



institute of draped clothes

IDC Newsletter 37 - December 2004 - February 2005

Summary:

	page:
1. news	1
2. new format for the newsletter.....	2
3. new web links.....	2
4. saris and Westerners.....	3
5. (1) replies to: still tradition... in Toronto! (the question of the choli).....	3
6. (2) replies to: still tradition... in Toronto! (the question of the choli).....	4
7. reply to: help! draping sarongs (for men).....	5
8. draping in Switzerland.....	5
9. a personal note from Chantal.....	6

1. NEWS:



*** Chantal and Peter recently demonstrated sari draping at the stand of “National Ethnicity and Learning Disability Network” (part of the Association for Real Change: <http://www.arcuk.org.uk>) at the Learning Disability Today Exhibition in London

“National Ethnicity and Learning Disability Network” was created to share good practice to improve services for people with learning disabilities from minority communities (in the UK).



Pictures: Left: Peter shows that drapes are also meant for men. Right above: a visitor discovers how beautiful she looks with a sari. Right: general view of the event.

*** If you know or participate in an event, web site, etc. connected with draping, please let us know. This “news” feature is yours!

2. NEW FORMAT FOR THE NEWSLETTER

If you usually receive this newsletter by email, you have already noticed the change in the delivery. I hope you like it, or at least don't mind. Let me know!

Our email boxes are already jammed by spams, attachments of all sorts, etc. I have made a policy of not sending our members attachments, which meant that our newsletter couldn't include pictures. The web version of our newsletter, on the other hand, is illustrated. Some members have also expressed the desire to have a newsletter which is not an email.

That is why from now on, the newsletter will not be sent by email, but be will be available on our web site. For those of you who want a printed version, you will be able to download it in Acrobat PDF. (You can open the document with Acrobat reader, which is already present on most computers, and otherwise can be downloaded for free at:

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>)

Some members do not want to be part of the yahoogroup (and so don't receive emails at all), and just check the web site every 3 months. The problem with this is that our membership looks smaller than it really is (I estimate that we are at least 500, although just over 300 of us currently belong to the yahoogroup). This is why from now on, membership (i.e. showing support for our goals), will be different from being on the yahoogroup. Watch for our next newsletter (or our web site in a couple of months) and you'll be able to register your support without subscribing to anything.

HOW TO BE INFORMED WHEN A NEWSLETTER COMES OUT:

1. Stay in or join our “yahoogroup”:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/idcmembers/>

You will be sent reminders and occasional urgent information.

2. In MS Explorer: “subscribe” to the page:

<http://www.idcw.org.uk/news.html>

To subscribe to a Web page:

1. Go to the page you want to subscribe to.

2. On the Favorites menu, click Subscribe.

3. Do one of the following:

* To use default settings for this subscription, click Subscribe.

* To specify custom settings for this subscription, click Customize, and then select the options you want.

3. NEW WEB LINKS

* Interesting site about a partially draped dress:

<http://www.lydiasilvestry.com/English/intro.htm>

This URL was suggested by Carol Wang, who has also an interesting site on a subject that is not totally unrelated to draped clothes: Chinese knotting... Worth a visit:

<http://www.chineseknotting.org/>

4. SARIS AND WESTERNERS?

A reply by Melanie Kohli to: Carol(a sari shop for Westerners?)

I read your comments about the sari catching on in America and wanted to let you know that I own a web based clothing business from America selling Indian sari. Although sari may not have gone mainstream as of yet, it is catching on among non-Indians. I started my business 5 years ago and sold primarily to Indian women living in the USA. In the past 5 years I have seen the amount of Non-Indian women purchasing sari skyrocket. These days 45-55% of my sari sales are to non-Indian American women! So keep a watch out as those women have to be out there somewhere. As for wearing the sari and feeling slightly uncomfortable in public, I totally sympathise. I am a blond haired, blue eyed American and when I first started wearing them, I felt very uncomfortable because of all the stares I received. However, over the years I have found that I do not mind as much anymore or they are becoming more common place in my area (not sure which!). Good luck to you in your endeavours and I hope one day you can wear sari with pride. PS, if you are interested in getting some customised help for your first sari, we would be happy to help you at our web site:

<http://www.pardesifashions.com>

5. (1) REPLIES TO: STILL TRADITION... IN TORONTO! THE QUESTION OF THE CHOLI

By Melanie Kohli



I could not help but be intrigued by your observation of a woman wearing sari with no choli. In fact, many years ago, I read a book that was set before Europeans had arrived in India. It went to great lengths to get the point across that it was NOT common to wear a sari blouse OR petticoat with sari. Women simply draped themselves in a way that it covered their breasts. I was very interested in this but was unable to find any follow up about it and have since forgotten the name of the book. Several years ago, a customer of mine (I sell Indian clothing online) contacted me about wearing the sari without a blouse and I passed along this information to her. I was even able to find a photo of a woman in a sari with no blouse from a Hindi movie (however, it was very risqué and showed her breasts clearly through the thin fabric. I doubt this was true to tradition). Since then, I stumbled across several pages. One was on Priyanka's site that says that wearing of blouses goes back to Sanskrit times. While it may be true that sari blouses were mentioned in ancient Sanskrit works, it is also true that it is NOT mentioned in many more.

Furthermore, when looking at the ancient artwork left behind it is pretty clear that toplessness was an accepted cultural practice for women. Interestingly, I found a great web page focusing primarily on Sri Lanka (remember that India and Sri Lanka have a co-dependency on each other for ancient history, ie. The demon who kidnapped Sita took her back to Sri Lanka) however, it also focus one part of their article on Hindu/Buddhist society. I guess we will not know the truth until someone decides to do a study but if you want to check the article out for yourself you can see it here: <http://livingheritage.org/toplessness.htm>. The top drawing shows a sari or other draped clothing being worn without the blouse. If anyone else has information to shed on this, please let me know. I would love to include it on our web site or pass it along to customers.



(Pictures: top left: worshippers, chaitya of Karla, 2nd century.
Right: A woman from the 2nd century B.C., on the stupa of Barhut.)

**6. (2) REPLIES TO: STILL TRADITION... IN TORONTO!
THE QUESTION OF THE CHOLI**

By Chantal Boulanger



I might add some comments to the topless dress in India, which is a BIG problem for Indians who have adopted Victorian values. I often receive letters about this. This is the reply I give:

Several cultures influenced Indian clothing, starting with Islam, especially in North India (covering the head, often thought by North Indian women as a mark of religious behavior when inside temples, is specifically forbidden in the Agamas - the texts covering temple rituals and behavior). In Hindu Agamas, covering the upper part of the body is considered arrogant. That is why men should not wear shirts and women not cover their heads. (See left: worshippers painted in Ellora, 9th century)



In South India, where Hindu clothing stayed popular long after the Portuguese and English began to arrive, women generally didn't cover their breasts until about 1800. When Marco Polo visited what is now Tamil Nadu and Kerala, on his way back to Venice, he said that people didn't wear much except jewels. If you look at the sculpture of that time (13th century, Hoysala) you will see that it was true. The fashion at the time was to wear heavy jewelled belts on top of very short dhotis, for men and women. (See right: a woman depicted on the wall of the Brahmeshvara temple, with tight dhoti a jewelled belt, Bhubaneshtar, 11th century.)



We have enough archaeological evidence of what was worn in India's past. Apart from "breast bands" (a kind of leather belt that was used to hold the breast, rather than hide it, Left: a woman depicted wearing a breast-band, Pattadakal, 8th century), most women represented (ordinary women, queens, scenes of daily life and not only mythical representations) do have bare breasts. In Kerala, some old women still do not cover their breasts (covering the breasts was forbidden to women of lower castes until the fifties).



The choli is very ancient, but was mostly worn by men, especially in battle. Queens would wear it when giving audience.

(right) Warriors wearing cholis, Ajanta, 6th century.

(left) A woman riding a horse and wearing a choli, Kanchipuram, 10th century.





Today Indians have adopted Victorian puritanical values and have a very hard time admitting to that. But archaeological (and anthropological) evidence is all over India, and Indians should think twice before referring to Victorian values as their own. They are not following Hinduism. The view of the body was much healthier in Hinduism. Women did not hesitate to be seen naked (and I have seen women bath naked in streams next to big roads in Orissa, so this behavior has not completely disappeared today), because MEN WERE RESPECTING THEM. Sexuality has rules in every religion, and Hinduism is certainly not a permissive religion, and has a huge emphasis on marriage (indeed, God Himself is married).



But in Hinduism curbing wild desires is achieved by the mind, not by hiding the body. I think Indians should be proud of that.

7. REPLY TO: HELP! DRAPING SARONGS

Reply to:

I wear sarongs wherever and whenever I can, and almost exclusively all summer. I have been doing so for about five years, and I no longer feel self-conscious in any way about doing so. I also prefer to wear them about ankle length. I started with Jan Bruydonckx's instructions, (the best documentation I have found), and have fitted the wrap to my own preference. (It varies with the length, width and material of the particular cloth).

I just about always wear a belt or some other tie such as a sash about the waist. When climbing stairs or walking through the woods, I do have to pick up the front, just as any woman does when wearing a long skirt. If I'm doing a lot of active work, I'll take the front folds (about 6 to 8 inches down from the waist), and tuck them into the waist band.

Dave Rosenthal

8. DRAPING IN SWITZERLAND

By Anjum Amirtham

I am an Indian/ Pakistani woman living in Switzerland and doing things very similar to you. After my marriage 17 years ago to a south Indian I was introduced to the different drapes in the different communities. Since then I have been collecting these drapes and learning new ones from all the grandmothers, mothers and mothers-in-law of friends and relatives. I recently found your book and the web site and started receiving newsletters. I have been doing exhibitions and workshops with the different sari styles in Switzerland for the last five years. My web site www.anjum.ch will show some pictures of what I am doing. It is so interesting to see that all this is going on all over the world. Even among the Indian women there is a need to spread the feeling that wearing a sari does not make them backward and less emancipated, it is a very comfortable way of dressing and we need to learn the old drapes from our mothers to keep this art alive.

My last program, on the 23rd Sept. 04 was a benefit evening for an agency supporting basic education in rural India by building schools and women's centres. I will be showing different textiles and saris from these regions in an exhibition as well as having a Bharatanatyam dance performance (as I am also a dancer).

Anjum Amirtham

9. A PERSONAL NOTE FROM CHANTAL

I hope you will like this new way of delivering our newsletter. In the next few months, I will change the “membership form” in our web site to allow everybody to register without having to belong to a yahoogle, or give information they don't want to give.

I have had a lot of work these last three months, and I hope that in our next newsletter I will have a lot of new things to tell you. Interest in draped clothes continues to grow, but there is still a lot to be done, especially in getting draping clothes techniques as something to be preserved, studied and used in creation.

Meanwhile, I have noticed that some IDC members have web pages about drapes (I'm thinking in particular about a page on ancient celtic clothing and one on draped clothes in Sarawak, but there are more) that keep on appearing and (unfortunately) disappearing from various hosts. If you have a web page relevant to IDC and want to have a permanent URL for it, do not hesitate to contact me for hosting it on IDC. All members with relevant web pages are most welcomed to have them hosted here. There are already a few: (<http://www.idcw.org.uk/sarongs.html> for instance). Your page will be linked in our web library, and later if there are more pages I might do an index of member's pages.

I wish you all the best for the holiday season!

Best wishes,



Chantal

chantal@idcw.org.uk : Make sure you have the word “cbmsari” in the subject line, or your email might not reach me.

Please do not hesitate to send any question, suggestion, criticism.

If you have some links to suggest, please let us know!

If you wish to write something for the newsletter, please do so and E-mail it to

<members@idcw.org.uk> IMPORTANT: put the word “cbmsari” in the Subject line (otherwise your email might be considered SPAM).

Newsletter publication dates and deadlines for contributions:

- 1st of June (June-August): deadline for contributions: 15th of May
- 1st of September (September-November): deadline for contributions: 15th of August
- 1st of December (December-February): deadline for contributions: 15th of November
- 1st of March (March-May): deadline for contributions: 15th of February

Institute of Draped Clothes
members@idcw.org.uk

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