




sringar

A Pageant of Indian Costumes An Air-India Collection



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
Public.Resource.Org

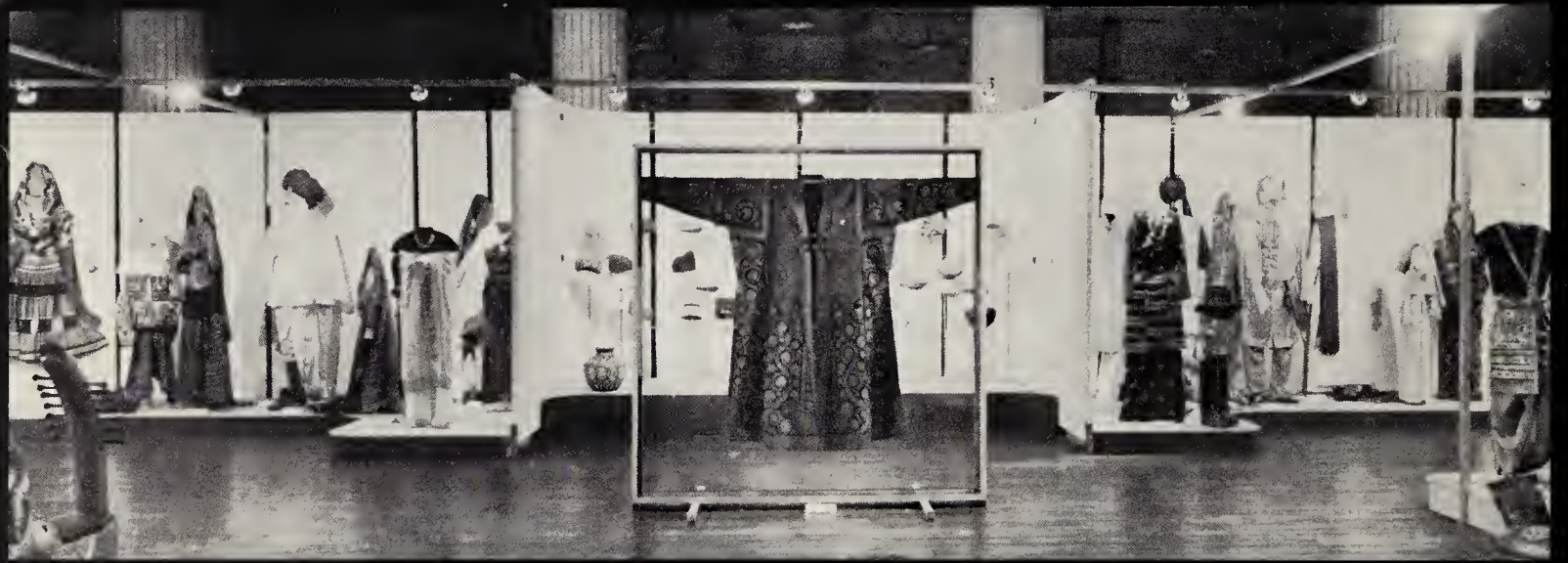
<https://archive.org/details/sringarpageantof00kala>

sringar

A Pageant of Indian Costumes

An
AIR-INDIA
Collection

Compiled by Roshan Kalapesi



Through the ages, artists and artisans have been sponsored and fostered by royalty, aristocracy and the church. In India too, many a craft and school of art developed and blossomed due to religious and royal patronage.

The empires of old are no more and the princes of yesteryear are fading away as patrons of the arts. But art is still a living vital force and this has created a new class of art collectors.

Museums, industrial corporations, banks, insurance companies, and millionaire collectors are increasingly becoming art patrons; with determined acumen and magnificently rewarding returns, both aesthetic and financial.

Air-India is justifiably proud to be one of the prominent art patrons in India.

The Air-India Collection which had its beginning about twenty years ago, today covers a vast range of classical and contemporary art and traditional handicrafts. These items embellish the decor of Air-India's offices and aircraft and are reproduced on the publicity and graphic material. This has an Indian identity, which is part of the distinctive Air-India personality established over the years on five continents.

SRINGAR, a pageant of Indian costumes, a travelling exhibit, reveals to the world yet another facet of Indian expression—the art of the craftsman as manifest in the apparel of Indians from various parts of the subcontinent. The diversity of style and technique are a reflection of the rich cultural complexity of this vast country.

This Collection has been compiled for Air-India by the designer Roshan Kalapesi, who has done years of extensive research in the field. We gratefully acknowledge her country-wide search for nearly a year, to assemble these authentic dresses.

Thanks are also due to the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, which has created a new concept for this travelling exhibit and executed the same with great sensitivity and understanding.

J. B. Cowasji

Of Woven Dreams

I am an old country they say. Like an ancient palimpsest “on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.”

Yes, my memories are very old. Time has not taken them away.

Silently I have watched worlds grow, mature and collapse around me.

Races, religion, empires and civilisations; people from other lands, gods and cults have held me close, struggled, faded away and re-emerged.

My people have grown, learnt and survived.

They have known millenia of splendour. And millenia of quiet desolation.

They are poor, yes. But they know their dreams.

The urge to create beautiful things and to live with them has been a part of their being. It has lent their life not only sustenance but a meaning, an affirmation.

How they live — dress, worship, work, play — and die, is a reflection not only of an individual aesthetic instincts but it is a flowering of a vast creative impulse, a complex ancient ritual, a moment of my long-lost subconscious.

Through the ages something vital and living has endured. A desire to synthesise the old and the new has survived.

So I am not just an old country. I am both old and new, wise and playful, traditional and flamboyant, poor and profound and always alive.

Long long ago people did not know cloth.

The hill people of the north-east tell a popular tale. The first weaver they say was a girl named Hambrumai. The god Matai taught her the art of weaving. She would lie in the forest and look up at the patterns woven by the branches of trees, the leaves and the ferns. She would sit by the river, watch the waves and the ripples and imitate them in her designs. Her work was as beautiful as her face and many boys wanted to marry her.

But one day Harium the porcupine saw her cloth and came to steal it. He pushed a rock against the loom and the girl was crushed beneath it. Her loom was broken to pieces and was carried down by the stream into the plains. The people there found it and learnt how to weave. The designs turned into butterflies and in the markings on their wings you can still see the designs that Hambrumai made.

Centuries have turned. The loom of Hambrumai has stayed. The loom is old, the threads are long and many. Historians muse of the time, long before Hambrumai, when there were colours and sounds in the towns of Harappa and Mohen-jo-daro, when cotton was grown, dyed with madder, woven and worn. The Vedic poets sing of the weaver's shuttle as it flew over the loom while day and night cast light and shadow over the earth. A pantheon of gods emerge in the glorified likeness of men. And the men—princes, warriors and nobles—rival the gods in their celestial splendour. Pristine in jewels and gems, in vestures of tissue and gold, they bring a radiance into the ordinariness of day to day living. And through the centuries the Indo-Gangetic plains hum with the sounds of a thousand looms, spinning out miles of gauze—beautiful and bizarre for gods and kings, pure and simple for the peasant and the primitive.

Of Ancient Cultures

A leafed-in world of birds and leaves, gods, demons and spirits; dark silences, shattering drums, frenzied rhythms, tattoos on the body, horns on the head, cowries, shells, beads and flowers and a meagre form of dress—"the badge of the tribe, established in mythology, enforced under penalty of stringent sanctions."

How was the sky born ? And how did the men grow big ?

The Bondos of Orissa tell a tale...

"Men used to be so small that if they wanted to pick a brinjal they had to put a ladder against the plant. The sky was very near the earth. One day an old woman was sweeping her court and her back brushed a cloud. She was angry and hit with a broom. The sky went up, out of the way. The men began to grow for there was room for them now."



And so the Bondos grew and spread. Today they live in the beautiful remote hills of Orissa.

A Bondo woman shaves her head, wears the smallest strip of cloth about her loins and covers herself with a mass of ornaments. "It is when a girl puts on a new brightly coloured cloth and many ornaments that we think her beautiful."

In the deep dark forests of Madhya Pradesh, the Maria Gonds tell another tale.

“Once upon a time there was a young man called Alami Mata. One day when he returned from the forest he found that the splendid bison-horns, and feathers of his head-dress had been stolen. It was like losing an heirloom. In the neighbouring village lived a beautiful girl he loved. Alami was wooing her in the dance. But with his horns gone, he felt like Samson, shorn of his hair. There was no strength in him. How could he go to meet his girl? He sat brooding. A life without music, love or rhythm was not worth living. So he went and hung himself.”

The moral of the story is that love cannot win without the head-dress of the marriage dance. So guard your bison-horns.



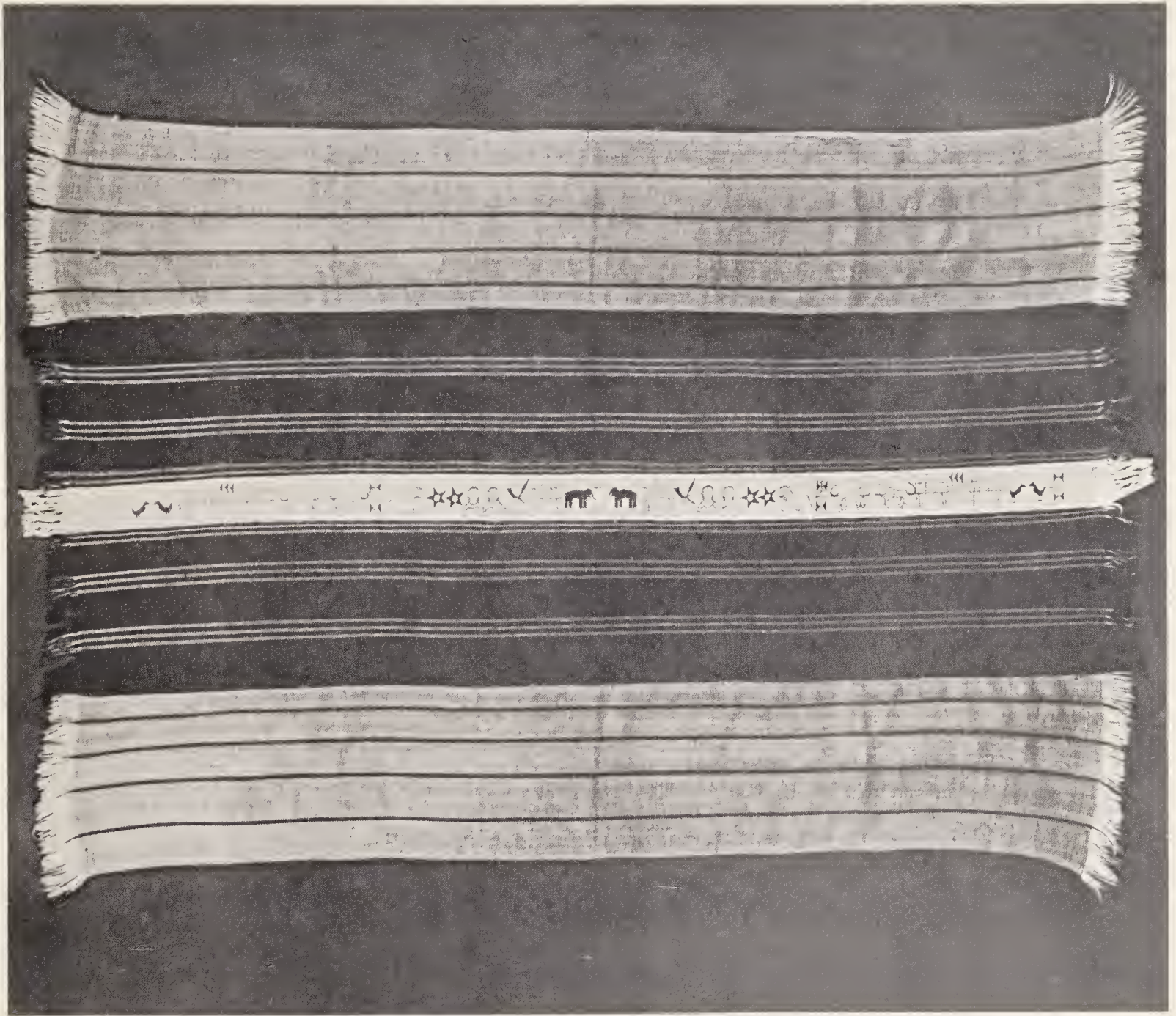
Mountains rise over mountains, range succeeds range,
woodlands of cedar merge into pine.

Perched cockily on the green hills of the north-east are
villages surrounded by ramparts of stone. Here, in bamboo huts
decked with skulls of wild dogs and panthers, the Ao Naga
women live, and weave for themselves, for their men and their
families. Every Ao Naga woman must weave or go without
a husband.

A Naga costume proclaims a wearer's social position and
prowess. And each one has its own story to tell, of the wearer
and his pursuits, of the tribe and his village.

The Dao or the hatchet is the Naga's chief weapon and
companion. With it a Naga fells trees, clears light jungles, cuts
house-posts and carves them, pares down cane, kills chickens
for food, divides up meat and digs a thorn out of his foot.



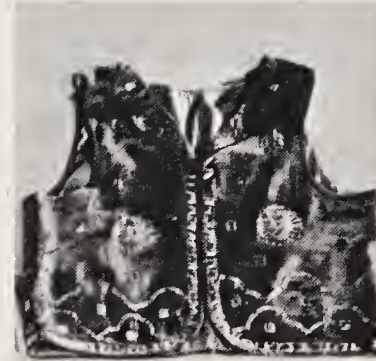


The shawl is another of his prize possessions. Each shawl is different and is worn on different occasions. One may be worn by a warrior who has won a battle. Another may be worn by

a rich man whose family has celebrated the "mithun-sacrifice" feast for three generations. The Naga uses his shawl as a bedding, as a baby carriage and as a market basket.

Of Folk Dances

During the time of the Sun festival in Purulia, Bengal, the people wear masks and do the Chhau dance. The mask hides the dancer's face and sex. It gives the dancer a super-human dimension. Different masks portray different characters— of gods, demons, men, animals and birds. The dancer wears a velvet jacket elaborately embroidered with silk, tinsel and pearls, a simple lower garment and the ornate mask, the most essential part of the dance dress. Restricted by the mask the dancer combines pure dance with pantomime and communicates through his body the meaning of the dance. The Chhau dance, sustained by a folk melody, combines the folk and classical expression of the Purulia people.



When the fields burn bright green and yellow in Punjab, the farmers oil and curl their moustaches and get dressed in bright coloured lungis, embroidered waistcoats and starched turbans with a pleated fan. Waving copper-tipped sticks they come into the market square to dance and celebrate the season in bloom.



The drummer pounds his drum, the dancers bellow, whirl around and leap. Wild shrieks of 'Balle-Balle' fill the air. One of the dancers moves forward and with one hand flung in the air and the other cupping his ear, he breaks into a saucy song....

"I went to the distant lands
But did I earn ? Nothing.
The gold ring dangles in your nose my love
The crystal bangles around your arms
Your eyes are black like night
You sway like a creeper, O my love,
You sway like a creeper....."

Of Villages

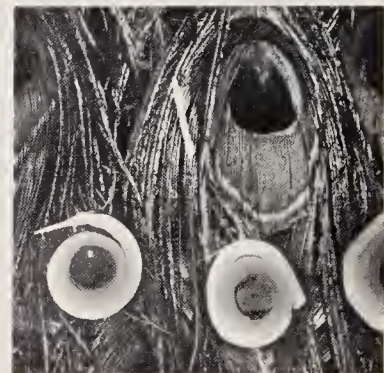
The people of the vast rural spaces tell stories as old as the landscapes they live in. Their tales, songs and dances, their tools and dress, reveal a lore that is creative, unchanging, bound to the soil and to simple human needs.

Far down in the blue hills of Nilgiri, live the blue-eyed Todas. Some say they are Mahabharata Hindus. Some say they are Greeks, descendents of the first Christians of a lost tribe of Israel. But the Todas say they came to earth hanging on the tail of the last buffalo left out of a large herd. Hence they revere the buffalo. They live in secluded hill villages, practise polyandry, and drape themselves in Toga-style white shawls with embroidery between woven bands of black and red. The men and women wear their hair in fancy ringlets and tattoo designs on their body and feet. It is the feet that a man looks at before deciding to marry a woman, say the Todas.

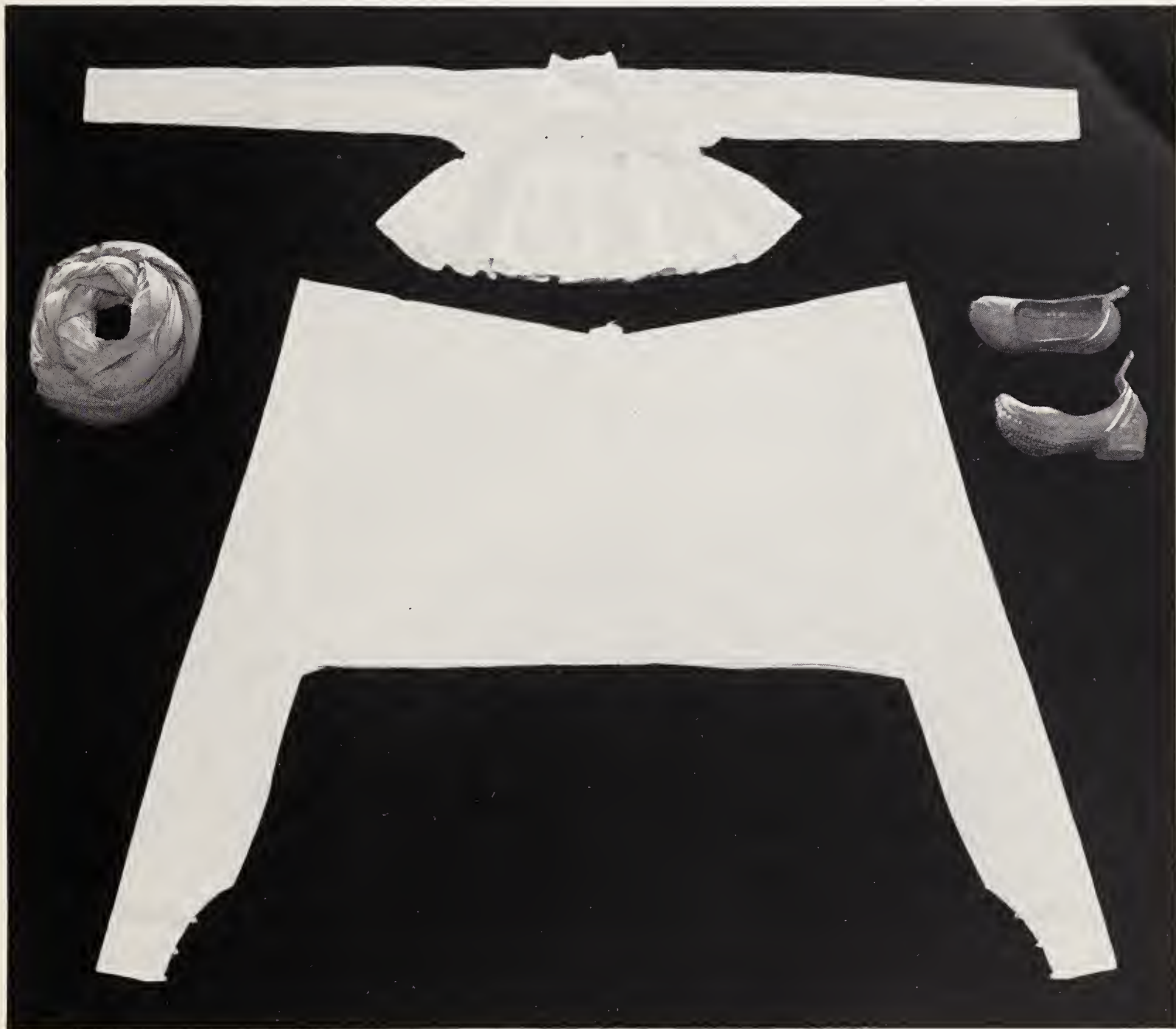


In the interior of the Maratha country roam the Vasudevas, the village troubadours. In the tradition of their ancestor, a Brahmin astrologer, they wander from village to village, soothsay and sing with wooden clappers and brass bells. The children love their simple tales and the way they look. For the Vasudevas

wear full skirted angarkhas and fancy conical hats made of peacock feathers. They are as unmistakable as the landscapes they wander and enliven.



All over the sun-baked stretches of Kathiawar and Saurashtra, roam the shepherds—men with flashing black eyes, elaborate moustaches. They wear many-fold turbans of flaming red, fancy shoes with upturned toes, gold earrings and finely-cut 'kediya's that lend their peasant looks a distinct elegance.





Nearby, the women of Kutch move around in swirls of red, black or green skirts—the 'Ghagras'. The land changes its colours. The Ghagra changes its length, shape and design. The Kutchi Ghagra is gathered, has mirror embroidery with the most sophisticated stitches. How did these women of Kutch—isolated and distant—learn to paint with the needle? After sowing, before the harvest, they sit through long hours and embroider animals, birds and human figures, flowers and designs that are square, round and even. They button-hole-stitch pieces of mirror-glass on the skirts, that dazzle as they move in the hot sun.



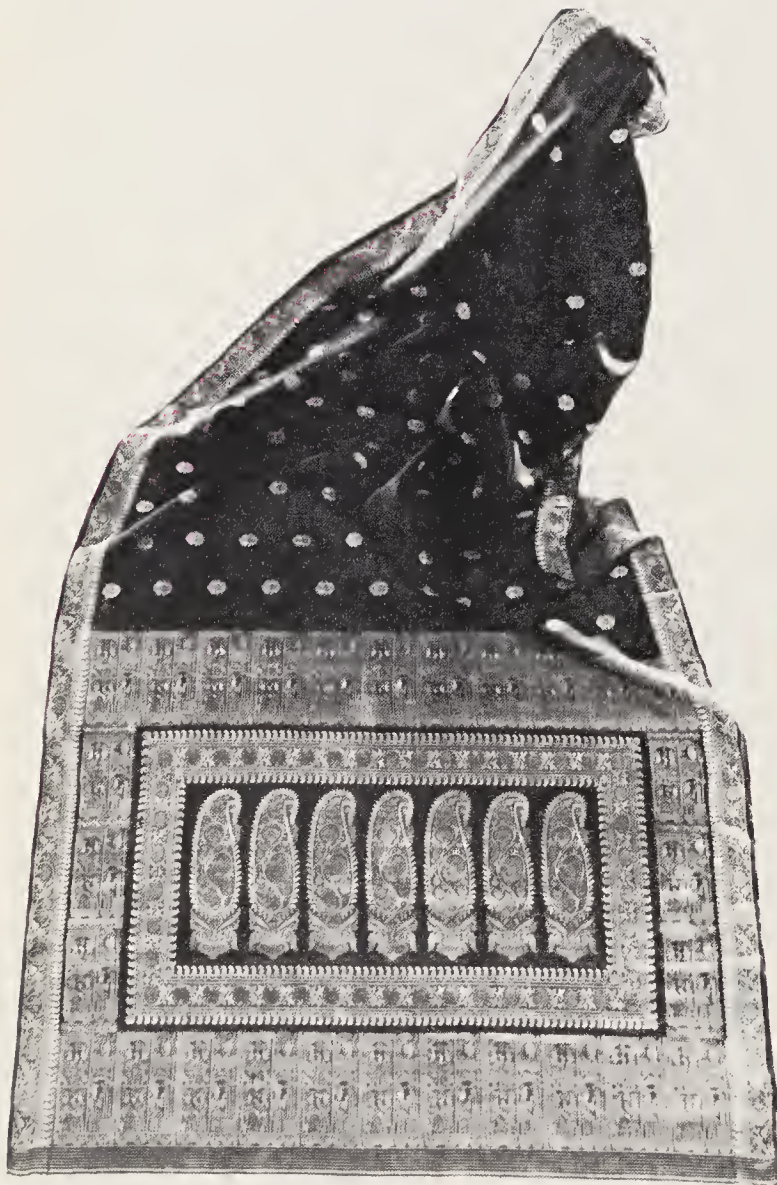
A woman of the Lambadi tribe is a gypsy. She too wears the swirling skirt, the Ghagra, made of a coarse red cotton but appliqued and embroidered with pieces of mirror-glass. The waistband of her skirt has larger pieces of mirrors, stitched in the gypsy tradition.

The story goes that a Lambadi woman changes her Ghagra once a year. She takes a year to sew it and embroider it and on a special festive day she discards the old one and wears the new. But she seldom, if ever, takes off the armful of metal and bone bangles, the brass anklets. The heavy, silver pendant-like

earrings are held on either side by her plaited hair. Her jewels become part of her body, her being.

Known to be nomads, petty thieves for generations, the hardy Lambadi women work today as construction workers or break stones on dusty roads.

Of Towns And Cities



In a kaleidoscope the colours beam and blend, the patterns change. In the cities some of the elaborate forms are lost. Some are diffused. Some are changed. The sari survives in its varied styles and forms preserving its antiquity, its universality. Known to be the oldest and most prevalent of the female costumes, the sari is found in sculptures and paintings as far back as fourth century B.C. It continues to be worn today by the old, the young and the mod. Its form remains the same, its variety continues to be a marvel.

In the eternal city of Benares, on simple pit looms are woven saris of gold and silver tissues and brocades of silk.

In sandy sun-drenched Rajasthan are tie-dyed the Bandhanis born of the silky sands, striped, checked and dotted in flaming colours.

In West Bengal, are woven the red-bordered cottons and silken Baluchars. Their pallavs may carry cameos of a lady with a flower seated on a horse, a train compartment with a sahib





in an 18th century costume, a temple scene, a durbar, a boat in the harbour.

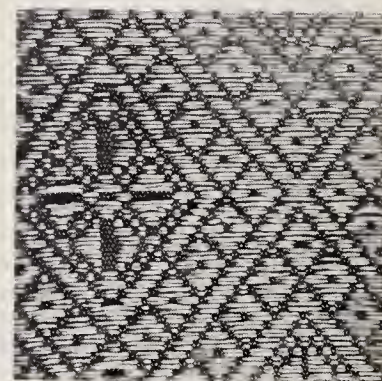
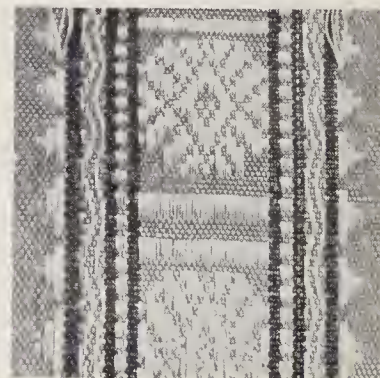
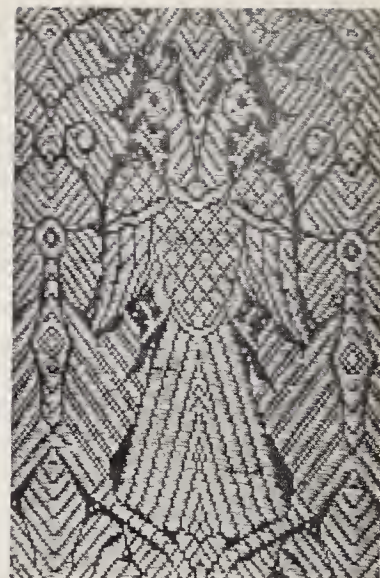
In Maharashtra, the Paithan saris are woven in patterns with flowers, animals and ancient motifs from the caves of Ajanta.

In Gujarat, and Orissa, are tie-dyed the intricate Patolas and Ikats woven in the muted colours of the earth.

In Assam, is woven the mekhala and chadar in the native muga silk with ornate borders and motifs.

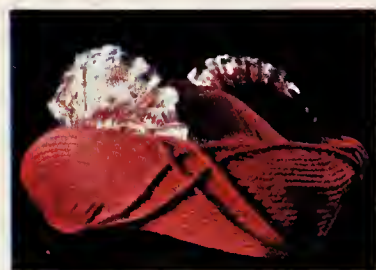


And then there are the China-inspired Tancois of Surat, the jewel-like silk-cottons of Chanderi, the Calico-cottons of Kerala, the heavy silks of Bangalore and Kanchipuram in rich colours, borders and pallavs.





Royal Pagdis
copied for use in the theatre



For the women the sari survives. For the man the head-dress remains. Ranging from a simple wrap-around rag to an elaborate turban, he wears the pagdi in a variety of ways—rolled, folded, brightly coloured or gilded—to suit his class, his profession or his own particular fancy.

The bride and the groom remain exclusive, romantic and gloriously apart from the daily life of the country. Like a Maharajah, the groom arrives, in a flower-decked car or riding a white mare. With him sits his youngest brother, his best man. Ahead of him walk musicians dressed in red and gold. The groom's sherwani is of shimmering brocade, his churidars are silken and his 'joothis' are gold embroidered, with turned up toes. A turban sits on his head and a 'sehra'—a veil of flowers and gold thread—cascades over his face. The sound of Shehnai fills the air. His bride is in a flaming red gossamer sari woven in gold. She has a gold necklace around her throat, bangles and bracelets on her wrists, a gold pendant on her forehead and a

large nose-ring in her left nostril. Hair twined with jasmine, hands red with henna, she awaits her groom with a garland of red roses. Through the archway festooned with marigolds and mango leaves, he enters. She garlands him. He garlands her. Then under the flower-strung pavilion they sit facing each other. The priest chants the vedic hymns, offers oblations of ghee. The man and woman walk around the fire seven times repeating the holy vows, the 'Saptapadi' or the seven steps that symbolise the journey of life—the most vital part of the ritual.....



“One for sap, may Vishnu speed you;
Two for strength, may Vishnu speed you;
Three for duty, may Vishnu speed you;
Four for welfare, may Vishnu speed you;
Five for animals, may Vishnu speed you;
Six for seasons, may Vishnu speed you;
Seven for seven hotras, may Vishnu speed you...”

The marriage rite, the core of all Hindu weddings is the same though the ceremonies differ, the costumes change from area to area.



Buddhist Bride

Of The Royal Past

Days of the grand Mughals, half-legend, half-dream.
Days of palaces, mosques and forts, banquets, durbars and mansions;
Days of nobles in robes of flowered satin and turbans of gold tissue;
Festive ladies behind latticed windows,
as slave girls fanned with peacock feathers and a whole world passed them by.

It was an age of splendour, of leisure, of good times and beautiful clothes. Men and women dressed then, in the best tradition of extravagance and good taste. On formal occasions in winter, the Princes wore the choga made of fine Pashmina wool, embroidered lavishly in gold.

The Nawab wore the 'Angarkha' made of the finest of white muslins, trimmed and embroidered in 'chikan' work. He had pearl drops in his ears, diamond rings on his fingers and carried a

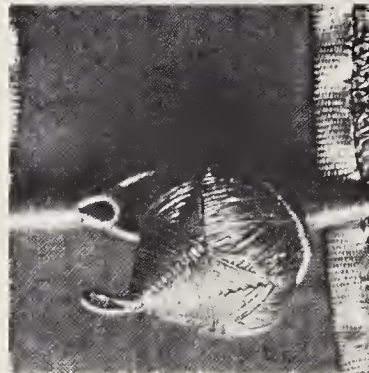


'Chikan' work

silk handkerchief, a snuff box, a walking stick with a silver knob. He also wore a finely embroidered chikanwork cap in white.

The origin of the cap and 'chikankari', according to local stories, goes back to the Courts of Oudh. The Nawab had a large

harem. One of his ladies, a princess, was also a skilled seamstress. To escape boredom, she embroidered a cap of white muslin with fine, small stitches for the Nawab. When she presented it to him, she won his singular attention. The others in the harem were jealous. They too began to embroider, outdoing each other in the finesse of stitches and designs. Out of the boredom of a harem and the desire to win the attention of the Nawab, a great art was born.



Royal Choga





The ladies of the splendid households in the tradition of the leisure class, wore the trailing 'Farshi' Ghararas. A unique development of the courts of Oudh, it was inspired by the Ghagra of Rajasthan. The Begums wore the 20-metre ghararas. Its train was draped over the arm when they moved around. In the past it was carried by a young maid.

The upper part of the ensemble—the bodice and dupatta—remained the same as in Rajasthan. Later, the bodice became a long tunic reaching just above the knees. Unlike the Begums, the average woman wore a less voluminous gharara to give herself more mobility.

The Court of Jaipur— the House of the rulers descending from the Sun God, radiated with an unrivalled splendour.

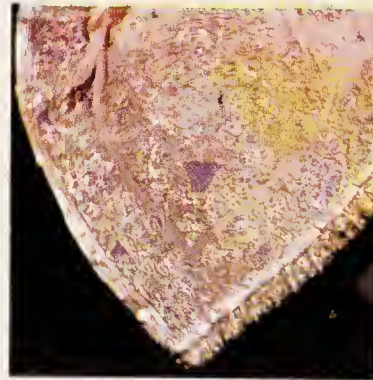
The Maharani wore the Ghagra or 'Lehnga' with the 'Kachli', 'Kurti' and 'orhna', native to the desert kingdom. But in her case it was no ordinary ghagra. Though made in the same spacious tradition, it was made with the finest of material ornamented with coloured silk, heavy gold jari and 'tilli'. Each panel was a garden of gold birds, peacocks, baskets and flowers. The sleeveless 'kurti,' the backless 'kachli', were heavily embroidered in gold and the orhna had a real gold fringe. The jewellery was as elaborate as the dress—a 'thimanya' or gold collar, a 'bor'





used in the centre parting of the hair, which was braided and tied in the back by a gold ornament. On the feet she wore gold 'joras', on the arm a 'bazoobandh' and in the ears, large 'jhumkas' with jewelled strings tied to the hair.

The Maharani wore this costume on court occasions, during marriages and festivals like the 'dussehra' and 'gangore', a festival known to the natives of Rajasthan.



Of Classical Dances

When men and women dance, they do in the manner of gods and celestial beings. And like the heavenly apsaras they dress with elegance and extravagance making the costumes of classical dance highly evolved and elaborate.



In Kerala, ancient India survives. In Kathakali, the native dance-drama, a pure form of art, remains.

A bell-shaped temple amid feathery palm trees. The sound of drums throughout the night announcing the happening - KATHAKALI - the next night, to start at dusk and continue for more than sixteen hours. A huge oil lamp lights the stage. The night is soon filled with strange shadowy beings, gods, demons, half-men, half-beast. A brilliantly coloured cloth is held high near the brass lamp by two attendants and dropped as violent drumming introduces each character.

The theme of the dance drama is the eternal war between good and evil. The dancers in capacious skirts and majestic head-dresses are men who are far from ordinary. Their perfect control of body and limbs is achieved after years of training. Their use of the face muscles is a marvel for they can laugh with one side and cry with the other. Their make-up is





made of pure vegetable dyes and the rice-paste 'Chutti' is applied whilst lying down for three hours. Each colour on the face is symbolic— green speaks of nobility, red of heroes and black of demons. Some dancers wear a beard of coconut fibre, but all wear long silver nails on the left hand. The white blob on the nose is the symbol of a monkey god. Whether it be demon or monkey the dancers are equally alive recreating a distant mythical world at a pace of another century.

And in Manipur, the costume of the 'RAS' remains as legendary as the origin of Manipur itself. The story goes that once Lord Krishna whilst dancing with Radha and the gopis asked Shiva to keep watch. Parvati was curious to see what Shiva was guarding. She insisted that Shiva let her watch the Ras. Enamoured by Krishna's dance she wanted to dance herself. But where would they dance? Looking for a place, Shiva chose Manipur surrounded by mountains, its beautiful valleys gleaming under water. With his trident he struck the mountain ranges, making a path for the water to flow out. The valley of Manipur emerged. Shiva and Parvati danced on it.

And the costume of the Ras dance, say the locals, is also an outcome of a legend. Krishna and Radha dancing the Ras, appeared in the King's dream in a particular dress. They asked the King to celebrate the Ras in the same manner. The king evolved the costume from the recollection of his dream. The dancers of today continue to wear what Radha Krishna wore in the King's dream. And another dance of the Gods survives.

Of My People



They are many.
They are different.





As the land changes
its contours and colours,
the faces of my people change.
Their foods change.
Their costumes change,
their life styles change.
Their variety baffles
and bewilders.
Yes, they are different.
Yet they are alike.
They are Indians.
I see them singly.
I find an echo
in each of them.



About the Collection

Of the many ways in which one could make a collection of dresses, I decided to base the selection purely on design. Each dress shows a distinct style in its cut, or in the manner of its drape. However, they have been regrouped to make a better display. No attempt has been made to keep to historical

periods, nor—to represent the various regions or peoples of the country. Each exhibit is collected from the place where it is worn.

Roshan Kalapesi

Of Ancient Cultures

- 1 Ao Naga Warrior *Nagaland*
- 2 Bondo Woman *Orissa*
- 3 Bhil Hunter *Madhya Pradesh*
- 4 Son Koli Fisherman *Maharashtra*
- 5 Maria Gond Drummer *Madhya Pradesh*
- 6 Muria Gond Girl *Madhya Pradesh*
- 7 Riang Woman *Tripura*

Of Folk Dances

- 8 Parayanthira *Kerala*
- 9 Chhau - 'Ravana' *Bengal*
- 10 Natti *Himachal Pradesh*
- 11 Bhangra *Punjab*
- 12 Lava *Lakshadweep Islands*
- 13 Cheraw *Mizoram*

Of Villages

- 14 Toda Woman *Tamil Nadu*
- 15 Meitei Woman *Manipur*
- 16 'Vasudeva' - Troubadour *Maharashtra*
- 17 Khasi Woman *Meghalaya*
- 18 Lambadi Woman *Andhra Pradesh*
- 19 'Bharwad' - Shepherd *Gujarat*
- 20 Kutchi Boy *Gujarat*
- 21 Kutchi Girl *Gujarat*
- 22 'Rabari' - Herdsman *Rajasthan*
- 23 Jat Woman *Rajasthan*
- 24 'Pujarin' - Devotee *Bengal*
- 25 Santhal Woman *Bihar*
- 26 Madura Woman *Tamil Nadu*
- 27 Nayyar Woman *Kerala*

Of Towns and Cities

- 28 Buddhist Bride *Bengal*
- 29 Kashmiri Woman *Jammu & Kashmir*
- 30 Hyderabad Muslim *Andhra Pradesh*
- 31 Jodhpur Shikari *Rajasthan*
- 32 Rajput Groom *Haryana*
- 33 Sikh Bride *Punjab*
- 34 Zoroastrian Priest *Gujarat*
- 35 Syrian Christian Woman *Kerala*
- 36 Jain Bride *Gujarat*
- 37 Bengali Groom *Bengal*
- 38 Bengali Woman *Bengal*
- 39 Assamese Woman *Assam*
- 40 Coorg Woman *Karnataka*
- 41 Tamil Woman *Tamil Nadu*
- 42 Maharashtrian Woman *Maharashtra*

Of Classical Dances

- 43 Manipuri 'Radha' *Manipur*
- 44 Manipuri 'Krishna' *Manipur*
- 45 Kathakali 'Krishna' *Kerala*
- 46 Kathakali 'Redbeard' *Kerala*
- 47 Bharata Natyam *Tamil Nadu*
- 48 Kuchipudi *Andhra Pradesh*
- 49 Odissi *Orissa*
- 50 Kathak *Uttar Pradesh*

Of The Royal Past

- 51 Maharani of Jaipur *Rajasthan*
- 52 Lucknovi Nawab *Uttar Pradesh*
- 53 Lucknovi Begum *Uttar Pradesh*
- 54 The Royal Choga *Delhi*

Acknowledgements

Air-India acknowledges with gratitude the contribution of costumes for the collection, by

The Governments of

Andhra Pradesh
Bihar
Gujarat
Kerala
Lakshadweep Islands
Madhya Pradesh
Maharashtra
Meghalaya
Mizoram
Punjab
Rajasthan
Tamil Nadu
West Bengal

and to

Yamini Krishnamurthi
Kumudini Lakhia
Sanjukta Pannigrahi
Kanak Rele
Mrinalini Sarabhai
Badrudin Morani
Gayatri Devi, former Maharani of Jaipur
Former Raja Saheb of Jahangirabad
Former Maharaja of Danta

Collection of Costumes, Research and
Catalogue Text : Roshan Kalapesi
Exhibition Design, Graphics and Printing :
National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad
Text for Souvenir Brochure and Display Panels :
Anees Jung
Music Compilation : Atul Desai
Co-ordinator : Uttara Parikh, Air-India



sringar

