PUBLISHER'S DESK
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Well, there seems to be an issue in this issue of our Hindu family newspaper-clothes. There is an old saying that "Clothes make the man." And it must follow that clothes make the woman. Dress codes are a growing issue in many temples throughout the world, and in ashrams and maths, too. It's being discussed not only in Hinduism but in other religions, too.

In thinking about it this month, I was pondering the difference between clothing and a costume. We all sort of know the difference. A costume is what we wear when we are pretending to be something that we are not. We see this all the time on television and at the cinema. Actors wear costumes, businessmen wear clothes.

The clothing we wear shapes our attitudes, cultural behavior and the friendships we hold. Can you imagine airline hostesses dressed like rock stars? Or rock Stars dressed like airline hostesses? The double-breasted or single-breasted suit is obviously of the materialist businessman. A kurta shirt and loosely-fitted pants and shawl is definitely Hindu, and goes well with the wife wearing a sari or punjabi.

In international airports all over the world, we see so many kinds of clothing. Airports are beginning to look like backstage at the opera-a flamboyant array-not like the opera that sports costumes of people pretending to be who they are not, but an array of clothing worn by people who are declaring who they are. A

materialist wears his shirt and tie. The Muslims are elegantly dressed. The Japanese Shintoists and Buddhists are in their traditional garb. Catholics dress demurely, Protestants informally. You can spot an existentialist just like that. And of course, you can never miss the punk rockers.

Clothes do affect our moods and emotions and make a declaration of who we are. My recommendation is to be who you are and let the world know it, even in the workplace, unless there is a dress code, of course. Don't be afraid to be a Hindu, which means dressing like a Hindu. Boldly proclaim your faith to the world. Others do. I will never forget seeing the many spiritual and parliamentary leaders in Moscow two years ago this month. Many were dressed in regular suits and ties, and it was hard to tell who among them was from the West, or from Africa or India, and harder still to tell who was a religious person and who a politician. But there were so many others, perhaps most, who wore their native dress. I knew instantly who they were, where they were from and what they represented. They carried the stronger message, and showed by their clothes that they had a proud tradition, and that they intended to preserve it. That kind of strength is good to see in a world that has mistaken sameness for security.

This is what temple societies and elders and swamis and gurus are all thinking deeply about-"Should my ashram look like a hippy commune or a serious place of yoga? Should our temples look like advertisements for Levi-Strauss acid-washed jeans?" Many say, "Well, God in the temple doesn't care how I am dressed. It's how I am on the inside that counts." This is a weak excuse. We are not one way on the inside and another on the outside. It's all us, inside and out. Even in elegant restaurants a coat and tie is demanded. They will lend you one at the door. We are thinking about passing out wrap-arounds and shawls to those who walk into our temple wearing T-shirts and shorts. We haven't quite decided yet. What do you think? Your opinion is valuable. Don't hesitate to write.

Women say that they think and act and move differently when they are dressed to a sari than to causal clothing. Another point - men look nicer to the traditional Indian outfit, rather than in, trousers. But many are shy. They need not be. Last summer a girl in our temple was scared to death to go to college in her punjabis. But she tried it. Within four days some of the American coeds came up and said, "What do you call that outfit? We want one like it, too. It is so beautiful." So much for our fears!

Swami Vivekananda noted, "The sari of our women and the chogap and turban of our men defy comparison as regards beauty to dress. The tight dresses cannot approach in loveliness the loose ones that fall in natural folds." Times are changing. Everyone today is free to be themselves. Hindus dressed like Hindus behave like Hindus. Don't underestimate the power of our dress, how it influences attitudes, feelings and even the company we keep. This is food for thought, isn't it? Think about it. Write to your Hindu family newspaper, and we will air your ideas in the next issue.

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