendance palpable over much of peninsular India by the eighteenth century even where its territorial reach had not been effected through conquest.

The Maratha polity had been carved out of the Bijapur sultanate by Shivaji Bhonsle (c. 1630-80), who variously allied with or opposed the Bijapuri and Golconda sultans as well as the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, and who was in 1674 crowned the first Maratha *chhatrapati* (literally 'lord of the umbrella', used analogously to *padshah*). In a posthumous portrait, Shivaji is depicted holding a blossom in one hand and a sword in the other, his body covered by a Mughal-style *jama* made of chintz – tied at the waist with a sash – with tight-fitting trousers of a striped fabric beneath and open slippers, and his turban and upper-body adorned with fine jewels.⁷³ In all, his attire is typical of seventeenth-century Mughal and Deccani sultanate styles, combining the refinement of the *mirza* and the readiness for battle of the *ghazi*. Again, the variations are subtle, not least the substitution of cloth of local speciality.⁷⁴ Shivaji's grandson, Shahu (r. 1708-49), is represented in another picture as a typically Indic ruler, bare-chested and wearing only a *dhoti* on the lower body, while surrounded by courtiers dressed in Islamicate sewn tunics and tight trousers. In this way, Maratha authority was visibly represented – in the present and for posterity – through the overlapping of Indic and Islamicate, Mughal and local styles and materials.

In turn, within the Hindu kingdoms of south India looking to Maratha hegemony for inspiration or even legitimacy, subtle shifts are discernible – in facial hair, headgear in a style associated with the Marathas, or the wearing of a *kamar band* as per the Mughal-to-Maratha sartorial repertoire – amidst code-switching to more typically Indic styles of dress when

⁷³ Asher and Talbot, *India*, 240, and 241 for a reproduction of this picture.

⁷⁴ Crill, *Fabric*, 131.

necessary.⁷⁵ At court and in other royal settings, clothing was part of a visual language of the political that remained malleable yet was becoming more multivalent even as certain elements had become codified. And, by the latter-half of the century, such attire was worn outside the court, as depicted in a picture of an elite Hindu man and woman of Tanjore, one of thirty-six ‘ethnographic’ pictures commissioned by a European to represent the castes and occupations of south India (Figure 19.5).⁷⁶ The woman in this picture, notably, wears a *choli*, thus prefiguring the call to Indian women to cover their breasts made vocal in the nineteenth century by colonial moralists and Protestant missionaries, the result of which was widespread adoption of stitched garments under saris.⁷⁷

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.5

If this was the case in newer courts on the edges of the former Mughal world, whose rulers had in some cases even risen in opposition to Mughal authority, what of the former Mughal heartland – the Rajput courts, for example? The same *topoi* of representing the *mirza-ghazi* utilised in the Maratha picture described above are at work in this picture (Figure 19.6): the holding of blossoms and the wearing of fine-stitched clothes, the girding of waists and the bearing of weapons. The central figure is possibly Raja Ajit Singh of Marwar (Jodhpur) but might also be a lesser ruler, so far had the popularity of portraiture – and of the courtly style – spread. A good example of this gentrification can be seen in the portrait of Thakur Padam

⁷⁵ Bes, ‘Sultan among Dutchmen’, 1821, 1839. See, also: Crill, *Fabric*, 131, 139; Asher and Talbot, *India*, 183.

⁷⁶ Their elite status is designated not only by their attire, but also by the fact that they are not labelled by their caste, unlike in the other pictures. They are probably Hindu, for a companion picture of a ‘Moor’ (Muslim) man and woman exists in the series: ‘A Muslim Man and Woman’ – Victoria and Albert Museum, London; AL.9128:7.

⁷⁷ Cohn, *Colonialism*, 136-43.

Singh, the ruler of the small town of Ghanerao between Marwar and Mewar (Udaipur), who nevertheless presents himself in the courtly style of the times, surrounded by nobles, musicians, attendants, and a female cup-bearer (*sans choli*).⁷⁸ Yet, there are also differences in these pictures reflective of regional styles as well as of broader changes in fashion across the subcontinent. Of the former, most notable are the almost conical turbans that are a distinguishing feature of Marwari (from other Rajput) paintings of the period, themselves so different from those in Tanjore pictures of the sort described above.⁷⁹ Of the latter, is the changing style of *jama*. Over the seventeenth century, these became more voluminous – indicated in these pictures by the numerous pleats or folds of the cloth – with the top and bottom parts made separately and stitched together rather than of a single panel.⁸⁰

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.6

By the eighteenth century, the length of the coat had dropped from the knee to the ankle, one such example preserved in the Metropolitan Museum, probably of Deccani origin (Figure 19.7).⁸¹ With extra-long sleeves so the fabric might be elaborately ruched on the forearm, this

⁷⁸ ‘Thakur Padam Singh of Ghanerao with Courtiers’ (Ajmer, 1721, by Manna), Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IS.12-1978.

⁷⁹ Indicatively, see: Rosemary Crill, *Marwar Painting. A History of the Jodhpur Style* (Mumbai: India Book House, 2009)

⁸⁰ Hence the ease of separating the torso-covering upper part, one such part surviving because of its ‘deconstruction’: ‘Fragment of a Robe’ (Indian, c. 1628-58, cotton and silk), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 31.47.

⁸¹ Compare this with two eighteenth-century *jamias* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London: one possibly from Burhanpur in printed cotton, IM.312-1921, the other of printed muslin embroidered with gold and faced in satin, IS.8-1968.

jama is also detailed in material woven of fine gold around the neck and borders of the sort seen in seventeenth-century portraits of the Mughal emperor. Its fabrication from more – and much finer – fabric reflects the competitiveness and aspirations, if not the actual bounty, of the wearer and his court.

INSERT HERE FIGURE 19.7

The major beneficiaries of this hunger for grandeur were magnates, whether as revenue farmers for cash-strapped rulers who sold the perquisites of kingship (tax collection) to fund their expansionary campaigns and their acquisition of luxuries, as the latter's creditors in times of dire need, or as financiers of the production and long-distance trade in specialised productions, including cloth. For their part, merchants wore unbleached white cloth draped about the body in the Indic style, eschewing conspicuous consumption – and the distrust in their scruples it drew from debtors and princes – in favour of spending on spiritual merit.⁸² That merchants eschewed coloured cloth is not to say the same was true of other members of Indian society. The material, weave, weight or thread count, colour, and pattern of cloth not only had healing or protective properties but also stood as markers of distinction and signifiers of identity, if not individuality, as were the styles of drapery, the cut of stitched cloth, or the

⁸² Bayly, *Rulers*, chapter 8. On ritual notions of purity and pollution – hardening over the nineteenth century but or prior origin – and associated concerns for the materiality, tightness of weave, and colour of cloth: Bayly, 'Origins'.

way in which saris or turbans were tied, even if historians have been insufficiently curious about each of these.⁸³

That said, merchants, manufacturers, and even guilds and other institutions each played their part in birthing new fashions in various sections of early-modern European society.⁸⁴ Was this true in south Asia, too? Several recent global histories recite Indian craftsmen's ability to produce the designs in pattern books shown to them by European traders, such agility taken as a sign of their aptitude for novelty and as tacit evidence that they might have adapted to or even cultivated changing tastes.⁸⁵ For the pre-colonial period, the evidence is very remote: in place of merchants' or producers' testimony, there are only European records that give details about these groups. Yet, there are traces. In a rather unassuming-looking scrap-book compiled after the annexation of the Punjab are around eighty samples of silk fabrics manufactured in Lahore, the capital of the erstwhile Sikh kingdom.⁸⁶ The earliest known examples of Punjabi silk textiles, they are distinguished either as pre- or post-annexation patterns, the former representing roughly two-thirds of the swatches. They are relatively plain but brightly-coloured, a few of single colours (*daryai*), the greater part striped (*gulbadan*). Some types of

⁸³ Take, for example, the bright indigo-blue turbans covered in weapons worn by *Nihangs* – members of a Sikh warrior order famed for their guerrilla fighting – which is probably of late seventeenth or early eighteenth-century origin. For an example: 'Sikh Warrior Turban (*Dastaar Boonga*)' (Punjab, nineteenth century, cotton and forged steel), British Museum, London, 2005,0727.1.a-p.

⁸⁴ See, for instance: Welch, *Fashioning*, 111-33, 169-85, 187-214 for the research of Andrea Wunder, Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset, and Lesley Ellis Miller, respectively.

⁸⁵ Crill, *Fabric*, 140-79. Few historians today would suggest that Asians imitated rather than innovated, preferring to leave the matter unsaid, although Zoltán Biedermann has called out the elephant in the room: 'Diplomatic Ivories Sri Lankan Caskets and the Portuguese-Asian Exchange in the Sixteenth Century', in Biedermann *et al*, *Global Gifts*, especially 116-18.

⁸⁶ V&A, *Samples of Silk Fabrics Manufactured in Lahore Shewing the Patterns &c Peculiar to Mahomedans, Hindus, Sikhs &c.* [c.1849-c.1862], Accession No. IS. 7915.

gulbadan are annotated in the book as having been introduced by the city's weavers during the reign of Maharaja Sher Singh (r. 1841-43), thus standing as evidence of innovation and of changing fashions in the closing years of Sikh rule.

Conclusion

Can we speak of fashion in the context of early modern south Asia? In a recent essay, John Styles has argued that what early modern Britons called 'Indian designs' were actually imitations or else based on European patterns. In so doing, the inventive capability of Indian artisans and taste-makers is downgraded, while the possibility of such a thing as fashion existing in south Asia is dismissed by mere (yet fairly routine) omission.⁸⁷ In contrast, Michelle Maskiell's study of Kashmiri shawls demonstrates an intra-Asian trade pre-dating the 'discovery' of these fine cloths by Euro-American merchants and consumers in the nineteenth century, as well as distinct design innovations before c. 1800 originating from within the relationships of Indian artisans and patrons (namely, the Mughal emperors).⁸⁸ Without overstating the significance of the latter case study, it serves as a reminder of the obvious fact that Indian cloth had a significance in India itself and not only in Europe, and that (albeit slow) developments in use and design constantly remade what appeared to outsiders as timeless tradition. We may even turn on its head Styles' proposition that European fashion and textile design innovation was more the product of the competitive political economies of the western

⁸⁷ John Styles, 'Indian Cottons and European Fashions', in (eds.), Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley, *Global Design History* (London: Routledge, 2011), 37-46.

⁸⁸ Michelle Maskiell, 'Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000', *Journal of World History* 13/1 (2002), 27-65, here especially 30-35.

European states system than of the competitive effects induced by Asian imports.⁸⁹ Rather than explaining what was singular about Europe, they remind Indian historians that the famously competitive post-Mughal ‘successor state’ system was the source of cultural – including sartorial – imitation and differentiation, convergence and competition, as the latter part of this chapter has shown.

One way of conceptualising ‘fashion’ is in relation to temporality; it captures, as John Styles notes, ‘forms of self-conscious, avant-garde innovation in dress’ resulting in waves or even cycles of change.⁹⁰ In India, as in Europe, some of the most significant transformations in dress occurred before the sixteenth century. If what thus marks as distinct the period after c. 1500 in Europe is the rapid acceleration of sartorial innovation, with modifications to existing articles of dress complemented by the invention of wholly new garments, accessories, or adornments, the same cannot be said of south Asia, where change was far more subtle, even over an immense geographic and temporal horizon.⁹¹ From the outset, however, this chapter has given substance to Peter McNeil’s astute observation that ‘Fashion can [also] be conceptualised as a form of knowledge; one requires knowledge of what is in fashion to be a participant.’⁹² From *dastur al-amal*, social elites could gain one form of such knowledge: *mirzai* was not about the conspicuous display of wealth – and authors of *mirzanamas* were attentive to the differences in readers’ rank, income, and wealth – but about belonging to this shared world and its social networks of erudition and cultural exchange.⁹³ Indian society at

⁸⁹ Styles, ‘Indian’, explicitly on 44.

⁹⁰ John Styles, ‘Fashion and Innovation in Early Modern Europe’, in *Fashioning the Early Modern*, 33, 36, and *passim*.

⁹¹ *Ibid*; Evelyn Welch, ‘Introduction’, in *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁹² Peter McNeil, “‘Beauty in Search of Knowledge’”, *Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the World of Print*, in *Ibid.*, 223-53.

⁹³ O’Hanlon, ‘Manliness’.

large was visually and verbally more literate than it was textually, especially compared to other parts of early modern Asia, giving greater significance to those non-textual forms of knowledge transmission that were operative.⁹⁴

By overlooking fashion as a subject, however, historians have not inquired into the mechanics of the diffusion or emulation of dress from one courtly setting to another, let alone whether and how new styles of dress were embraced by the denizens of towns and cities.⁹⁵ There was a trade in second-hand and readymade clothes across Afro-Eurasia, including the Indian Ocean world.⁹⁶ The role played by such trades in the Indian context remains a mystery, for Indian historians have instead fixed their attention on the connection of discourses of purity and pollution to the preference for cloth unblemished by other hands.⁹⁷ If nothing else, the spread of clothing styles described in this chapter raises important yet unexamined issues around technical know-how: how tailoring developed where only draped cloth had been worn, how skills were learnt, who produced stitched garments (and where), whether second-hand or discarded clothes circulated as prototypes for these garments, and so forth.

‘Clothes are not just body coverings and matters of adornment, nor can they be understood only as metaphors of power and authority, nor as symbols’, remarked the Indian historical

⁹⁴ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information. Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially 36-44. Certainly, in the nineteenth century, demonstrations by travelling salesmen played an important part in creating and plying a market in new consumer goods: David Arnold, *Everyday Technology. Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁹⁵ C.f. Paula Hothi, ‘Dress, Dissemination, and Innovation: Artisan Fashions in Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Italy’ in Evelyn Welsh (ed.), *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles, and Innovation in Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 143-165

⁹⁶ Beverly Lemire, *Global Trade and the Transformation of Consumer Cultures. The Material World Remade, c. 1500-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 114-22; Miki Sugiura, ‘Garments in Circulation: The Economies of Slave Clothing in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch Cape Colony’ in Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello (eds.), *Dressing Global Bodies The Political Power of Dress in World History* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁹⁷ On cloth, purity, and pollution: Bayly, ‘Origins’.

anthropologist, Bernard Cohn; ‘in many contexts,’ he continued, ‘clothes literally *are* authority.’⁹⁸ Indeed, fashion is most commonly defined by scholars, as Styles has highlighted, as loosely denoting forms of embodied identity and their construction.⁹⁹ In this direction, this chapter has shown that the early moderns in south Asia took great pains as to their self-presentation (if not their ‘self-fashioning’). Clothes were forms of authority; the appropriation and adaptation of particular forms of dress was already part of the moulding of new political and social identities from the fifteenth century and acquired even greater reach and pace from the seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries. If fashion was seen by some contemporary critics in Europe as a ‘foreign invasion’, but one that could ultimately serve to reinvigorate local craftsmanship through imitation and competition, the same was to some extent true in India too.¹⁰⁰ Indian rulers’ patronage of local artisans and regional styles even as they took to ‘imperial’ sartorial styles, is one example of this similarity.

Just as the study of luxury and the material culture engendered in Europe by Euro-Asian trade was about to take off, C.A. Bayly wrote the following in his landmark study of late eighteenth-century India: ‘luxury production and consumption were the life blood of the pre-colonial order and [...] had a social and ritual value which cannot easily be conveyed by the glib term “luxury”.’¹⁰¹ In some ways, ‘fashion’ might be a similarly glib term.¹⁰² If nothing else, however, this chapter has shown that thinking *with* ‘fashion’ is immensely productive. It has thrown into perspective how much more is known about the manufacture of Indian cloth

⁹⁸ Cohn, *Colonialism*, 114.

⁹⁹ Styles, ‘Fashion’, 34-35.

¹⁰⁰ Welch, ‘Introduction’, 11.

¹⁰¹ Bayly, *Rulers*, 266.

¹⁰² Styles has critically examined whether or not fashion is European or even Eurocentric category, noting its broader applicability but also differences between Europe and other parts of Eurasia: ‘Fashion’, 36-37 and fn 13-18.

than about clothing, and thus how much remains to be studied of Indian dress and the ways in which it was worn, about how this changed, and why.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Sylvia W. Houghteling's forthcoming *The Art of Cloth in Mughal India* will be a welcome step in this direction.