

SARIS:

An illustrated
Guide to the
Indian Art of
Draping



Chantal Boulanger

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Art of Draping



Shakti Press International
New York

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Text and Illustrations
by
Chantal Boulanger



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WARNING

Learning how to drape saris took me a lot of time, patience and perseverance. Although I tried to make it as easy as possible to wrap any sari from this book, do not expect it to be **too** easy! **Study the introduction carefully**, make sure you understand all the new words and master the basic techniques.

If you want to drape a specific sari, **start by reading the introduction thoroughly**. Then work on **all** the saris of the sub-family of the style you want to know. Work on them again and again, until the gestures become natural. If you have a problem, take a similar sari and work on that one for a while. The more drapes you know, the easier it will be to learn new ones, so start with those you find easy.

Draping is an art and a technique that requires some training, like painting or playing a musical instrument. You do not expect to take a violin and play a symphony without prior training. Similarly, it takes practice to wear a sari perfectly. Good luck!

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Introduction

Of all the arts that have flourished in India, one of the least known and studied is that of draping. This is all the more extraordinary because it is a unique art and craft which offers special insights into the ethnology of Indian and South-East Asian peoples and the archaeology of the periods in which it developed. At its heart is Hinduism whose preference for unstitched clothing, for both religious and social reasons, fostered the growth and development of the sari. Although knowledge of sewn garments has existed since prehistoric times, these were mostly reserved for warriors and kings, and never achieved the popularity of drapes. Therefore, the Indian culture developed the art of wrapping a piece of cloth around the body to a degree that far surpassed that of any other people. Unfortunately, this art has never been fully studied. Books on saris usually show a maximum of 10 or 15 drapes and too few explain how to drape them. Most of these studies have been done by men who have never experimented with the drapes themselves.

When I was studying Tamil temple priests, I learned that the women draped their saris in a special way, using a piece of cloth 9 yards long. It is a well-known fact that Tamil Brahmins, such as the *Coorg*, Bengali or *Marwari* women, have their own peculiar way of wearing saris. Yet, nobody had noticed the way Tamil peasant or Kannadiga labourers draped theirs – and neither had I.

My interest was aroused at a wedding. Among the guests, I saw a woman who wore a drape I had never noticed before. I took her picture and started looking in books in order to learn how to drape her style. After a year and many books, I realized that this kind of drape had never previously been recorded. I tried to find a woman who could teach it to me, but this was not easy because only a few old women knew how to do it. Finally, I studied how to drape that particular sari, and I gave it a name for my records. Since this drape is worn by peasant women in a region of Tamil Nadu called Tondaimandalam, I called it the “Tondaimandalam sari”.

Having discovered that sari draping had never been properly researched, I decided to record as many drapes as I could find. As I travelled throughout South, Central and Eastern India, I realised that the whole subject was far too big for my own researches to be exhaustive. I hope, however, that this work will lead others to carry on this research all over India. Apart from the few famous saris recorded in the past I found a large number of drapes, most often typical of a caste or a small region. Only worn by old women, the majority of them will be forgotten in a few decades.

The modern drape, often called *nivi* sari, is now worn by most Indian women. Few even bother to learn from their grandmothers how to attire themselves traditionally. This is especially true with the lower castes, where girls refuse to dress in a way that clearly displays their humble origins. We can no doubt consider as social progress the disappearance of caste-marking drapes, but this is no excuse to forget them.

As the following chapters will show, draping is a subtle art where what seems at first sight to be similar may actually be very different. It is important to study and preserve every kind of drape. It is a part of the world's heritage which might very well be lost forever if we don't record it with method and precision.

2 Introduction

I Perspectives

To describe in detail over 80 different ways of draping a sari may seem merely anecdotal and even pedantic. Yet all the studies on Indian clothing have overlooked the extraordinary precision and care that have been devoted to draping in its many forms. Numerous books have been written on textiles, and saris have been studied at great length as such, yet how the cloth is worn has not been considered important. Draping, which is so closely linked with fashion, has been deemed utterly trivial by academics, but just as, in the Western world, fashion tells us about society, so draping tells us much about the Indian and Hindu culture.

Classifying drapes according to method rather than by region leads to interesting conclusions. The classification imposed itself as I developed my research. I had originally planned to present my study by region, as everyone else has done so far. But I soon realised that this approach made no sense at all. Arranging drapes according to their method of production gave not only a new perspective on the study of saris, but also opened up a whole new level of meaning as to their function and purpose. Within each category, the study of the detailed variations showed interesting clues, especially about the evolution and significance of draping.

"Show me how you drape, and I will tell you who you are" could be the motto for this book. Drapes are closely linked with the ethnic origin of the wearer, and in Chapter 7 I will detail the conclusions that I reached from this study. My aim in this section is to make clear that the detailed study of saris is not merely a question of classification for classification's sake: for instance, the ethnologists and archaeologists can draw a lot from it.

The ethnologist can discover in traditional clothing what are the origins of the group and how it has been influenced by others. For instance, the *Aiyar* sari derives from a *dhobi* (typically high-caste when worn by women) but starts with a *kosu*, a kind of pleating which is the mark of Tamil (non-Brahmin) saris. The archaeologist can use clothing not only to determine the period, but also to discover clues regarding the ethnic origins of the people represented.

To draw meaningful conclusions from draping, it is essential to study it in detail and have an intimate knowledge of the procedure. The *Aiyar* sari is mentioned in numerous studies, but so far nobody had noticed that it contains a *kosu*, or that the *kosu* is so typical of Tamil saris. The only way to understand my conclusions is, therefore, to appreciate and comprehend fully the way drapes are produced. The social and historical meanings of draping often lie in hidden, minute details.

Indian drapes can also be placed in a much larger context. Draping was very common in Antiquity and is still found in most countries of South-East Asia. This work will help any future studies on draped clothing, not only in India but also in South-East Asia where it comes from the same basic drapes. Historians and archaeologists should find here many helpful clues that can be applied to any kind of drape.

I started this research totally unaware of its wide implications (not to mention the time and effort!). Thinking that I would save a few drapes from fast-approaching oblivion, I discovered a totally unexplored world whose meaning had never been considered. I will explore some of this in my last chapter, which, by itself, fully justifies the lengthy explanations of its preceding pages.

II Methodology

A Field research

Researching drapes requires travelling through as many villages and regions as possible, looking at everybody to identify precisely what they wear, and asking everyone if they know or have seen different ways of draping. Once I found an unknown drape, I not only saw how it was produced from the person who usually wore it, but I also learned how to do it myself. It was very important for me to be able to wear it. Since this might seem a little extreme, here is an anecdote which will illustrate the necessity.

I always thought I knew how to wear a *kaccha* sari, such as worn in North Karnataka and Maharashtra. All I had to do was to drape a modern sari with 9 yards, so as to have many pleats in front. Then I had to take the lower border of the middle pleat and tuck it in the back. When I went to the region where these saris were worn, I did not bother at first to learn how to drape them. Problems started when I decided to go out wearing a *kaccha* sari. It was in Goa and I went to a Hindu temple, where I was clearly conspicuous. Most people appreciated my efforts, but at one point, a woman, seeing me, shouted something in Konkani and everybody laughed. My assistant was reluctant to translate, but eventually he explained that the woman had said: "The way she wears her sari, all the boys are going to fall in love with her!"

I understood that something was wrong with my draping and immediately I sent my assistant to find someone who could teach me how to wear it properly. A few minutes later, a woman showed me many of the finer details which prevent this kind of drape from crumpling up and backwards, revealing the thighs.

On another day, visiting Ellora, I realised that when I walked and moved a lot with a *kaccha* sari, despite all that I had learnt, the cloth was still crumpling up on my back. I had to stop every five minutes to pull the folds back into place. Then I noticed a Maharashtrian woman who had the same problem as myself. Suddenly she stopped, grabbed a fold of her sari from between her legs, pulled it and tucked it in front. I immediately understood why she had done that, and the effect it had on the drape. I was bending down to repeat the gesture when she saw me. Without a word, she realised everything and came towards me to teach me the final detail to prevent this kind of sari from crumpling up away from the thighs which it should hide.

A sari moves. Unless we fully understand how it moves, and what small details make it move properly, we cannot really grasp how it is draped. When researching, I thought it essential to wear the drapes I was studying, not just once in a room, but also in normal living conditions.

I have travelled quite extensively through Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. I have also visited Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal, although not as thoroughly. A short trip in Assam convinced me that there is much to learn in this area. Exhaustive research would have meant visiting almost every village and caste in India, a task far too difficult for me. This may again sound a little extreme, but many drapes are worn by small castes, and may only be found in a village or two.

For instance, the *Kappulu* sari, one of the most interesting and elegant drapes I have found, is worn only by old women of the *Kappulu* caste. I noticed it completely by chance on a woman crossing the road outside Masulipatnam (Andhra Pradesh). Although I had crisscrossed the region asking as many people as I could if they knew different ways of

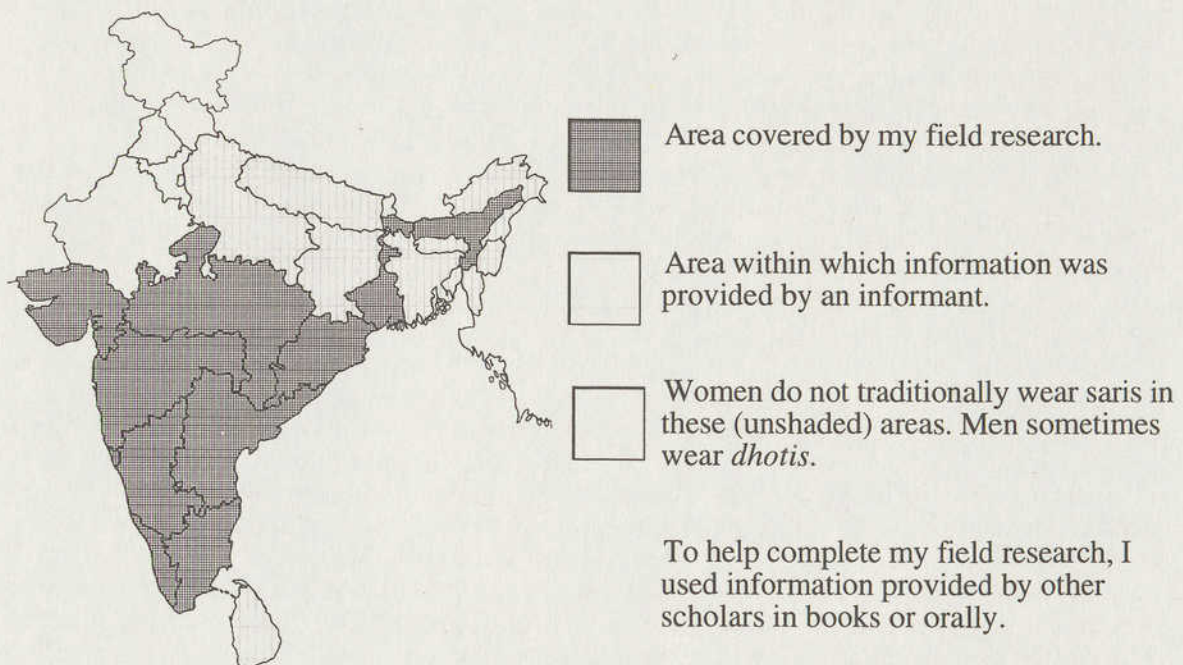
4 Introduction

draping, nobody had said anything about this style. As we were going back to Vijayawada, a woman crossed the street right in front of our car. My driver turned towards me and said: "Do you know how to drape this sari?" To my surprise I realised that I had no idea such a sari existed. We found the woman in a roadside tea shop, and she had no difficulty in teaching me the drape. It took me an unusually long time to grasp the intricacies of a sari which is quite unique, and which couldn't fit within any of my classifications. I have never seen this drape outside this village.

This anecdote illustrates the need for a thorough survey. I also understood that day that I would never be able to complete my work.

I have asked many women to teach me how to drape their saris. Most of them were unknown to me, and I had simply met them in the street. None refused and every one of them, from the educated Brahmin to the illiterate tribeswoman, understood what I was doing and why. They were all pleased with my work and entrusted to me their knowledge with pride.

B Additional research



For antique drapes, the work of Anne-Marie Loth, *La vie publique et privée dans l'Inde ancienne, fascicule VII, les costumes* (1979), is the most detailed and complete book available on draping. I will mention in the bibliography several other books which have been helpful.

For Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal, I relied on information from Linda Lynton-Singh, who is a textile specialist and who had learnt several drapes from North-East India (her husband is from Bihar). Thambal Yaima showed me the two styles draped in Manipur. She also described a third style, worn by Manipur dancers, which requires a partially stitched cloth and hence is not included in this book. Mrs Ruklanthi Jayatissa helped me with the saris worn in Sri Lanka.

For Madhya Pradesh, I also studied very closely the book *Saris of India: Madhya Pradesh*, by Chishti and Samyal (1989). I tried all the drapes myself.

For tribal saris, I relied on the book *The Tribals of India through the Lens of SUNIL JANAH* (1993).

I am deeply grateful to all these informants who have made my task easier and whose interest in draping encouraged me.

I discovered a number of drapes in books, drawings or photographs, and couldn't find any woman actually wearing them. Most of the time, I have been able to guess the draping. Since my aim is to preserve as many drapes as possible and not make an ethnographical work about castes, I have included some of them in this book, with whatever information I have about them.

C Descriptions

To write about draping in the most precise and clear manner, I had to create a vocabulary describing each part of the sari and each basic drape. The few existing Indian words were often too vague to be used here without being redefined. I have tried to keep popular expressions when possible. Since most of the terms I needed did not really exist, I made them up, borrowing mostly from Sanskrit and Tamil.

Here, the word *sari* is used both in the sense of a piece of cloth (a 7-yard sari) and as a kind of drape (the *Kappulu* sari). Since it is both at the same time, I don't think that this will be confusing. **I have applied this word to cover female and male wear.** For instance, what is usually called a *dhوتي*, a kind of drape worn nowadays exclusively by men, is called here a sari in both senses (a cloth of 5 yards and a kind of drape). *Dhوتي* simply qualifies the drape. It could be referred to as a "*dhوتي* sari". This departs widely from the normal usage of both words. There are several reasons for this choice. We must remember that such a drape was commonly worn by both men and women in the past, and that many women still wear saris that I will qualify as *dhوتي* drapes.

Definition of a "sari"

In this book, a sari is defined in two ways:

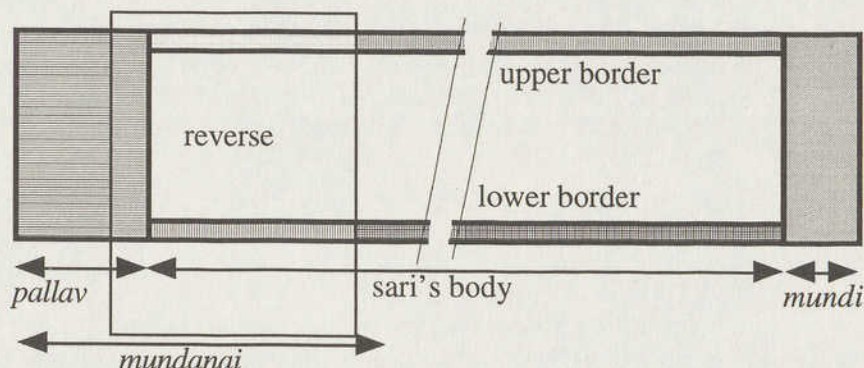
- (i) **a piece of cloth, of varying dimensions, draped to form the main garment;**
- (ii) **a kind of drape.**

The names of saris, such as *Marwari*, *Kappulu*, *Salem*, follow as much as possible what informants called them. But Indians rarely name drapes with precision. When a sari is characteristic of a specific caste or of a particular region, naming it was easy. The *Marwari* sari is worn in Maharashtra. For a few it was more complicated and in these cases I used the name of the town or village in which I first saw them.

6 Introduction

Terminology

The following conventions have been adopted in this book in referring to the design and dimensions of saris:



A sari has two dimensions: its **length**, which may vary from 2 to 9 yards, and its **height**, which may vary from 2 to 4 feet.

Please note: Indians still use yards and feet to define saris, *veshtis* and *dhotis*. **But these dimensions rarely correspond to a precise length.** For instance, if actually measured, a 6-yard sari may vary between 5.05 m and 5.40 m (6 yards = 5.48 m). I have kept yards and feet here as loose indications of a sari's measures, according to Indian usage.

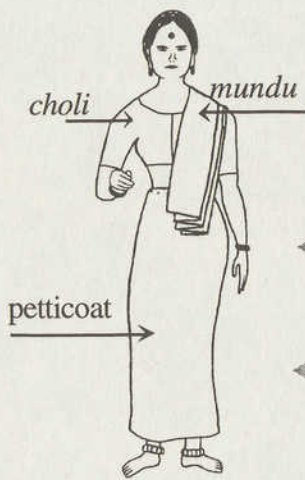
A sari has two borders lengthwise, the **upper border**, which is the highest border when the sari is first tied (generally used for the knot), and the **lower border**, which touches the feet when the sari is first tied. Please note that throughout the book I will refer to "upper border", meaning a border that was first tied at the waist level, but that may become lower afterwards, when draped in such a way that the two borders are twisted.

On a few drapes, both borders start at the waist level. In this case, I have called "lower" the border which becomes lowest first.

On the drawings, the upper and lower borders are coloured with different patterns in order to make the draping easier to follow. On actual saris, both borders are usually of the same colour. I have also assigned each border a reverse pattern, which indicates when the border appears upside down. It helps to understand the draping.

The main part of the sari will be called the **body**. It is in white on my drawings, and sometimes, for a better understanding of the drape, translucid.

A sari has two *pallavs*, or ends, coloured or woven differently from the body, usually of the same colour as the borders, and often having elaborate weaving patterns. The part thrown over the shoulder, which is the most decorated, will be called *pallav*. At the other end of the sari, we find another *pallav*, less elaborate, where the colours of the body and the borders usually mix. The draping of a sari often begins with this *pallav*, here called *mundi*, a Tamil word meaning *pallav* or border. On my drawings the *mundi* appears with the same pattern, whether reversed or not.



As a convention, I have called *mundanai* the part of the sari, starting from the *pallav* but significantly longer, which is thrown over the upper part of the body. *Mundanai* is a Tamil word designating a separate piece of cloth used as a drape for the upper part of the body. By extension, Tamil women often use this word for the *pallav* or the part of the sari which is draped over the upper part of the body.

◀ A smaller piece of cloth often used to cover the head or thrown over the shoulder is called *mundu*. This South Indian word usually translates as towel. I have used both words for any smaller piece of cloth used besides the main sari.

◀ Nowadays, saris are mostly draped over two pieces of stitched clothes: the *choli*, or blouse, covers the breasts and often the upper arms. It has different shapes, according to region and fashion. Petticoats have also become very popular, and I have even seen them worn with *kaccha* saris.

III Basic drapes

Most of the saris I have recorded fit into “families”, which means that they follow certain basic ways of being draped. There are four main families, with sub-families, and a few smaller families :

- *dhotis*
 - men’s *dhotis*
 - women’s *dhotis*
 - South Indian Brahmin saris
- Dravidian saris
 - *veshtis*
 - Tamil saris
 - Eastern saris
 - *Santal* saris
- *nivi* saris
 - modern saris
 - *kaccha* saris
 - upper *kaccha* saris
- tribal saris
 - “high *veshti*” tribal saris
 - “right-shoulder” tribal saris
- *Gond*-related saris
- *Lodhi* saris
- drapes with *nivi* and Dravidian influences
- unique saris

Some drapes could fit within two families, such as the *Gauda* sari which is at the same time tribal and *kaccha*. On the other hand, several drapes do not fit anywhere and will be described in the Chapter 6.

The Sanskrit word *kaccha* means “pleats” or “pleats tucked between the legs”. Many



The Sanskrit word *kaccha* means “pleats” or “pleats tucked between the legs”. Many authors have used this word to mean any kind of draping that separates the legs, not differentiating between several very different kind of drapes. There are many ways to have a sari covering each leg independently. I will only call *kaccha* a drape where the border of the middle pleat is tucked at the back.

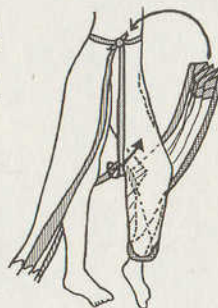
◀ The most common *kaccha* consists of making many pleats and tucking their upper border over the navel. The lower border of the middle pleat is then passed backwards between the legs and tucked at the back. *Kacchas* are sometimes made with the upper border passed between the legs and tucked at the back.



Dhotis are draped quite differently. The middle of the upper border is first tied around the waistline. ▶ The part of the sari between the knot and the *mundi* is wrapped around the left leg, while that between the knot and the *pallav* comes around the right leg.

◀ In Tamil Brahmin saris the whole body of the sari is thrown backward between the legs and tucked at the back. These saris are halfway between Dravidian saris and *dhoti* drapes. They have been included as a subfamily in Chapter 1 (*Dhotis*).

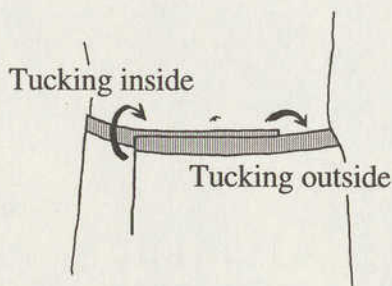
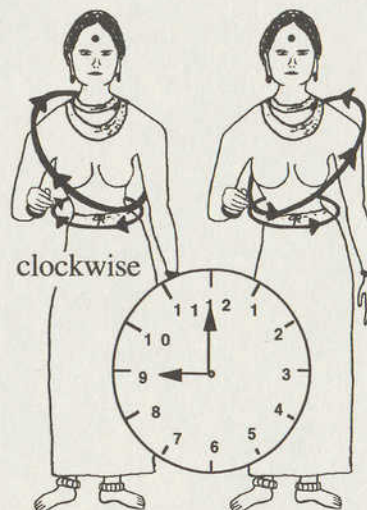
The women of the *Koli* tribe wear a drape which is unique and shows yet another way of draping saris with separate legs.



A The closing

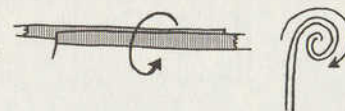
The first step in draping is to give the cloth a direction. Most saris are draped counter-clockwise, from right to left. ▶ A few castes distinguish themselves by draping theirs from left to right, clockwise.

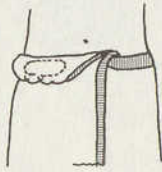
The draping of a sari is usually started by tying a part of the cloth tightly around the waist. I will call this the **closing**. This closing holds the rest of the drape and the pleats are tucked within it. The action will be called to “**close a sari**”, and there are many ways to secure it tightly:



◀ The most common way to close a sari is to tuck both ends of the closing. The *mundi* or part of the upper border is tucked out while the other end (usually part of the upper border) is tucked in. To hold properly, the closing must be as tight as possible.

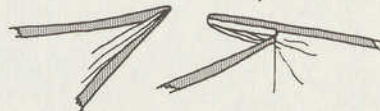
Another way to close is to roll together both ends of the closing. ▶



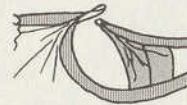


part of the cloth which is tucked towards the outside which is rolled. We may insert a purse, some coin or a handkerchief in the middle of the roll. In some saris, pleats are not tucked but held in the roll which is then called a **banana** because of the form it takes.

Some women prefer knots. These are usually made with parts of the upper border which are pulled as shown here:

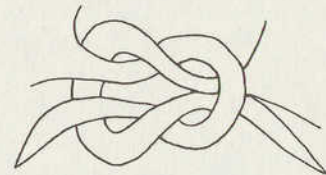
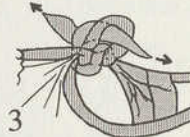
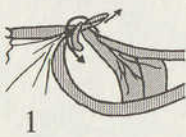


Parts of the upper border are tied to make a knot.

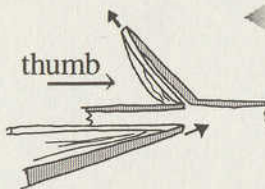


The upper border and the upper corner of the *mundi* are tied to make a knot.

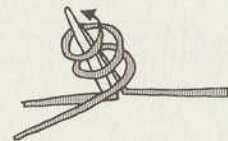
The most common "Granny's knot" (right) is used mostly by Brahmin and North Indian women.



In South India, we find a very peculiar knot which I will call the "**thumb-knot**":



One part of the upper border is pulled to make a thumb-like form. The other side of the closing is then rolled twice around this "thumb".



The result is tucked inside.



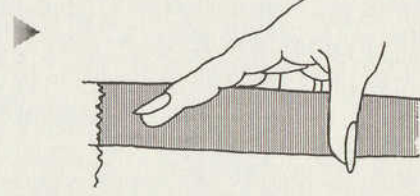
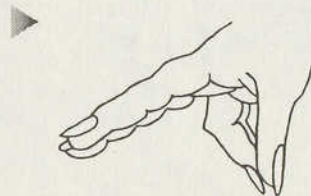
B Pleats

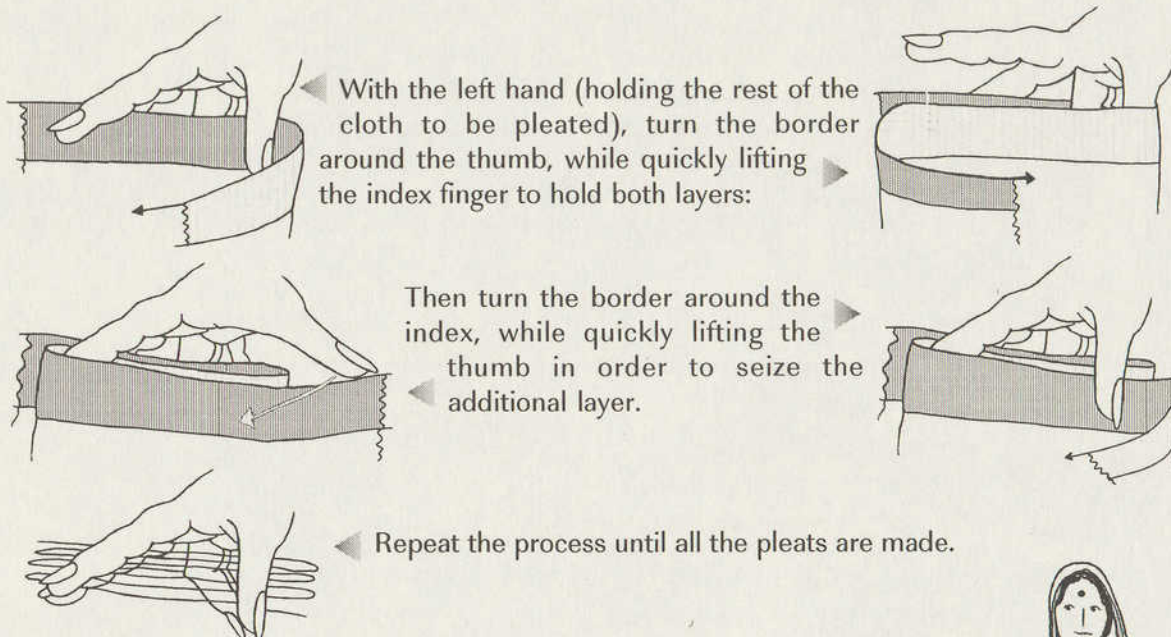
Most drapes involve making pleats. There are two different techniques in pleating.

Pleating technique 1

The most popular is as follows:

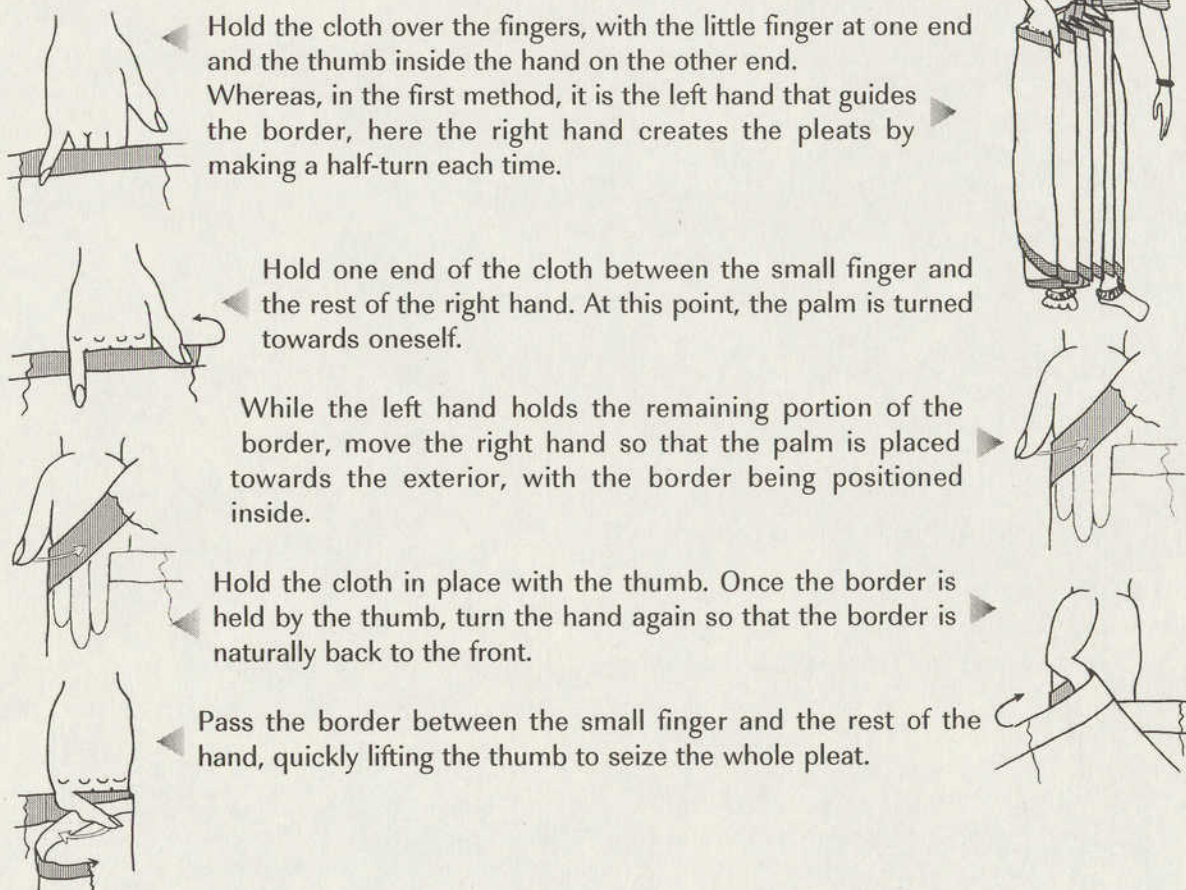
Hold the portion of cloth to be pleated between the index and the middle finger on one side and the thumb and the little finger on the other (of the right hand):

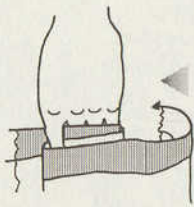




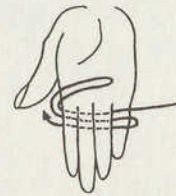
Pleating technique 2

The other method is as follows:



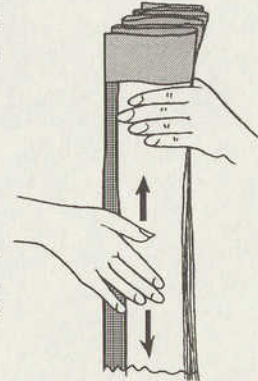


While turning the hand again to bring back the border inside the palm, lift the small finger to seize all the layers. The process goes on until all the pleats are made.



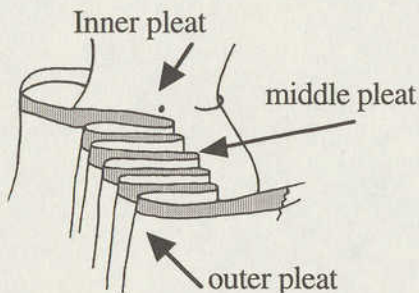
This method, which involves less movement than the first, gives a better hold of the pleats once made. (Needless to say, especially with the first method, lifting the finger and being quick enough to pinch the pleats back before they fall down becomes difficult when you have a lot of them.) It explains why this second method is mostly practised by women who have a lot of pleats to make, with a *kaccha* sari for instance, when you have to fold about 5 yards of cloth.

Once the pleats are made, they should be flattened together by pressing them with the hand along the height or length:

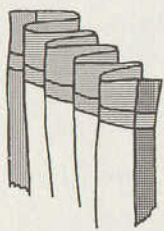
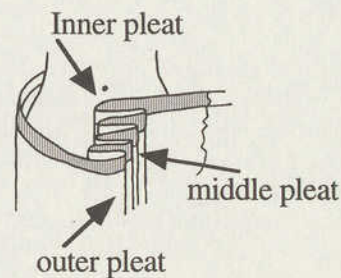


These two methods can be used to make several sorts of pleats. Most often pleating is made with a loose portion of the upper border, starting with what will be the outermost pleat. Once done, the pleats can be tucked towards the outside or towards the inside.

Pleats towards the outside:

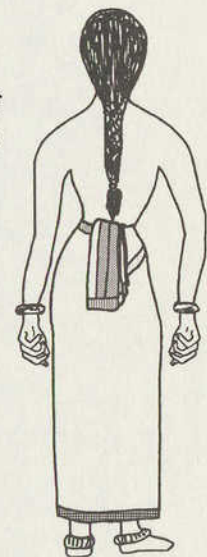


Pleats towards the inside:



The pleats are not always made with the loose portion of the upper border: in *dhotis*, pleats are often made in the height of the *pallavs*.

Kosu is a Tamil word meaning pleats. I have used it here to define the kind of pleating common to all Tamil saris. The *kosu* pleats are always towards the inside. Pleating starts with the corner of the *mundi* and the upper border. The pleats are then pulled up and thrown outside over the part of the sari which is tied around the waistline (the closing).



IV Textiles

Every drape requires a piece of cloth of a specific length and width. For instance, it is impossible to make a *Marwari* sari with 6 yards, since 9 yards are needed. Each region of India has developed textiles woven in the dimensions fitting the local drapes. But apart from the size of the cloth, almost all saris can be tied with any kind of textile.

When at home or working, women wear cotton or synthetic fabrics. When going to a function or an event, they often dress up with a silk sari. Most of the time, the draping is the same whatever the textile, although there are festive and daily drapes. It is important to note that a festive drape can be worn with a beautiful silk, polyester or cotton sari and that one might wear an old silk sari with a daily drape.

Both textile and drape are independently influenced by fashion. Stylists are mostly concerned with fabric and the form of the *choli*, but sometimes they try to introduce new drapes too. I will describe some fashionable styles in the *nivi* subfamily.

There are many books on Indian textiles. My only concern here is the interaction between textile and drape. The nature of the fabric sometimes imposes minor changes on the draping.

- Cotton

Saris are always best draped with cotton. Once folded and tucked, cotton stays in place, and doesn't require anything to hold. All my descriptions are meant for cotton saris.

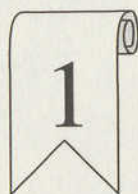
- Silk

Festive drapes are often made with silk saris, and for South Indian or *tussah* silks, which are thick and not too slick, the draping is most of the time exactly that of a cotton sari. Because of the weight, a pin or a clip may be used to hold the pleats. With North Indian silks, which are lighter and very slippery, pins are a must if one doesn't want to keep on readjusting the drape all the time.

- Synthetic fabrics

These saris are becoming extremely popular since they are durable, easy to wash and to dry. They can imitate traditional silk or cotton quite well, or they may have new and fashionable designs and textures. But many synthetic saris are also very thin and slippery, in which case the use of pins to hold the pleats and the *pallav* becomes imperative. Nowadays, some polyesters have the same touch and aspect as cotton, thus combining the advantages of both. These saris are very popular with women who don't want to use pins.

There are some other textiles, such as cotton and silk mix, linen, wool etc., but these are relatively rare. If specifically worn with a kind of drape, they will be mentioned in the section referring to the relevant drape.



DHOTIS

The most ancient recorded Indian drape (excluding those of the Harrapa civilisation) is a *dhoti*. Although Buddha is shown wearing a large mantle, his lay followers, such as *Ashoka* and the men and women represented on the *stupa* of Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh, 2nd century BC), wore elaborately pleated *dhotis*. Nowadays, *dhotis* are still worn by men all over India. They require a piece of cloth which seems longer and larger than what was worn in the past, but their pleating is often simpler, and they are no longer adorned with belts.

I Men's *dhotis*

Men's *dhotis* are generally white, 5 yds long and 4 ft in height. They are usually made of light cotton, have little or no borders and *pallavs*, and are worn by men all over India, except in Tamil Nadu and Kerala where only Brahmins drape them. There are several styles which reflect personal taste and/or occupation.

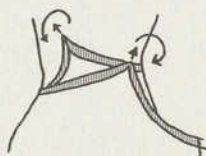
A The classic *dhoti*

All *dhotis* begin with the same basic closing. It is the only drape that doesn't start from one *pallav*, but from the centre of the upper border.

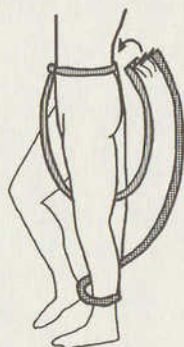


Close the middle of the cloth around the waistline.

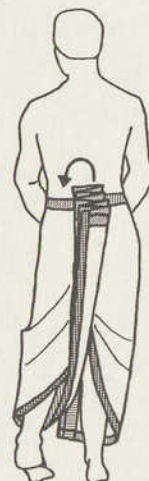
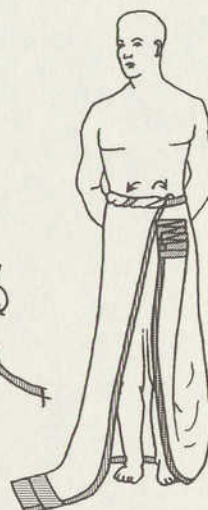
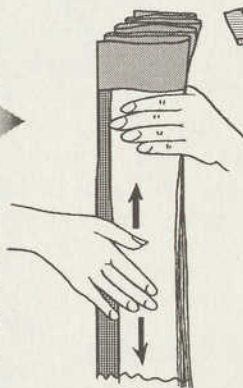
Secure the closing by tucking and rolling the part which is tucked out or, by rolling both ends.

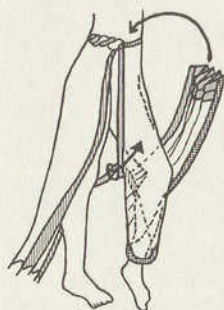


Pleat along the height the *pallav* falling on the left side, which will be called here *mundi* to follow my terminology (there is no real differences between the two *pallavs*). Press the pleats with the hand so that they are well formed and straight.



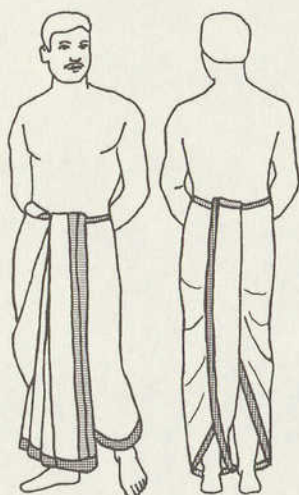
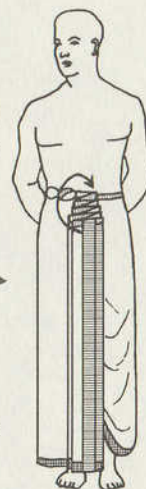
Pass the pleated *mundi* between the legs and tuck it in the middle of the back. The lower border must come on top of the pleats. (The right part of the cloth is falling in front.) Tuck the pleated *mundi* in the upper border, in the middle of the back.





◀ **Important tip:** For a better fit, and especially with short and tightly draped *dhotis*, pull forward between the legs the lower border which falls in the back of the closing.

Pleat the remaining portion of the upper border falling on the right side, and tuck the pleats in front. The *pallav* should be on top of the pleats. ▶



There are many variations of this sari, especially with the drape of the *pallav*.

The style shown left (front and back views) is the classic *dhoti*, the most common all over India. It is especially popular with Brahmin men, but it was worn by women in the past. Some Brahmin women have told me that they still drape it to cook on very ceremonial occasions. As we will see, South Indian Brahmin saris have evolved from this.

In the past, it seems that the most popular way to drape the *pallav* was to tuck it very high in front. This way, the lower border on the right side falls making zigzags (see the Andhra *dhoti*, p. 15). ▶

Today this drape is quite rare, although it seems to be popular with North Indian temple priests. I have seen it worn by priests in North Karnataka with a deep purple silk cloth, which is highly unusual.



B The priest's *dhoti*



In the classic *dhoti*, the *pallav* makes it difficult to walk fast or climb stairs because it falls on the feet. Temple priests, who have to wear *dhotis* when officiating, drape an adaptation of the classic *dhoti* which is more practical.

Although this style is most common with priests, especially in South India, some men wear it all over India, following their personal taste or family tradition.

This *dhoti* must be 5 yds long, and of white cotton. One border is often red while the other is green (called *Ganga-Yamuna* in the North and Night-Day in the South).

Drape it like the classic *dhoti* up to the point where the *pallav* is tucked in front.





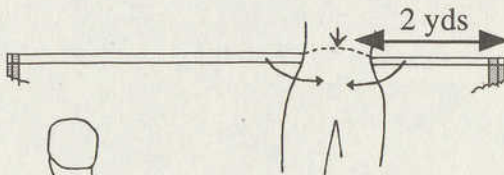
◀ Pleat the pallav in the height and tuck it in the waistline over the navel. The lower border must come on top of the pleats.

Wrap around the hips a towel or a piece of cloth traditionally in silk but often in cotton, when it's not a real bath towel, and tuck it in front. Most often, but not always, it is tucked with the ends gathered and slightly twisted. If the cloth is high enough, first fold its height in two. ▶



C The Andhra dhoti

This *dhoti* is mostly worn in Andhra Pradesh, but, as with most *dhoti* styles, it can occasionally be found all over India. It is made with a standard 5 yd *dhoti* cloth.

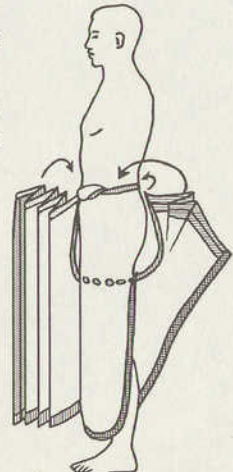


When making the closing, leave an extra yard on the right side. Tie the upper border tightly around the waistline and roll it over the stomach. ▶



Pass the upper corner of the *pallav* between the legs and tuck it in the middle of the back. ▶

◀ Pleat the upper half of the *pallav* and tuck it on the left side of the back. The lower half of the *pallav* should fall in such a way that it creates a zigzag with the lower border. ▶

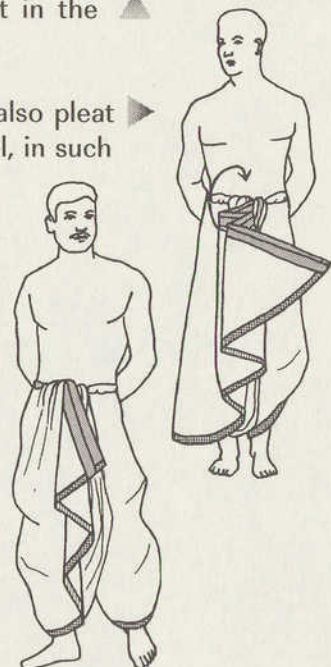


◀ Pleat the upper border on the right side and tuck it in the closing over the navel. ▶

Once the pleats of the right side are securely tucked, also pleat the upper half of the *mundi* and tuck it over the navel, in such a way that the lower border falls making zigzags. ▶



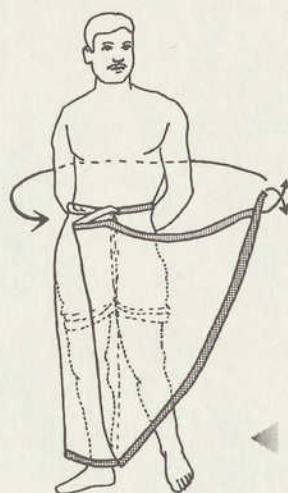
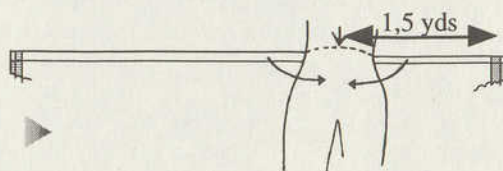
The draped sari should look like this (right). Men of some castes (left) drape this *dhoti* in the opposite direction (the *pallav* is draped around the right leg and tucked in the back; the *mundi* falls from the left side). This is also true of some *nivi* saris (see p 57), and marks the difference between right-handed and left-handed castes.



D *Short dhotis*

When the wearer is working hard, classic *dhotis* can be quite uncomfortable. This is why North Indian men have devised two styles, both of which are wrapped tightly around the thighs.

Short *dhotis* have one feature in common: instead of putting the middle of the upper border in the back, the left side (towards the *mundi*) is much shorter than the right. From the closing to the *mundi* there should be less than a yard. For these styles, 4 or 5 yds *dhotis* can be used.



After the closing is tucked and rolled, pleat the *mundi* (on the left) along the height, pass it between the legs and tuck it in the middle of the back (while pushing up and forward between the legs the lower border which falls in the back). The main difference with the classic *dhoti* is that the cloth is wrapped tightly around the upper part of the left thigh. In doing so, the lower border is often turned up, and higher than the lowest fold.

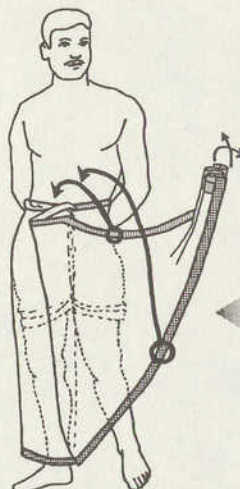


Make and tuck one fold to the right with the upper border that falls on the right side from the closing. Pull the remaining portion of the cloth (towards the *pallav*) upwards to the left while twisting the two borders together.

1 *Short dhoti of Western India*

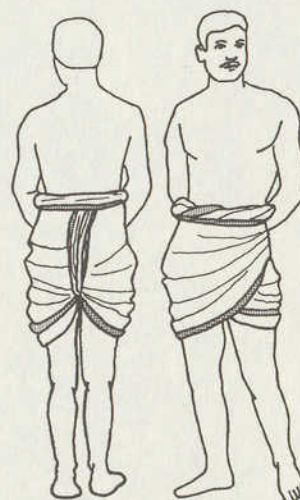
This style is more popular in North-West India, although, like all *dhoti* styles, it can be worn anywhere (it is not uncommon to see it on a Tamil priest).

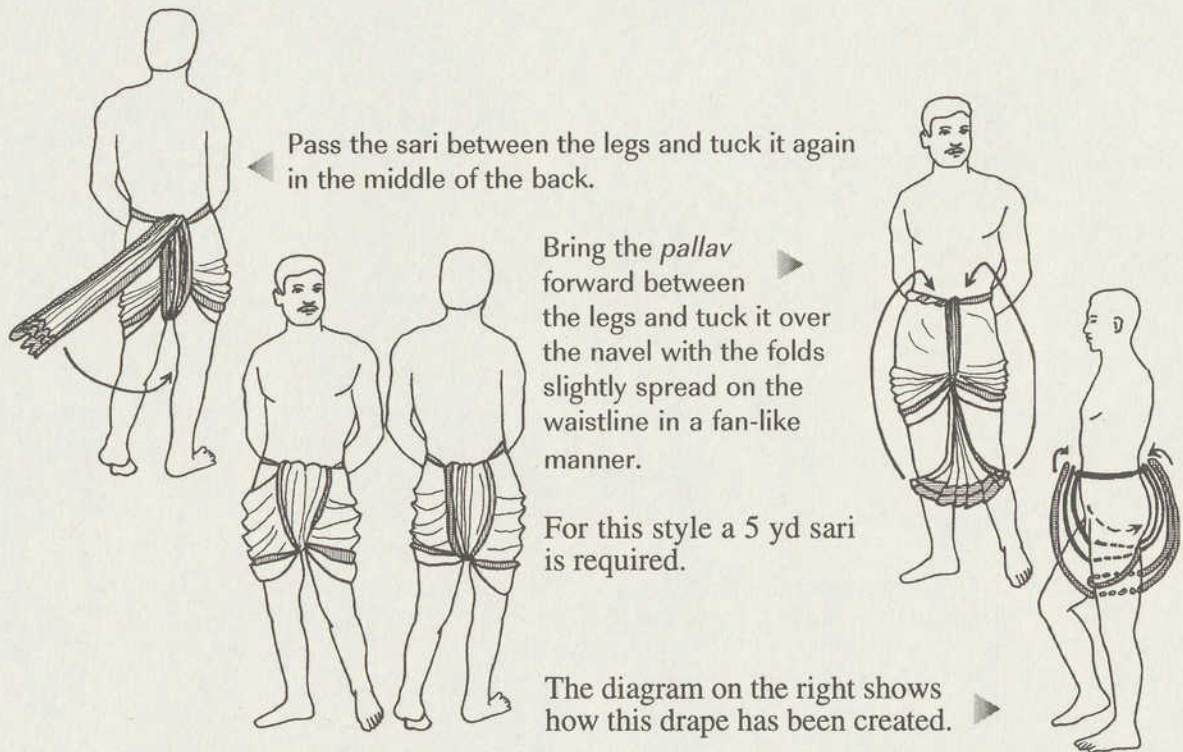
After the borders of the right part of the *dhoti* are twisted together, wrap the twisted cloth around the body counter-clockwise, making at least 1 1/2 turn.

2 *Short dhoti of Eastern India*

This style is common among Rajasthani farmers and labourers. It is always extremely tightly draped.

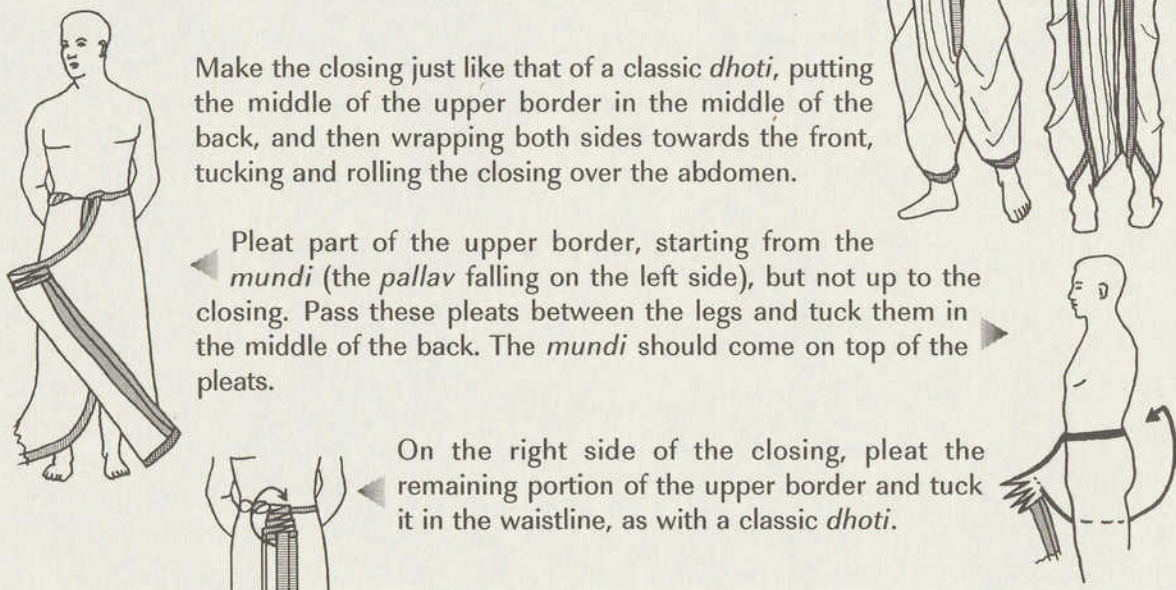
Pleat the *pallav* in the height. Gather both borders on the right side, twist them slightly as near as possible to the closing, and then tuck the cloth in the waistline over the navel.





E The Marwari dhoti

This *dhoti* is substantially different from the classic *dhoti*, and is mostly worn in Maharashtra and in neighbouring states. It offers a striking resemblance to the *kaccha* sari common in the same area, although it is draped in a completely different way. The cloth must be 5 yd long and have little or no borders and *pallavs*.



The *mundi* then falls in the back (its upper corner is tucked in the closing). Pleat it in the height and tuck the pleats on the left hip or in the back towards the left hip (depending on personal taste).



◀ Pass the lower corner of the *pallav* (which is falling in front on the right side) between the legs and tuck it in the back towards the right hip.

F The *Chettiyar dhoti*

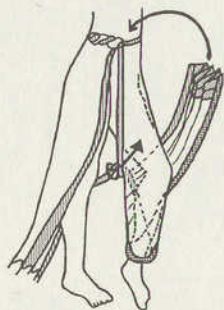
This *dhoti* is very rarely worn nowadays, but it used to be the most aristocratic drape in South India. Statues representing Gods, Goddesses, kings and queens often show this style.

Whereas in the past both men and women could wear it, today it is exclusively a male garment. It is associated with the *Chettiyar* caste, whose members are the ancient aristocracy of Tamil Nadu. It is also worn by traditional dancers in South India.

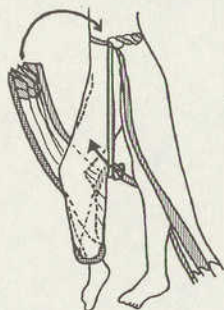
It is draped with a 5 yd cotton or silk *dhoti*, preferably having brightly coloured or golden borders.



The closing is similar to that of a classic *dhoti*. Close the middle of the cloth around the waistline. Secure it by tucking and rolling the part tucked out.



◀ Pleat the *mundi*, which falls on the left side, in the height. The lower border must come on top of the pleats. Press the pleats with the hand so that they are well formed and straight. Pass the pleated *mundi* between the legs, turn it clockwise around the left leg and tuck it on the waistline over the navel. Pull the middle of the lower border which was falling in the back, between the legs.

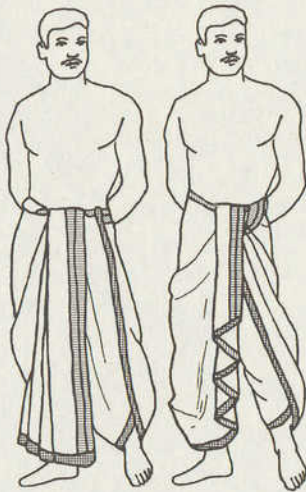
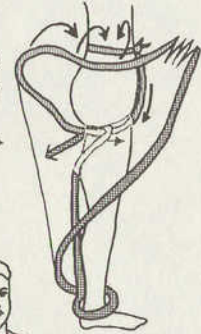


Tuck in the upper border, starting from the *mundi*, and all along the closing on the left hip towards the middle of the back. At this point, pull it up as much as possible between the legs and tuck it firmly.

◀ Repeat the same process with the right side. Pleat the *pallav* in the height. The lower border must come on top of the pleats. Press the pleats with the hand so that they are well formed and straight.



Pass the pleated *pallav* between the legs, turn it counter-clockwise around the right leg and tuck it in the waistline over the navel. Tuck in the upper border starting from the *pallav*, and all along the closing on the right hip towards the middle of the back. At this point, pull it up as much as possible between the legs and tuck it firmly.



Sometimes, the pleated *pallavs* are not tucked over the navel, but on the hips. This way, the lower border comes up on the sides. In this case, when making the closing, it is important to cross both sides of the upper border well over each other to cover the abdomen.

Modern representations of Gods and Goddesses often picture a style draped like the *Chettiyar dhoti* on the left leg and the classic *dhoti* on the right.



II Women's dhotis

In the past, women wore *dhotis* just as men did, like those described in the previous pages. From the 14th century onwards, women's clothes started to develop in a very different way from those of men. The numbers of yards required became longer and the shawl that sometimes covered their shoulders was transformed into the upper part of the sari, the *mundanai*. By the 19th century, the colonial attitudes imported from Victorian Britain considered *dhotis* to be "indecent" for women and in some castes, women adapted the drape so that it covered their breast.

A The *Kannagi* saris

Kannagi is the name of a famous Tamil heroine who lived some time around the beginning of the Christian era. It is said that she gave her name to drapes which are no longer worn, but are still remembered and considered classic drapes in South India.

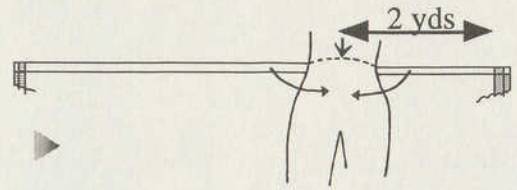
1 The fishtail sari

During the 17th century, fashionable South Indian women draped what came to be known as the "fishtail sari", because the *pallav* falling in front looks like the tail of a fish.

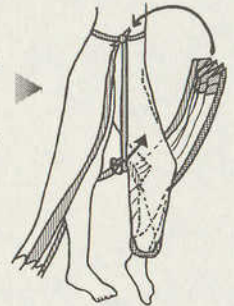
This style requires a 5 to 6-yd sari with a heavily brocaded *pallav*.



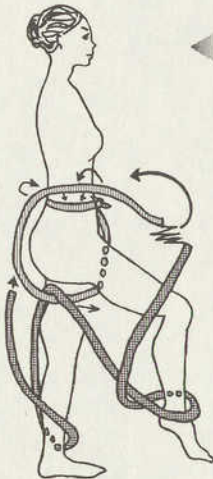
Pass the middle of the upper border around the waistline, leaving approximately 2 yds on the left side from the middle of the back. Secure the closing by a knot.



Pleat the *mudi* in the height, pass it between the legs and turn it clockwise around the left leg. Tuck it inside the waistline, over the navel. Push the lower border falling in the back inside the legs, towards the front.



Tuck the upper border, starting from the *mudi*, all along the waistline on the left hip, towards the back. This part is exactly similar to the *Chettiyar dhoti*.



Pleat the *pallav* in the height. Pass it between the legs, turn it around the right leg counter-clockwise and pull it up across the chest. Once the upper border is passed between the legs, pull it up tightly and tuck it in the middle of the back.

Press the pleats of the *pallav* all along the length of the *mundanai*. Tuck the sari over the navel leaving approximately 1 yd of falling *mundanai* (with the *pallav*). Tuck the extra upper border in the waistline over the right hip. The *pallav* is left to fall in front. If it is heavily brocaded, it will open up and look like the tail of a fish.



2 The flower seller's sari

This style seems to have been worn by women selling flowers (as a caste trade) in the Madurai region, Tamil Nadu. I couldn't find any woman still draping it, but I have seen old photographs of it. *Bharata Natyam* dancers often wear a stitched adaptation of this style.



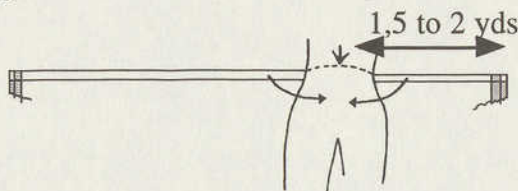
It is draped exactly like the fishtail sari, except that the *pallav* is thrown over the left shoulder and brought to the front from under the right arm. It is tucked over the left hip. If the sari is long enough, the *pallav* falls over the left hip, once the *mundanai* is tucked in the closing after being tightly draped around the upper part of the body.



B The *Naidu* sari

This sari is rarely worn nowadays. I have seen it once on a group of women, and I identified it later with a style worn by *Naidu* women of Andhra Pradesh. This drape can be achieved with 6 yd, but using a 7 yd sari is better.

Pass the middle of the upper border around the waistline, leaving approximately 1 1/2 - 2 yds on the left side from the middle of the back (towards the *mundi*). Secure the closing with a knot.



Pleat the *mundi* in the height and pass it between the legs. Tuck it in the middle of the back. Pull between the legs the lower border falling in the back, since the drape must be rather tight.

Pass the upper corner of the *pallav* over the left shoulder and the head, across the chest, and tuck it in the waistline over the left hip.



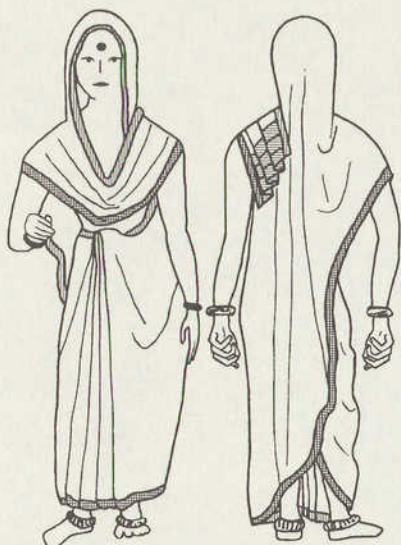
Once the *mundanai* is covering the head and the chest, a length of about one yard of upper border should be falling in front, from the knot. Pleat it towards the outside and tuck it in the waistline over the navel, pleats turned towards the right.

The *pallav* falls over the chest. When draping, the lower border follows the sari naturally, coming across the back and falling over the right shoulder.



When making the pleats, care should be taken to leave a small portion loose after the pleats, so that the left arm can come out of the drape if necessary.

When working or simply busy, this drape is rather cumbersome. To make movements easier, women drape the *mundanai* in a different manner.



Pass the upper corner of the *pallav* under the left arm, over the head, across the chest and finally over the left shoulder.

The body of the sari and the lower border follow naturally. The lower border goes across the back, over the chest and the left shoulder.

In this style, the *mundanai* is draped just like a shawl across the chest.



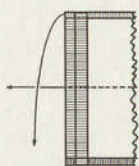
III South Indian Brahmin saris

In two states of South India Brahmin women wear very distinctive saris, that I have grouped here as "South Indian Brahmin saris". In Andhra Pradesh, these saris are clearly adaptations of *dhotis*. In Tamil Nadu their extremely complicated styles are a cross between Dravidian saris and *dhotis*.

What the four styles (two for Andhra and two for Tamil Nadu) have in common is the drape of the *mundanai*, which I will explain here (called hereafter the **Brahmin mundanai**).

Note that some of these saris are draped to the right (clockwise), whereas others, like most drapes, are to the left (counter-clockwise). The instructions given below apply to a Brahmin *mundanai* of a sari draped to the right. For a sari draped to the left, simply follow the same instructions changing right for left and vice versa. Compare these styles on the *Aiyar* and *Aiyangar* saris.

Once the bottom part of the sari is draped, pull the *mundanai* to the side, following the movement of the drape (to the right if the sari is draped clockwise, to the left if it is draped counter-clockwise).



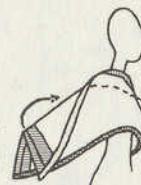
Fold the *pallav* in two, the upper border falling towards the outside, over the fold made lengthwise in the middle of the height. I will call this fold the **middle fold**.

Throw the middle fold over the right shoulder.



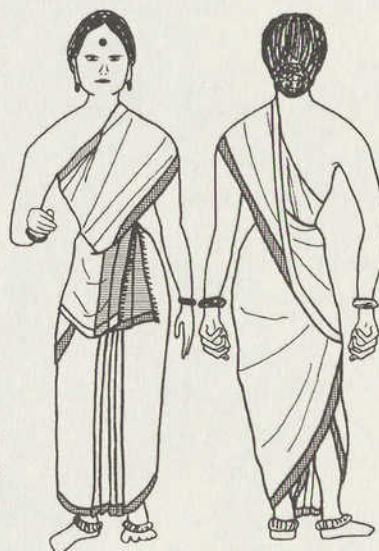
Pass the corner of the *pallav* and the middle fold across the back and under the left arm if the sari is draped clockwise. Then pull it in front of the abdomen and tuck it over the right hip.

Once the *mundanai* is draped, some women take the upper border (which is falling, reversed, in the back) and pass it around the neck and over the left shoulder (if the sari is draped to the right), where it joins the *pallav*.



A The Tamil Telugu Brahmin sari

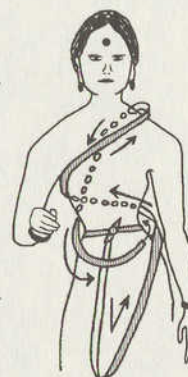
This drape is worn by women of a Brahmin subcaste in Andhra Pradesh. Although Telugu, they claim to be of distant Tamil descent. This style requires a sari of 7 yds, a length found only in Andhra Pradesh. Once draped, the sari should look like this (right) :



The closing and drape of the left leg are similar to that of the *Naidu* sari (see p 21), or, for that matter, of the classic *dhoti* (see p 13), leaving the extra 2 yds on the right side.

▶ Pleat the *mundi* in the height, pass it between the legs and tuck it in the back.

Now drape the *mundanai*. Pass the upper corner of the *pallav* under the left arm, across the back and under the right arm, across the chest, over the left shoulder, again under the right arm and across the abdomen. Tuck it over the left hip.



Once it is securely tucked on the left hip, pull the upper border away from the knot and from the *mundanai*, so that the *mundanai* is tightly draped across the upper part of the body and about a yard (depending on the sari's length and the size of the body) of the upper border falls loosely in front, from the knot.



▶ Tuck into the waistline the portion of the upper border coming from the back under the left arm (the beginning of the *mundanai*), as close as possible to the knot.

▶ Pleat this loose part of the upper border towards the inside, starting from the knot. Turn the pleats towards the left and tuck them in the waistline over the navel.

Free the *pallav* and drape the *mundanai* in the Brahmin way described above.

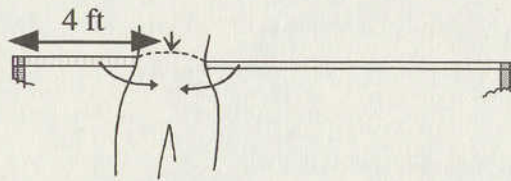
Fold the *pallav* in two, the upper border falling reversed towards the outside, over the fold made lengthwise in the middle of the height. Throw the middle fold over the left shoulder. Pass the corner of the *pallav* and the middle fold across the back and under the right arm. Then pull it in front of the abdomen and tuck it over the left hip.



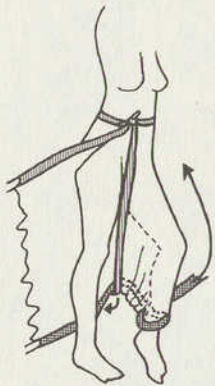
B The Telugu Brahmin sari

This drape is worn by the women of a Brahmin subcaste in Andhra Pradesh, of pure Telugu descent. It requires a 6 yd sari.

The style is interesting because it shows a transition between the pure *dhoti* saris seen in the previous pages and the Tamil Brahmin saris. Note the position of the *pallav* which falls in front of the legs, rather than being thrown over the shoulder. Once draped, the sari should look like this (right):



▲ Pass the upper border of the cloth around the waistline, leaving approximately 4 ft on the right side from the middle of the back to the *pallav*. Secure the closing with a knot.

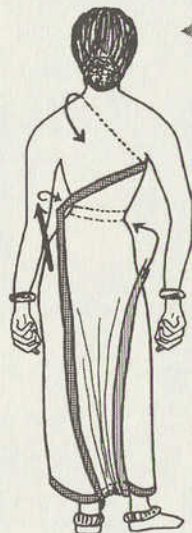


◀ Pass between the legs the part of the sari falling on the left side (the part with the *mundi*), without pulling the upper border. Turn the part of the lower border that is close to the left foot clockwise around the ankle.

Pull up the lower border along the left leg, up to the hip where you tuck it tightly. Once tucked, treat the lower border as if it was the upper. Pass it across the back, under the right arm and over the left shoulder.



◀ Tie the *mundanai* in the usual Brahmin way.



Note that the *mundanai* in this drape follows the *mundi* and not the *pallav*. The upper border follows naturally, going loosely around the right leg counter-clockwise. It goes up across the front and is thrown over the left shoulder with the *mundanai*. Note that it becomes in fact the lower border of the *mundanai*.

The *pallav* is falling on the right side from the knot. Pleat its upper border lengthwise and tuck it in the closing over the navel, not unlike the right part of a classic *dhoti*. The *pallav* must come on top of the pleats.



C The Aiyar sari

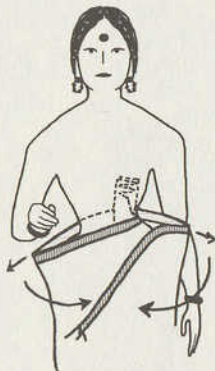
This style is worn by *Aiyar* (also *Smarta*) Brahmins who follow *Shankaracharya*, by *Saiva* temple priests (*Gurukkal*) and by a non-Brahmin caste of craftsmen, essentially jewellers, called *Acari*. These castes are found mostly in Tamil Nadu and South Andhra Pradesh.

The sari requires 9 yds (this is essential) and the *pallav* is rarely very elaborate. Most often the *pallav* and the *mundi* are similar in pattern. The borders must be contrasted to outline the symbolism: the lower border appears five times in front of the lower part of the body, five being the sacred number of *Siva*. The left part of the drape evokes a woman (it is a *kosu*, a typical drape of Tamil women) and the right a man (it looks like a *dhoti*).

The closing of this sari is similar to that of a *pinkosu*, the typically Tamil sari (see p 40), except that the pleats are towards the outside.



At first make eight pleats with the upper border, starting from the *mundi* in the reverse. Pleat the upper border towards the outside, so that it comes with the good side up around the waistline for the closing.



Turn the upper border once around the body clockwise, with the sari following (actually, it is easier if you turn yourself). When making the closing, take care to leave the upper border loose around the waistline.



Pull apart the upper border of the closing over each hip, so that the part of the upper border which is in the back is tight and pressed against the body, holding the *kosu* (let the pleats fall over the closing towards the outside).



Pull these parts of the upper border (that were on the hips) to the front and use them to tie the knot.



Pull up the sari, towards the right from the knot. Take a point in the middle of the height of the body, approximately 1/2 a yd (50 cm) away from the knot, and tuck it in the waistline, between the navel and the right hip.

Take a portion of the upper border a little away from the knot and tuck it between the navel and the left hip.

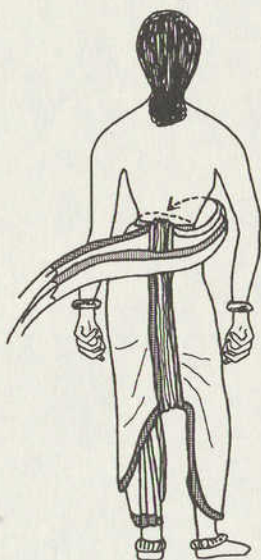


◀ Gather both borders together lengthwise and, with the whole sari, pass them between the legs. Pull them as high as possible so that the cloth passes slightly above the knees, and tuck them in the back, with the whole height of the sari at this point being inserted in the waistline in the middle of the back.

In front, the sari should look like this (right): ▶



At this point, pull the lower border falling on each leg as low as possible. First pull the right side then adjust the left. Each leg should be covered down to the ankle. ▶



◀ In the back, take the border coming on the right side (it should be the upper) and pass it reversed under the right arm, so that it goes back with the good side up. In other words, make a large fold with the upper border, covering the right hip, and tuck it over the navel.

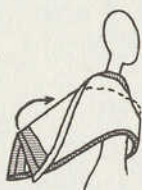
Twist the sari twice, passing the lower border around the upper twice, so that finally the lower border falls naturally with its good side up. ▶



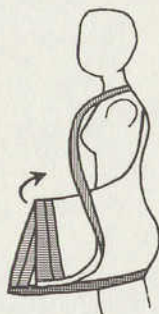
The sari should then fall like this (down right): ▼ ▶



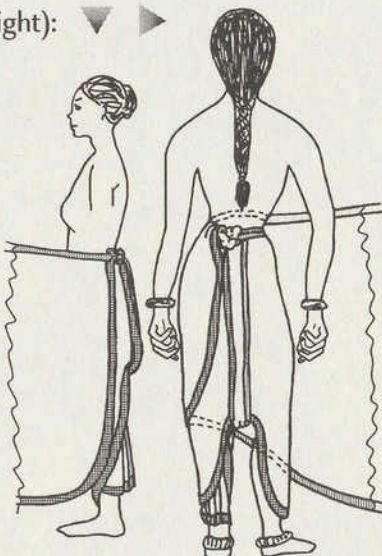
◀ Pass the sari in front and once more around the body. (It is easier if you turn yourself, especially with such a long piece of cloth.)



◀ After it is passed again under the left arm, throw the *mundanai* over the right shoulder and drape it in the Brahmin way described earlier.



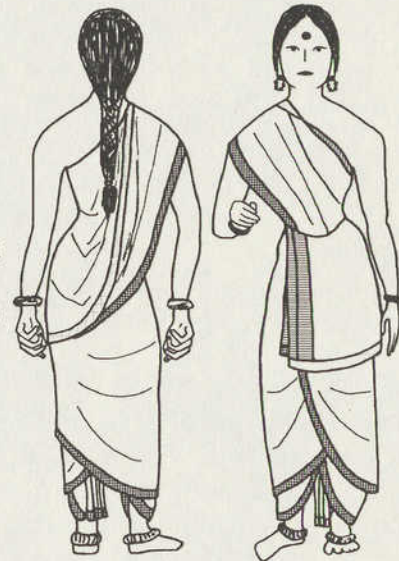
◀ This sari is very often worn with the upper border thrown over the left shoulder (see the drawings at the beginning of this paragraph p 22).



Traditional widows pull the upper border from behind the neck to their forehead, in order to cover their shaven skull. For this sari they use a 9-yd plain orange cloth.

The lower border should fall in front twice over each leg. With the *pallav*, this makes five times, which is Siva's sacred number.

During the drape, adjust the folds so that they look right visually whenever necessary. The finished sari should be like this (left) or like those pictured at the beginning of this paragraph.



D The Aiyangar saris



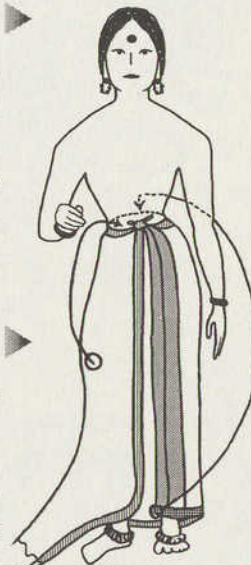
Aiyangars are a Brahmin subcaste, worshippers of *Vishnu*, found mostly in Tamil Nadu, South Andhra Pradesh and South Karnataka. They are divided into two distinct communities, those from the North (*Vadagalai Aiyangar*) and those from the South (*Tengalai Aiyangar*).

Both subcastes wear basically the same drape, but to distinguish themselves the *Vadagalai* drape their sari to the left (counter-clockwise) whereas the *Tengalai* do it to the right (clockwise). Since the drape is basically the same, I will only describe how to drape the *Aiyangar Vadagalai* sari. For the *Tengalai*, follow the instructions substituting "left" for "right" and vice versa. Both saris require 9 yds.

For the closing, hold the upper corner of the *mundi* over the navel and turn the sari around the body counter-clockwise. Tie the knot over the navel with the part of the upper border coming from the right hip and the upper corner of the *mundi*. Take the lower corner of the *mundi* and tuck it in the middle of the back, going over the left hip.

Take a point of the sari's body, in the middle of the height, where it is approximately over the right knee, and tuck it in the waistline on the right side of the abdomen. This way the height of the closing will be halved.

With the upper border coming from the knot on the right side, first make one large pleat towards the left and tuck it on the waistline over the left part of the abdomen. Then make four small pleats towards the right and tuck them in the waistline over the right part of the abdomen.

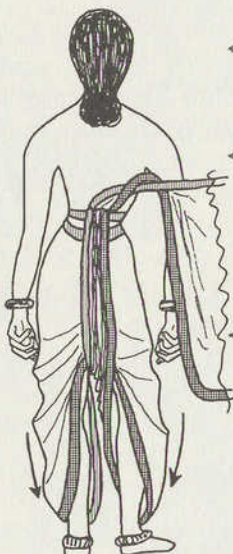




The sari should be towards the left. Take the upper border and pass it around the body counter-clockwise, under the left arm, in the back and then under the right arm, with the sari following its movement.

When the sari comes from under the right arm, make a large pleat and tuck it over the abdomen. The sari should be falling in front of the body.

Gather both borders together lengthwise and, with the whole sari, pass them between the legs. Pull them as high as possible, so that the cloth passes slightly above the knees, and tuck them in the back, with the whole height of the sari at this point being inserted in the waistline in the middle of the back.



Pull as low as possible the lower border falling on each leg. The sari should fall to the ankles.

When the sari is firmly tucked in the back, twist the lower border once around the upper, so that the sari falls to the right, with the borders on their good side up. It should look like this (left).

During the whole process, keep on readjusting the sari over the legs so that they are properly covered.

Pass the sari around the body again, counter-clockwise: under the right arm, in front (where we make two small pleats tucked over the navel), under the left arm, across the back and again under the right arm.

Do not pull the upper border. The cloth should be flat around the wider part of the hip, but the upper border should be a little loose around the waistline. Tuck it in all the way making many tiny pleats.



Once it is passed under the right arm, fold the sari in two and throw the middle pleat over the left shoulder. Drape the *mundanai* in the typical Brahmin way described earlier. When not working, *Aiyangar* women prefer to wear their *mundanai* over both shoulders, by bringing the upper border of the *mundanai* across the neck and over the right arm (for the *Vadagalai*).

The *Tengalai* wear the same kind of drape, but to the right (clockwise).



DRAVIDIAN SARIS

Dravidian saris are basically draped in two parts. The *veshti*¹ covers the lower part of the body. It is supplemented by a separate *mundanai* or *mundu*.






The draping of the *veshti* is very simple and virtually universal. Most people all over the world use this drape to wrap a bath towel around themselves.

Various forms of *veshtis* were worn in India, and are represented on many sculptures and paintings from numerous places, as early as the 2nd century BC. (Right, a drawing made from a sculpture of the 8th century, from Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.)

Nowadays, styles of *veshtis* are worn by women of some tribes or castes as far as Kutch (Gujarat), and in South-East Asia.

Dravidian saris are found mostly in South and Eastern India, as shown on this map:



-  Area where *veshtis* are worn by men and women.
-  Area where men wear *veshtis* and women Tamil saris.
-  Area where Tamil saris were worn at the beginning of the century.
-  Area where Eastern saris are worn (and *Santal* saris in tribal areas).
-  Area where some forms of *Santal* saris or *veshtis* are occasionally found in specific ethnic groups.

Today, *veshtis* are mostly worn by both sexes in Kerala. In Tamil Nadu, they are reserved for men, since women joined both pieces of cloth, creating many elaborate new drapes, probably not earlier than the 19th century. The draping of Tamil saris did not change much from that of the *veshti-mundanai*, except that this new fashion had one big inconvenience: when walking, the sari was pulled upwards by the *mundanai*, revealing the legs. Women in each region of Tamil Nadu found their own solutions and adapted their draping in order to remain "decent". The saris of North-East India (mostly Bengal and Orissa), although not worn by Dravidians, are clearly related to these drapes.

Men's *veshtis* should not be confused with *lungis*, worn by men in South India and by Moslems all over India and in Bangladesh. A *lungi* is always made of thick coloured cloth and stitched along the height. Because it is only partially draped, I didn't include it in this book.

¹ "*Veshti*" comes from the Sanskrit verb "*vesh*", meaning "to cover, to wrap around, to roll".

I *Veshtis*

Veshtis are commonly worn by men in the two southernmost states of India, and also by women in Kerala. Some styles are still worn by old women in parts of Tamil Nadu. *Veshtis* are also worn by a few women of low castes in many parts of India. It is a common drape in many countries of South-East Asia.

A The *veshti-mundu*, on women



The drape called *veshti-mundu* is simply a *veshti* to which is added a small piece of cloth, commonly used as a scarf or as a towel, the *mundu*. In Kerala, it is worn by most women when at home or work, even if they have a different, caste-specific drape.

Whereas most Indian women differentiate between their daily saris and their dressed-up saris by changing textile but keeping the same drape, in Kerala, the *veshti-mundu* is the daily dress and the other drapes (described pp. 33-4) the dressed up saris.

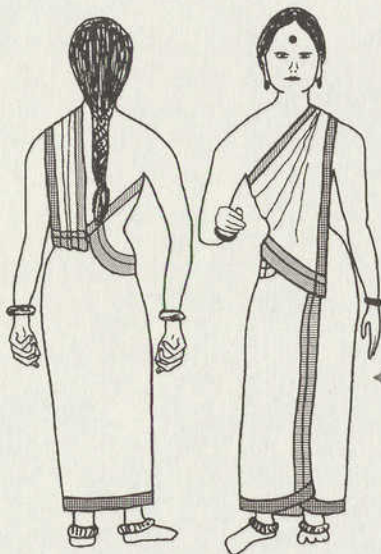
The most common form of *veshti-mundu* worn by women is a *veshti* in which the upper corner of *mundi*, tucked outside, appears on the right hip if the sari is draped towards the left. Here, the *mundu* is simply thrown over the left shoulder. There are very few variations in the draping of the *veshti*, but the *mundu* can be worn however you like.

The cloth used for the *veshti* is usually coloured, often with checks and no special pattern marking the borders and *pallavs*.

It has to be very thick, and about 2 yds in length. I have represented here *pallavs* and borders in order to explain how it is draped. The *mundu* is often made of white cotton, but can be coloured. Sometimes it is even a real bath towel. Nowadays, women wear a petticoat, and a *choli* to cover their breasts. The drape can go towards the right or towards the left, depending on personal taste or family custom.

Taking the example of a drape towards the left, wrap the sari around the body so that both *pallavs* come to the front, the *mundi* coming from the left hip to the

right, and the *pallav* going over the *mundi* in the opposite direction (to the left). Pull the *mundi* up over the right hip. If there is enough cloth, make a few pleats, creating a small *kosu*. Simply tuck the upper corner of the *pallav* inside, close to the left hip, or towards the middle of the abdomen.



Traditionally, this sari was worn without *choli* or petticoat. The *mundu* is sometimes draped over the chest, by tucking at the back one of the corners falling in front, so that the *mundu* is stretched from one hip to the opposite shoulder.

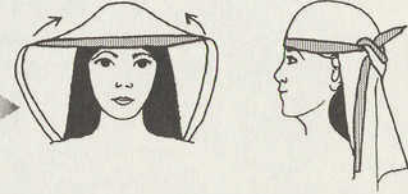




Another way to cover the breasts is to close the *mundu* around the chest, in much the same way as the *veshti* itself.

The *mundu* is very often used to cover the head. In this way, it is very popular, not only with women wearing *veshtis*, but with all South Indian women wearing a style of sari which doesn't cover the head. The *mundu* is worn in this manner when working in the fields.

Put the middle part of the cloth over the head so that a border comes across the forehead. Pull both sides of this border towards the back of the head and tuck them together.



In parts of India where women wear the *mundanai* over the head, they sometimes use this kind of draping to secure it when working. In this case, it is the upper border which is used for the tucking.

B The *veshti-mundu*, on men

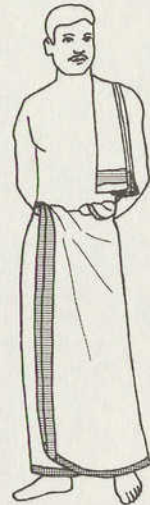
In Tamil Nadu and Kerala men usually wear white *veshtis*, often draped with 4 yds (12 ft) of cotton muslin. On grander occasions, they wear it in silk. Since the drape requires only 2 yds, the cloth is folded in 2 lengthwise. Consider this fold as the *mundi*.

When working hard they prefer a simple 2 yd piece of thick white cotton. When going on a pilgrimage, it is coloured to honour the God they are visiting: saffron (most gods), black or dark blue (*Ayappa*) and green (*Murugan*).

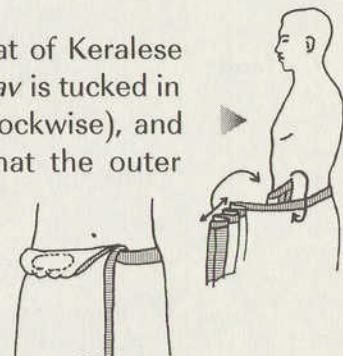
Mundus (towels) are of the same textile and colour as the *veshti*. Their size varies enormously, from something not much bigger than a handkerchief to a cloth as large as a *veshti*, depending on what the wearer likes and needs. The most common *mundu* is approximately 2 yds in length and slightly less than 1 yd in width.

Both *veshtis* and *mundus* have thin borders and *pallavs*, usually matching. It is common for a man to show his political preferences by wearing a *veshti* with the borders of his party's colour (in Tamil Nadu, red and black for the DMK and red, white and black for the AIADMK).

Veshti-mundu is worn by men of all castes in the two southernmost states. Traditionally Brahmins wore only *dhotis*, but although they still do so when officiating or on special occasions, they mostly conform to the general fashion and prefer *veshtis*.



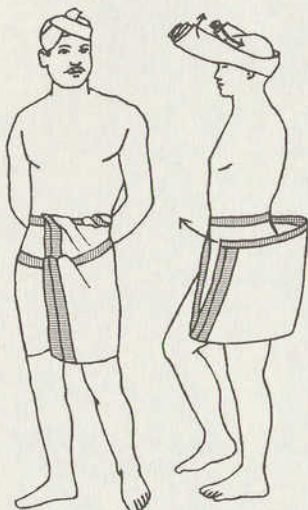
The draping of the *veshti* is very similar to that of Keralese women, except that the upper corner of the *pallav* is tucked in close to the left hip (or the right hip if draped clockwise), and never in the middle. The main difference is that the outer tucking of the upper corner of the *mundi* is rolled. This roll is generally used as a pocket.



Sometimes, a thick leather belt is worn over the *veshti*, slightly lower than the closing. It is usually worn to hold the *veshti* when working hard and probably when fighting: older men of warrior castes wear it as a sort of status symbol. Since this belt tends to be associated with hard labour it is becoming less popular.

There are a few variations of the drape, linked with circumstances rather than caste. When at home or out with friends, most men wear their *veshti* long. When working, fighting or doing rituals they usually modify their garment to fit the situation.

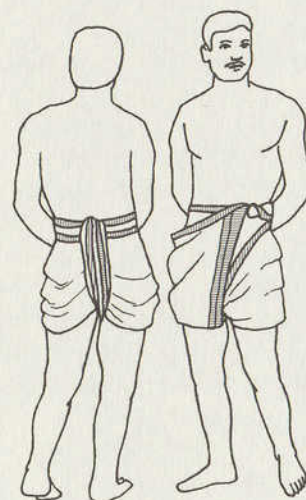
When walking fast or working, men fold their *veshtis* in two in the height.



Grab the lower corner of each *pallav* and tuck them together around the hips. This tucking is usually made quite loose (it only holds with cotton *veshtis*, and is never used with silk), and needs to be adjusted quite often. Note that the *mundu* is often tied as a very simple turban around the head.

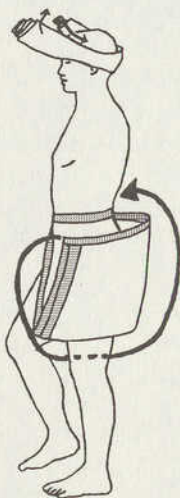
When running, working hard in the fields etc., this short *veshti* is sometimes pulled up very high and tucked tightly around the waist.

Another method for getting it out of the way is the *veshti-dhoti*, which is associated with violence. Nowadays, although Tamil tradition speaks very highly of warriors, and the majority of non-Brahmin castes claim to have martial origins, violence is very much shunned and this style is rarely seen. The indigenous arts of combat are not popular any more, except in cinema, and its in a film that I have seen how to drape this *veshti*.



Start with a *veshti* already shortened as shown above.

Pass the lower corner of one *pallav* between the legs and tuck it in the upper border in the middle of the back, as with a *dhoti*.



This drape is also used by some "thieves" castes during rituals, especially when making animal sacrifices.

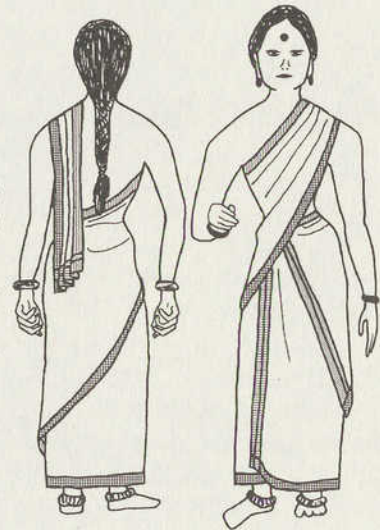
The only variation of the *veshti* linked with caste is that of temple musicians, who often pull up the *pallav* and make the front of the upper border go up in a zigzag. This elegant drape is very rare today.



C The *veshti-mundanai*

Keralese women wear the *veshti-mundu* at home or in the fields, but when they want to dress up, they change their coarse clothes for a more elegant *veshti-mundanai*. This drape is generally made of two pieces of fine cotton muslin or silk, always white. The borders and the *pallavs* are small but usually made of gold brocade. The *veshti* is usually made of 4 yds folded in two lengthwise (the fold is considered as the *mundi*).

The *mundanai* is 1 x 2 yds. Both should match.



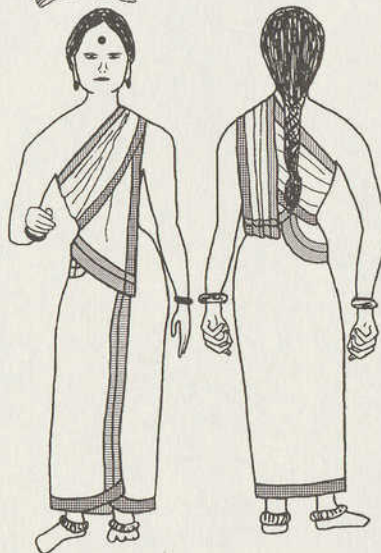
4 Drape the *veshti* as usual (see p. 30).

For the *mundanai*, tuck the upper corner of the *mundi* in the closing, over the left part of the abdomen (1).

Pass the upper border in the back under the left arm (2) and again bring it to the front under the right arm.

At this point, pleat the *pallav* in the height, pressing the folds along the length.

Pass the pleated *pallav* from under the right arm (3) to over the left shoulder (4). The *pallav* should fall in the back from the left shoulder, where you may fasten it with a pin to the *choli*.



Many women, especially in the mountains, drape the *mundanai* in a slightly different way, which seems to be more traditional. It is also used more commonly, and not as a festive drape like the above *veshti-mundanai*.

Tuck the upper corner of the *mundi* over the left part of the abdomen and then pass the upper border in the back (1). Pleat the *pallav* in the height, drape it across the chest from under the right arm to the left shoulder (2).

Pass the pleated cloth across the back from the left shoulder (3) to under the right arm (4). Throw it again across the chest from under the right arm to the left shoulder. Let the *pallav* fall over the left shoulder (5).



It is interesting to note that some Tamil saris and many Eastern saris also have the same basic drape as the *mundanai*.

Occasionally, the *pallav*, instead of being thrown over the shoulder the second time (5), is passed from under the right arm to under the left arm, and tucked at the back in the *mundanai*.



D The *Nambudiri* sari

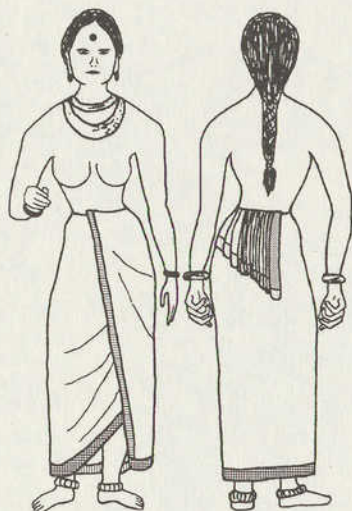
This drape is often pictured as “the” traditional Keralese sari, worn by aristocratic and *Nambudiri* Brahmin women. I have only seen it in historical films, and on some photographs of old women.

Although this sari is extremely rare today, it is so easy to drape that it will not be forgotten. It is made of two *veshtis*, one tied around the waistline as usual, and the other draped over the breasts. It has a shorter version described earlier, p. 31.

It is always done with two pieces of white cloth, usually with gold brocade *pallavs* and borders. The *veshtis*, if thick enough, are only two yards. When draped with cotton muslin or fine silk, which is often the case, two 4 yd *veshtis*, folded in two in the height, are used (in this case, the fold is to be considered as the *mundi*).



E The Christian sari



Christian women of Kerala wear an interesting drape which is probably the “ancestor” of the Tamil *pinkosu* sari (see p. 40). The upper part of the *mundi* is longer, carefully pleated, and falls out in the back in a graceful cascade of tiny, well-formed pleats. This style is always worn with a thick white cotton cloth of 4 yds. Most often it has no pattern marking the borders or *pallavs*. Sometimes it has a little gold brocade. It is represented here with the usual patterns to make the understanding of the drape easier.

First, make as many small pleats as possible with the upper border (about 1 to 1 1/2 ins (2.5-4 cm) wide; make them using three fingers instead of the whole hand), starting from the upper corner of the *mundi* and leaving just enough cloth for the closing. Press them carefully.



While holding the pleats up in the back, turn the rest of the cloth around the waistline clockwise. Tuck (or roll) the upper corner of the *pallav* in the closing over the right side of the abdomen.



Let the pleats fall in the back and carefully arrange them to come down as low as possible and up towards the left hip in a fan-like shape. The pleats must slightly overlap each other.

This drape is now worn with a long shirt and a towel (*mundu*), but as with all feminine Keralese *veshtis*, it used to be the only piece of cloth. Keralese Christians fought Hindu laws to be allowed to cover their breast early in the century.

F The Salem *veshti*

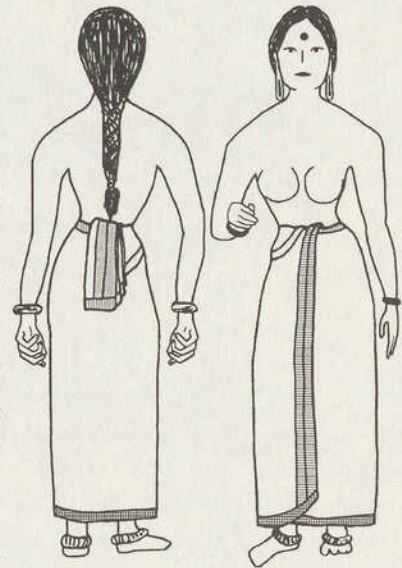
In the countryside around the Tamil city of Salem we find a very simple drape which forms the basis for most Tamil saris, including the *Aiyar* sari (see p. 25). It is made of a colourful piece of cotton, about 4 yds in length. It usually has no border or pattern other than that of the cloth's body.



Make pleats with the upper border starting from the *mudi*. They must be as wide as the hand. Use all the length except for the part that will be used for the closing.



Hold the pleats, called *kosu* in Tamil, in the middle of the back while passing the rest of the upper border around the body counter-clockwise, going first to the right hip, then across the abdomen, over the left hip, in the back over the pleats which are left to fall outside, and finally to the front. Tuck or roll the upper corner of the *pallav* in the middle of the waist.

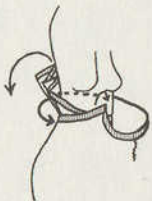


Even today, this style is usually worn without *choli*.

The *mundu* is draped over the head (see p. 31). This drape was probably very common in the past, when breasts were not hidden. Now, it is restricted to a few old women working in the fields or at home. With time and the Victorian influence, the *veshti* evolved to hide the upper part of the body, becoming the Tamil *pinkosu*.

G The *pinkosu veshti-mundanai*

The first stage was probably a drape which can still be seen today in the Bodhinayakkanur area, Tamil Nadu. It is made of an 8 yd sari of brightly coloured cotton, with small borders, *mudi* and *pallav*. First, cut the sari in two equal halves (two 4 yd pieces).



Drape the bottom half just like the Salem *veshti*, except that you make a half turn more: once you have tucked the upper border over the abdomen, securing the closing, pass it again to the back over the left hip.



Tuck the upper corner of the *pallav* at the back of the right hip. When pleating the *kosu*, care must be taken to leave enough cloth to go twice around the body (once from the *kosu* to the first tucking on the abdomen, and then back to the right hip).





Pleat the cloth of the *mundanai* in the height, pressing the folds throughout the whole length.

Let the *mundi* fall over the breasts from the left shoulder. Pass the sari across the back to under the right arm. Twist it at this point. Pass the twisted sari over the waist almost as a kind of thick rope.

Finally, tuck the sari in the middle of the back. The *pallav* should fall on the back of the left hip.



This kind of pleating and twisting to create a "belt" was very common and is represented in numerous sculptures. It seems here that the belt has been modified to cover the chest.

H The Manipur sari

This sari, worn by women in Manipur, is closely related to *veshtis*.

The main difference is the way the closing is done. I am thankful to Mrs Thambal Yaima for having shown me how to drape this style. The cloth, which can be very colourful and heavy or fine and white, should be about 2 yds long, or 4 yds folded in two.



Hold the upper corner of the *mundi* over the right hip and turn the upper border counter-clockwise around the waistline.

Push the *pallav* tightly towards the left.

Roll the upper borders together over the left hip, leaving the upper corner of the *pallav* to fall at the back.



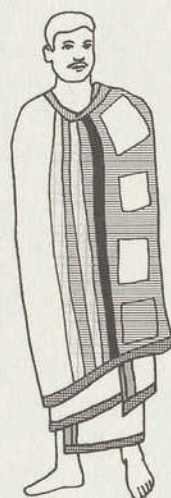
It is worn with a *choli*, as well as a scarf (*dupatta*), which can be draped over the chest, with both ends falling at the back from each shoulder, as represented here. It can also be draped all around the upper part of the body.

E The Toda veshti

In North-western Tamil Nadu, men of the *Toda* tribe wear shawls, such as described later in Chapter 4 (see p. 77). Under these, they have a kind of *veshti* which follows the diagonal lines of their shawl's drape.

Women do not seem to wear this style of *veshti*, although they drape shawls just as the men do. They prefer the common *veshti* (see p. 30).

For this style, you need a 2 yd *veshti*, made of thick white cotton, with little or no borders and *pallavs*.





Take the upper corner of the *mundi* and hold it over the right side of the abdomen. Pass the cloth around the body counter-clockwise. The upper corner of the *mundi* should fall over the upper border once it has gone around the waistline and passes in front of the abdomen again.

Make small informal pleats with what remains of the upper border as it passes again under the left arm. Twist these pleats with the upper part of the *pallav*, and roll all this in the upper border, in the middle of the back.

As a result, the lower corner of the *mundi* falls over the feet, while the lower border rises around the body, towards the left and in the back, where the lower corner of the *pallav* should now fall below the knees.



Veshtis in various styles exist all over India and beyond. It is one of the world's most ancient and common drapes. It has evolved to cover the chest, creating three distinct sub-families: the Tamil saris, the Eastern saris and the *Santal* saris.

II Tamil saris

A natural evolution of the *veshti* with a *kosu*, such as the *pinkosu veshti-mundanai* (see p. 35), led to the Tamil saris. The *mundanai* became attached to the *pallav* of the *veshti*, becoming an 8 yd sari, instead of two separate 4 yd pieces of cloth.



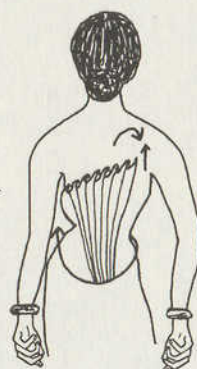
Attaching the *mundanai* to the *veshti* had one major inconvenience: it made it difficult to walk. The top part of the sari pulled the lower half, revealing the legs. To avoid this, women in every region of Tamil Nadu adapted the drape in several different ways.

For all Tamil saris, the *kosu* remains the main characteristic feature of the drape. It can be placed in the middle of the back (as with *pinkosu* saris - "*pin*" means "back" in Tamil), on the right or on the left hip. Since the technique is common to this sub-family, I will describe it here.

First take the upper corner of the *mundi* in the right hand. Pleat the upper border lengthwise, leaving the *mundi* towards the body. The number of pleats depends on the sari's length, the size of the waistline and the drape. It can be as little as 4 or as much as 12 pleats or more. It takes a certain familiarity of the drape before you can easily determine how many folds will be necessary.



Hold up the pleats firmly on the body, over the back or the hip. Since the cloth should fall over the closing, the pleats must be pulled as high as possible, normally to the level of the shoulder-blades. Take the sari around the body, usually counter-clockwise, and secure the closing with the upper border.



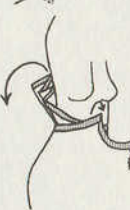
There are two techniques to close:



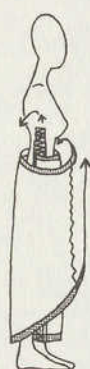
1. The **loose closing** has already been studied for the *Aiyar* sari. Take the upper border of the closing over each hip and pull both sides away, so that the upper border which is in the back is tight and pressed against the body, holding the *kosu*. Bring the parts which are pulled away to the front and use them to tie the knot (a thumb knot).



2. In the **tight closing**, pass the upper border tightly around the waistline while holding the pleats up. Once the *kosu* is held by the upper border, close the sari by tucking or (more often) rolling part of the upper border over the abdomen. This is very similar to the closing of a *veshti*. Although it is not very convenient (the cloth is more tight around the legs, while the loose closing gives more room), it is more common.



A The Karaikkal sari



Women in the area of Karaikkal (Pondicherry), and especially fisherwomen, wear a sari clearly adapted from a *veshti-mundanai*. It requires only 6 yds, and can be draped with any kind of ordinary sari.

First make some small pleats (from 5 to 9), using only three fingers. Hold them under the right arm while turning the rest of the sari around the body counter-clockwise to make the closing. Once the upper border has come round the waistline and is holding the *kosu*, tuck it or roll it over the left side of the abdomen.



When the closing is secured, bring the upper border towards the right and tuck it under the right arm over the pleats. Then throw it over the left shoulder. Throw the lower border loosely over the left shoulder after it has come around the body once.

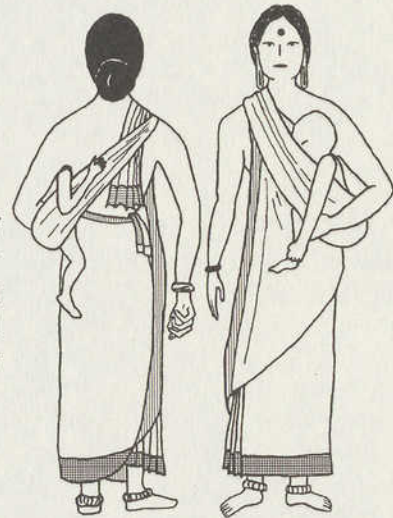
Arrange the sari's body on the shoulder to make pleats. Fold the *pallav* in two in the height, and make this middle fold come over the upper border on the shoulder. Bring the fold of the *pallav* across the abdomen and tuck it on the left hip or, if the sari is long enough, in the back, as represented above.



B The Velanganni sari

In Velanganni, a Christian pilgrim centre just South of Karaikkal, most begging women carry a child (after all, they are counting on the local popularity of the Virgin Mary, seen as a mother carrying the baby Jesus). To be able to beg and hold a child (from the age of 1 up to 4 or 5 years old), they have modified the *mundanai* of the traditional Karaikkal sari. It requires 6 yds.

Drape the bottom half just like the Karaikkal sari.



Once the bottom part is draped, tuck the upper border at first on the right side of the abdomen, and then on the left, before throwing the rest of the sari over the right shoulder (to be able to carry the child on the left arm). In doing so, the cloth is in fact folded in the height, and the part thrown over the shoulder is reversed.

Notice that this creates a fold which starts at the point where the upper border is tucked under the left arm and goes across the front down to the twist of the lower border over the right foot.

The lower border follows, being folded at the point where it crosses the bottom of the pleats. It goes up along the right side of the body. Tuck it slightly over the pleats under the right arm and then throw it over the right shoulder, close to the neck. (It will get untucked very quickly.)



Pass the sari across the back, the borders towards the body. Install the child (c) in the fold under the left arm while pulling the *mundanai* up towards the right and securing it by tucking the *pallav* under the part of the sari already on the shoulder.

I have also seen this drape of the *mundanai* with other styles of saris (*pinkosu*, *nivi* etc.) for the bottom part, always in Velanganni and with begging women.

C *Pinkosu* saris

To everyone in Tamil Nadu, **the** traditional sari worn by village women is the *pinkosu*, which means "pleats in the back". It is very similar to the Karaikkal sari, except that the pleats are large and the *kosu* always in the middle of the back. It requires 8 yds to be well draped, but, for convenience, women often manage with an ordinary 6 yd sari, using fewer pleats and with a shorter *mundanai*. As with all Tamil drapes, it is traditionally worn without *choli* or petticoat, although nowadays more and more women add these two garments.

When well-made with an 8 yd sari of thick cotton or silk, the lower border comes up in a straight vertical line from the left foot to the shoulder, giving a commanding appearance to the wearer.

Since there are countless variations of the style made by combining different *kosu* and *mundanai*, I will study both separately. Each kind of *kosu* can be fitted with any kind of *mundanai*.



Make large pleats with the upper border, starting from the *mundi* (from 3 to 12, depending on the sari's length, the wearer's body, and the size one wants to give to the *mundanai*). While holding the *kosu* over the shoulder-blades, pass the upper border counter-clockwise around the waistline and secure the closing (see p. 38).



◀ The *kosu* falls backwards over the closing, with the *mundi* towards the outside. Usually the pleats are all in one bunch in the middle of the back, and the upper border (reversed) goes from the last pleat to the front over the right hip.

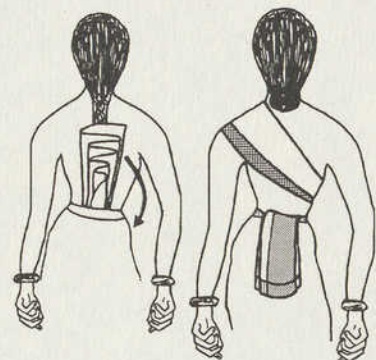


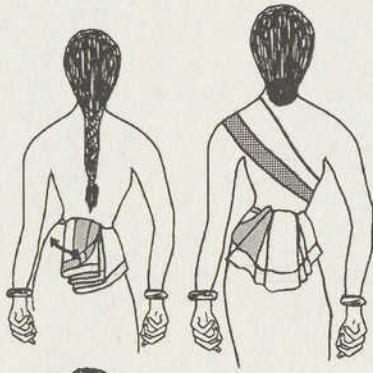
Some women prefer to spread the pleats over the whole back, especially in *Maravar* communities. The *kosu* then seems to be a kind of short pleated skirt over the sari. In this case, the upper part of the *mundi* can be seen in the reverse over the left hip. This style demands an 8 yd sari to have enough folds. With a 6 yd sari, the *kosu* is stretched over the back until it is flat.



◀ In the region around Erode (Western Tamil Nadu), women drape their *kosu* in such a way that it falls "alone" in the back:

Pleat the upper border towards the outside with smaller and smaller folds, until it goes in the closing under the pleats. When the *kosu* is left to fall, it is totally rectangular, and there is no portion of reversed upper border over the right hip. Usually this is done with an 8 yd sari; the *kosu* is important and sometimes very long (down to the level of the knees).





◀ An elegant way to drape the pleats in Tirunelveli (Southern Tamil Nadu) is to make the usual *kosu*, then take the upper corner of the *mundi* and tuck it over the left hip. The folds are arranged in a fan-like shape that underlines the rounded form of the woman's body.

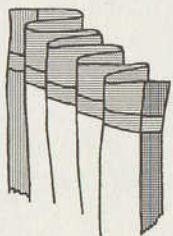


Once the closing is secured, throw the rest of the sari over the left shoulder. This should be done without pulling, so that the lower border makes a fold in front of the left foot and goes up straight. ▶

◀ The upper border is then quite loose between the closing and the shoulder. Take it about half-way between the two, pass it over the right hip to the back and tuck it as far and as tight as possible, making a fold across the sari's body down to the lower border.

If it's a 6 yd sari the *mundanai* is pulled a little and the lower border goes up without making a neat fold. ▶

When throwing the *mundanai* over the left shoulder, pleat the body of the sari so that the lower border doesn't fall on the arm. ▶



◀ One way of making sure the sari is well pleated along its length is to start from the *pallav*. In this case, pleating should start from the lower border, which comes on top. Press the folds carefully one by one over the whole length of the *mundanai*, up to the shoulder, and even beyond in a fan-like shape across the chest.



◀ Pass the pleated *mundanai* across the back from the left shoulder to the right hip. Gather it in a tight bunch or even twist it. Bring it counter-clockwise over the waist and tuck it firmly over the left hip.

If the sari is long enough, after it is tucked, the *pallav* should fall loosely over the left hip or even in the back. The front picture of this style is the very first in this paragraph (see p. 40). Here (right) is the back as it should look with a tight *mundanai*.

Older women prefer the loose drape of the *mundanai*, as described earlier (see p. 38). This method should also be adopted when draping a 6 yd sari, since it requires less cloth than the tighter drape.



After throwing it over the shoulder, arrange the sari's body by making pleats. Fold the *pallav* in two in the height, and place this middle pleat over the upper border on the shoulder, next to the neck. Bring the fold of the *pallav* under the right arm, across the abdomen and tuck it on the left hip or, if the sari is long enough, in the back.

D The mountain *pinkosu*



Keralese women living in the mountain area drape their *mundanai* in a special way (see p. 33). This influenced the *pinkosu* of the Tamilians living just on the Eastern side of those same mountains.

It is essential to drape this style with an 8 yd sari so that the *pallav* falls long enough in the back.

Many women in the area along the south of the Eastern Ghats (Kuttralam to Dindikkal) wear the *pinkosu* just described in the preceding paragraph, but once they have taken the *pallav* under the right arm, they throw it again across the chest and over the left shoulder.



Sometimes the *pallav* is tucked on the shoulder. The part of the *mundanai* passing across the back then becomes a kind of bag. Women going to work in the far mountain estates find this a convenient way to carry their food or other belongings (I've never seen it used this way to carry a child).

Some women wrap the *pallav* over their breasts (see p. 33).



E The Salem *pinkosu*

In Salem, women drape the bottom part of their *pinkosu* just like those of near-by Erode, making their *kosu* in such a way that no reversed upper border appears on the right hip (see p. 40). For this style, a 6 yd sari is enough.

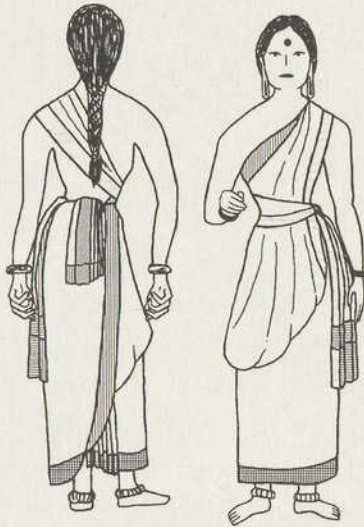
In order to walk more freely, they take the *mundanai* up in a different manner:



After securing the closing, take the lower border and bring it up in the back, reversed. This way, a fold is created over the back of the right foot. ➤

Throw the sari, reversed, over the left shoulder, leaving the upper border loose after the closing. (It falls down for a foot or so, and then goes up straight to the shoulder.) ➤

Tuck the reversed lower border in the closing in the middle of the back. ➤



◀ The sari is turned upside down in the process, along a line that goes from the twist of the lower border in the back to the point where the upper border goes up.

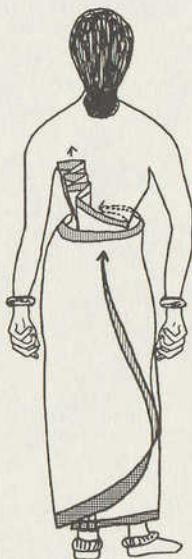


As can be inferred from the drawing of the fully draped sari, if the pattern of the borders is only beautiful on one side, the sari should be started with the cloth reversed, so that the "good" side becomes apparent on the *mundanai* and *pallav*.

In this drawing, I have **not** reversed the patterns, but followed my usual conventions. It clearly shows that when the *mundanai* is used upside down, as it will be with several other Tamil drapes, it is best to drape the bottom part with the best border patterns turned towards the inside. (Apply this to the *Chettiyar* and *Madurai* saris, below.)

F The Chettiyar sari

Karaikkudi, the homeland of the *Nadukottai Chettiyars*, is famous for its thick 6 yd cotton saris of unsurpassed quality. They are used by women of this interesting caste to drape a Tamil sari with a *kosu* on the left hip.



◀ First make a *kosu* with only 5-6 pleats over the left hip. While holding them under the left arm, make the closing following the loose method with a thumb knot (see p. 38).

Turn the lower border up-side down over the back of the right foot and bring it up, reversed, towards the closing. Tuck it in the middle of the back. Pass it under the right arm and across the chest to the left shoulder. ➤ ➤

After having used it for the closing, tuck the upper border close to the *kosu* on the left hip and then throw it upside down over the left shoulder. Notice that the *mundanai* is reversed along a fold going from the back of the right foot to the left hip. ➤



Fold the *pallav* in two in the height and press this middle fold up to the left shoulder where it covers the reversed lower border (then closer to the neck). Pass the folded *pallav* under the right arm and across the abdomen. Tuck it close to the *kosu* on the left hip.



G The *Tevar* sari

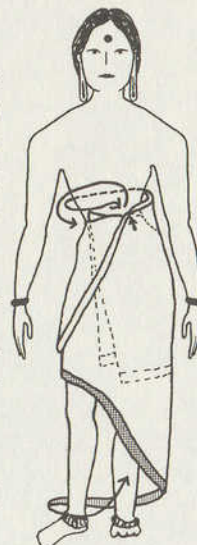
In Tirunelveli, old *Tevar* women wear a rather narrow sari, which prevents them from sitting cross-legged: they have to sit with their legs stretched. It is draped with only 6 yds of cloth.



Fold the *mundi* in two in the height. Pass the pleat around the waistline counter-clockwise starting from the right side of the abdomen. Make the closing by tucking the fold on itself. Bring up the upper border and tuck this in the closing as well.



Pass the sari once more counter-clockwise around the lower part of the body, this time unfolded with the upper border following the waistline. Tuck the upper border again in the closing near the left hip.

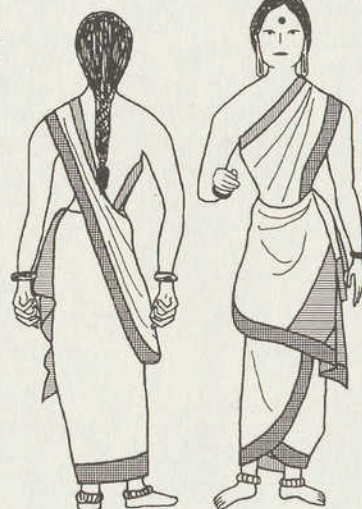


Throw the lower border over the left shoulder.



Before throwing it over the left shoulder, pull the upper border under the right arm and tuck it in the middle of the back.

Fold the *pallav* in two and bring the pleat to the front under the right arm. Tuck it over the left hip or even at the back.



H The Madurai sari

Peasant women in the region surrounding Madurai also wear a very narrow sari, passed twice tightly around the legs. It is clearly related to the previous *Tevan* drape, which is hardly surprising since this caste is well represented in the region. It requires 6 yds.



Make a tiny *kosu* of about 5 small pleats (made with only three fingers) and hold it under the right arm. Pass the upper border around the waistline counter-clockwise and tuck it over the abdomen to secure the closing.

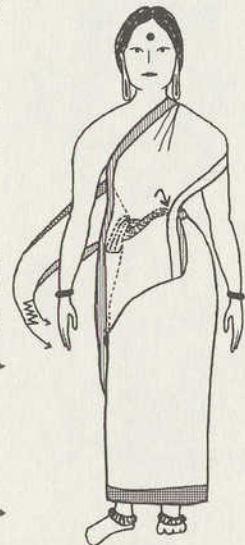


Pass the sari once more around the body counter-clockwise, this time not too tightly, making tiny pleats with the upper border and tucking them all around the closing. Finally tuck the upper border once again on the left side of the abdomen.

After tucking it, let the upper border fall for about a foot down on the left side of the body, and then throw it, reversed, over the left shoulder.

The lower border follows, going from the back of the right foot to the left shoulder in the reverse. A fold is then created along the height where the cloth is reversed. The reversed lower border is not tucked, but simply goes up over the right side of the body and then across the chest to the left shoulder.

Pleat the *pallav* in the height, pass it under the right arm, and across the abdomen to the left hip, where you gather the folds and tuck them in the closing. The *pallav* should fall over the left leg.



III Eastern saris

In North-Eastern India (West Bengal, Orissa and some parts of Madhya Pradesh) and in Bangladesh, women wear drapes clearly related to Dravidian saris. Although these Eastern saris have no *kosu*, the rest of the drape is practically the same.

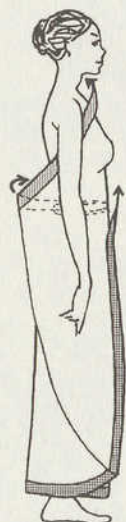
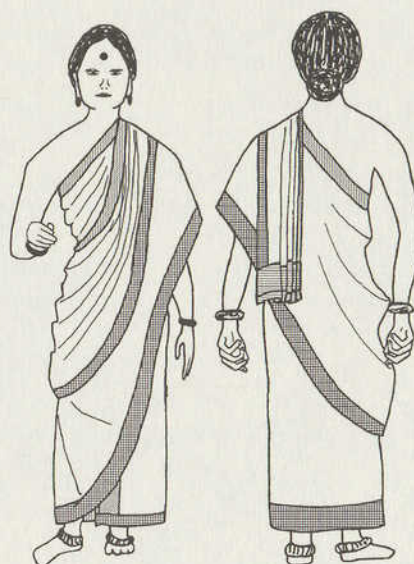
All the Eastern saris start in a similar way, with a *veshti*-like bottom and the upper part being thrown over the shoulder in the same way as with a *pinkosu*. Differences are mostly in the manner the *mundanai* is draped.

A The Oriya sari

Women in Orissa wear a simple drape which seems to be the base for all the other Eastern saris. It is traditionally made with a 5 yd cotton *ikat* cloth. Like all Dravidian saris, it should be worn alone (without *choli* or petticoat).

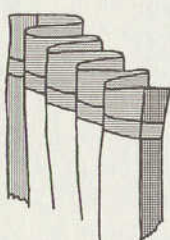


◀ Make the closing with the upper corner of the *mundi*, held on the right side of the abdomen, and the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise. Secure it by a knot or by tucking and rolling these parts of the upper border. Once this is made, firmly tuck the upper border on the left side of the abdomen.



▶ Throw the upper border loosely over the left shoulder. Take it then about half-way between the closing and the shoulder and pull it under the right arm, in order to tuck in the back, as far as possible.

◀ Simply throw over the left shoulder the lower border, once it has come around the body once (following the closing).



▶ Pleat the *pallav* in the height, and press the pleats along the length for about 2 yds.

▶ Pass the pleated *mundanai* from the left shoulder to under the right arm, across the chest in a loose way, and throw it again, pleated, over the left shoulder. The *pallav* should fall in the back as low as possible.



When the upper border is going for the first time over the left shoulder, traditional women pull it to cover their head. Although nowadays most women wear this type of sari, older and more traditional women drape the *mundanai* in a slightly different way.

After tucking the upper border in the middle of the back, bring it under the right arm, across the chest, over the left shoulder and over the head. Fold the *pallav* in two in the height and take it loosely under the right arm, across the abdomen and finally tuck it in the closing on the left hip. ▶



Important: These two ways of draping the Oriya *mundanai* (with the *pallav* folded and thrown over the shoulder or tucked on the left hip) are sometimes used with Bengali saris, especially when worn by lower caste or working women, who seem to prefer a tucked *mundanai*.

B The Bengali sari



In Bengal, whether West Bengal or Bangladesh, women drape a sari using the *pallav* as a key-ring. This heavy addition to the cloth (the keys are usually numerous and enormous) allows a drape of the *mundanai* which would otherwise be impossible. (Indeed, if there are no keys, refer to the end of the preceding paragraph, above.) It requires 5 or 6 yds.

For the closing, tie a knot using the upper corner of the *mundi* and the part of the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise.

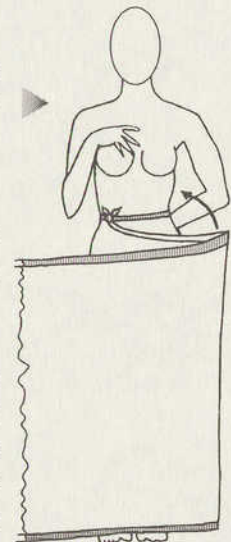
Take the upper border from the knot and pull it under the left arm to the back of the left hip. Tuck it firmly in the closing.

Then pass the upper border across the abdomen to the back of the right hip where you tuck it.

Pass it again across the abdomen to the back of the left hip, and tuck it. This way, the sari makes three wide folds, covering the whole front of the legs, and going first to the left, then to the right, and then again to the left.

Loosely throw the upper border over the left shoulder. Take it about mid-way between the last left tucking and the shoulder, pull it across the chest and under the right arm. Tuck it in the back as far as possible.

The lower border follows the folds and is finally thrown loosely over the left shoulder with the rest of the sari.





Pass the sari across the back from the left shoulder to under the right arm.

Once it is in front, attach a heavy key-ring to the upper corner of the *pallav* by tying a simple knot. Throw the keys over the left shoulder so that they hold that corner just over the shoulder. The *pallav* should fall down in front from the left shoulder.

Traditional women drape the sari over their head: when passing it in the back, after it has been thrown over the shoulder for the first time, they take the upper border and pull it over their head.



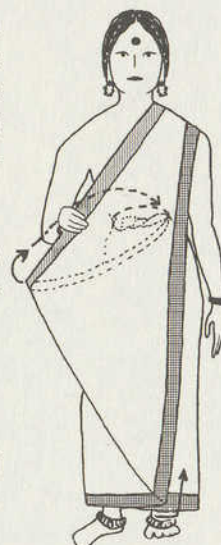
C The Oraon sari



This drape, found in Southern Madhya Pradesh, is probably an adaptation of the Oriya sari, to which it only adds one more turn of the cloth around the body. This 6 yd drape is worn by low-caste and tribal women, especially *Oraon*.

Make the closing just like that of the Oriya sari, the knot or tucking being over the right part of the abdomen.

Throw the sari over the left shoulder, while pulling the upper border under the right arm and tucking it in the middle of the back. The lower border goes up straight from the left foot to the left shoulder.



Fold the *mundanai* in its height, with one side of the fold (the upper) being much shorter. The upper border is falling backwards over the body of the sari. The fold should go all the length back to the shoulder.

Pass the folded sari around the body, counter-clockwise with the fold following the waistline. From the shoulder it should go across the back, under the right arm, in front of the abdomen and under the left arm, still following the waistline across the back and under the right arm again.



Once the sari has been passed this way, pleat the *pallav* in the height and throw it over the left shoulder. It should fall in the back.

Note that the fold (made when the sari was first thrown over the left shoulder and passed around the body) is undone and the upper border takes its usual place close to the neck when thrown over the shoulder the second time.



IV The *Santal* saris

Dravidian tribes related to the *Santals* of Madhya Pradesh wear drapes which have adopted some features of other styles found in Western and Central India, yet they are clearly Dravidian saris.

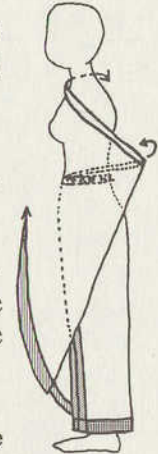
There are several variations of the *Santal* sari. I will first describe the beginning of the drape, which is common to all. These styles require 6 yd saris with the borders and *pallavs* woven with a reversible pattern, since the *mundanai* is reversed. The cloth is often white with plain red or brown borders.



Make the closing with the upper corner of the *mundi*, held on the right side of the abdomen, and the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise.

Pass the upper border from the knot or the tucking to under the left arm and tuck it in the middle of the back.

Notice that unlike Eastern saris, the border still goes counter-clockwise until it is tucked in the back (i.e. with the good side up), so when it is turned and brought to the front again to be thrown, this time on the right shoulder, it reverses the sari.



After the upper border has been tucked in the middle of the back, bring it forward under the left arm and throw it over the right shoulder. The lower border, from the fall of the *mundi*, goes around the feet once, counter-clockwise. It is then reversed at a fold going from the tucking in the back to the front of the feet. Throw it loosely over the right shoulder.



Pass the sari from the right shoulder to under the left arm. Take the upper border passing behind the neck and bring it to the front in order to cover the head (optional).

From that stage onwards, each sari has its own different drape of the *mundanai*.



A The Raipur sari

This style is mostly worn by low-caste agricultural communities near the Orissa border. The drape of the *mundanai* was probably influenced by the *Lodhi* saris (see p. 99), found in nearby areas.

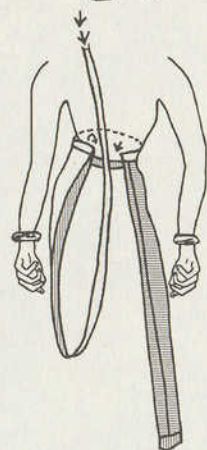
Drape the sari as explained above.



Hold the *pallav*, coming from under the left arm, in front of the body, towards the right. The rest of the draping is mostly concerned with the upper border starting from the *pallav*.

Pass the upper corner of the *pallav* under the right arm and tuck it in the middle of the back. Pull the upper border backwards from the *pallav*. Pass it across the abdomen, under the left arm and tuck it in the middle of the back.

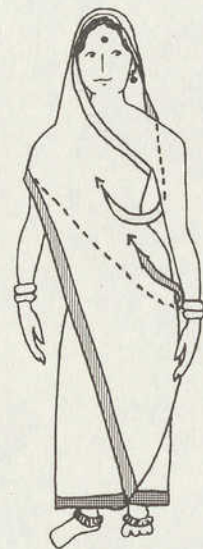
Let the rest of the upper border fall from the head to the tucking in the back. The lower border follows, making a vertical fold in the sari under the last tucking of the upper border in the back.



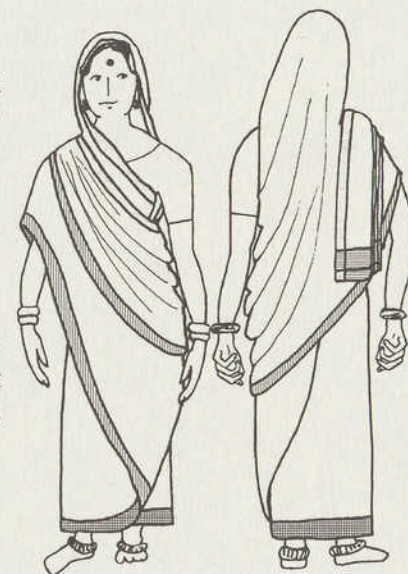
B. The Rajim sari

This drape is found in Southern Madhya Pradesh, on different tribes or low-caste agricultural communities. The drape of the *mundanai* is influenced by the Oriya sari.

Drape the bottom part as explained above.



When taking the *pallav* from under the left arm, pleat it in the height and throw it again over the right shoulder so that it falls in the back.



C The Sarguja sari

This drape is found in Sarguja, worn by women of the *Oraon* tribe.

Drape the bottom part as explained above (see p 49).



◀ When taking the *pallav* from under the left arm, pleat it in the height and pass it pleated around the waistline clockwise until the whole length of the *mundanai* is used. With a normal 6 yd sari it should do 2 1/2 turns.

◀ The pleated *pallav* should be tucked in this "belt" in front of the abdomen.

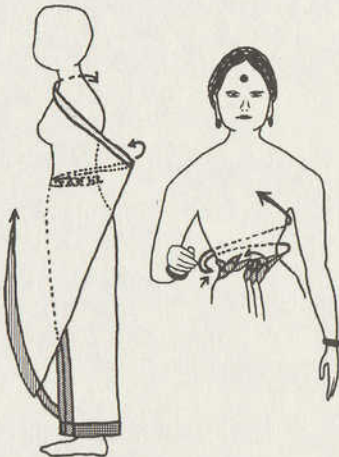


Note that these last three drapes are worn by women of various related tribes, mainly *Santals* and *Oraons*. Until recently they did not cover their heads. In fact, all the old photographs I saw of these women showed them with these drapes but bare-headed. So it is optional (and probably less traditional) to bring the upper border over the forehead to cover the head.

D The Koppla Velam sari

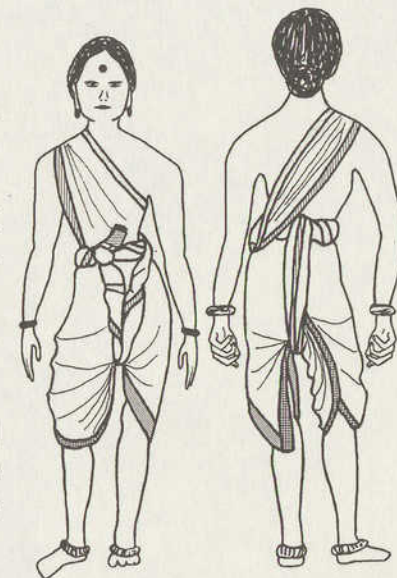
The *Koppla Velam* are a caste of agricultural labourers in North-Eastern Andhra Pradesh. Although they are not directly related to the *Santals*, their sari is basically the same. When not working, they wear the Rajim style described above (p. 50), with a small difference (three little pleats after the closing). When doing hard labour in the fields, they change the drape of the *mundanai* to a style which is very interesting and, in fact, quite unique.

It requires a 6 yd, or better, 7 yd sari, usually plain white.



Once the closing is secured, and before making the large fold in the back, make three small pleats and tuck them over the knot.

◀ After the three pleats are tucked, bring the upper border to the back, and tuck it at the back of the right hip. Fold it and take it, reversed, across the back, under the left arm and across the chest. Throw the whole sari over the right shoulder.





◀ Once passed over the right shoulder, twist the entire length of the *mundanai*. Take the *pallav*, bring it to the front loosely from under the left arm. Take it clockwise again around the waistline, this time tightly. Make a knot with the edge of the *pallav* and the *mundanai* just before it passes under the right arm.

This end of the *mundanai* should form a tight belt around the waistline (going clockwise) and a length of twisted *mundanai* should fall loosely between the right shoulder and the knot. ▶



Once brought in front, the twisted *mundanai* should be long enough to fall below the knees. Pass it between the legs and tuck it in the belt in the middle of the back. ▶

◀ Arrange the sari around each leg so that it hides the thighs.





NIVI SARIS

The *nivi* family is by far the most widespread. Nowadays, these saris are worn all over India, as well as in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan, not to speak of the Indian communities living abroad.

There are more and more women draping the "modern" sari. For instance, in Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, where stitched clothes are worn traditionally, they are becoming increasingly popular. In Sri Lanka, it has become the compulsory sari of government employees, rather than the more typical Ceylonese sari (see p. 93)! It has influenced Western stylists and evokes for most European women a vision of flowing beauty and elegance.

There is a great variety in the drape of the modern sari. To the right above, we have it with the *pallav* tucked over the left hip in the Tamil way. To the left, the *mundanai* is used to cover the head, a typical style of North India.

Yet the drape which is now considered to be **the** Indian sari has never been represented on any ancient painting or sculpture. Whereas *dhotis* and *veshtis* were commonplace in the past, *nivi* saris seem to have been nonexistent. It is possible that a few of the ancient garments might have been *kaccha* saris, but even this is unlikely before the 18th century. I will not try to solve this mystery here, but will discuss it later in Chapter 7 (p. 109).



I The modern sari

All *nivi* saris start from the same basis, with some little differences when tucking the pleats for some traditional drapes. This base is the **modern sari**. All modern saris require 6 yds.



◀ This sari is draped counter-clockwise. Start by making a knot on the right side of the abdomen with the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline.

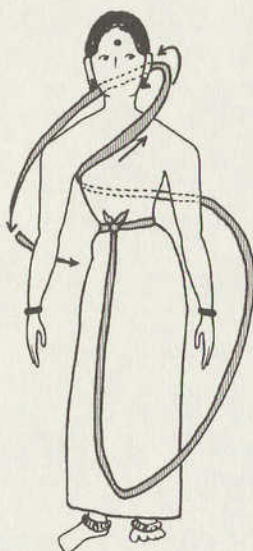
Nowadays it is more common to use a petticoat for the closing. In this case, tuck the upper corner of the *mundi* in the petticoat on the right side of the abdomen.



Take the upper border, pass it and tuck it around the waistline counter-clockwise, making a small pleat first on the left hip and then on the right hip.



◀ Finally tuck the upper border over the middle or the left side of the abdomen (depending on whether you want the front pleats to fall straight or in a fan-like shape).



◀ When the sari has been passed around the body once, let it fall and take the *pallav* to drape the *mundanai*. It is essential not to follow our instinct to drape the sari from one end to the other, since the front pleats - the most characteristic part of *nivi saris* - are made with the cloth left between the drape of the sari's closing and its *mundanai*.

◀ Take the *pallav*, either pleated in the height or by its upper corner, pass it under the left arm (at the waistline level), across the back and just under the right arm (in the armpit). Throw it from under the right arm to over the left shoulder, pulling it long enough to be able to come again across the back, under the right arm and to the left side of the abdomen.

The length of the *mundanai* is determined by the way each woman likes to drape it. Some let the *pallav* fall from the shoulder only to the waistline in the back. Others leave it down to their feet.

What I have described here is the way most ordinary women wear it on usual days, when they tuck the *pallav* back in the closing over the left side of the abdomen. There is no absolute rule for the drape of the *pallav*; it is only a question of personal taste.



Once the *mundanai* is draped around the upper part of the body, a length of sari should be falling in front, ▶ between the closing (or the last tucking) and the drape of the *mundanai* at its tightest. Take the upper border of this part and pleat it towards the inside, starting from that which is closest to the closing. Once the whole length is pleated, tuck it over the abdomen, pleats towards the left.

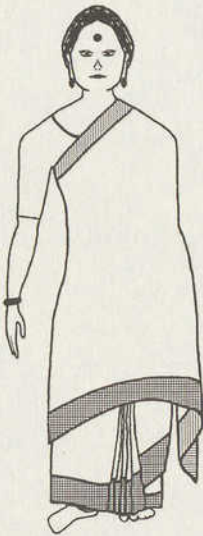
Here again, most women tuck the pleats over the right side of the abdomen, so that they fall in the middle, but others tuck them in the middle, their fall being over the left side. The way the pleats are tucked differs from woman to woman. If the pleats are to fall really straight, the first and the last ones should be larger, and a small pleat should be made on the right hip before the main pleats, towards the right.



A Fashionable saris

Before going into the traditional styles of the modern sari, I will briefly examine a few fashionable drapes. Most Indian women follow fashion and adapt their clothes to the latest trends, mostly determined by the styles worn by Indian film stars.

Fashion mostly concerns the cloth itself, its colour as well as the size and patterns of the borders and *pallav*. The form and patterns of the *choli* are also important. The actual drape of the sari is not much influenced by fashion, except for the *mundanai*. Fashion may also be slightly different from state to state. Here are some examples.



◀ In the 1960s and early 1970s, saris were made of nylon muslin, with no borders or *pallav*. The upper border of the *pallav* was pinned to the *choli* close to the neck and the *pallav* itself was left to fall over the left shoulder. The *choli* had short close-fitting sleeves (whereas earlier on it used to puff).

This drape was not really practical and as women began to work and became more independent, pins were commonly added to hold the *pallav* pleated in the height. In the late 1970s and early 1980s light silk became fashionable, with saris having a very large lower border and a small upper border. The sleeves of *cholis* became longer and decorated with patterns. ▼

The saris of the late 1980s and early 1990s have seen the borders grow smaller until they practically disappeared. The *choli* sleeves have grown, sometimes covering the whole arm, and are puffing again. In the South, "ethnic" embroidered *cholis* (from Gujarat or Rajasthan) have been made popular by several films.

The *mundanai* is pleated in the height and the pleats are very firmly marked up to the shoulder, where they are pinned. ▶ The *pallav* is left to fall sometimes as far as the feet, which leaves less cloth for the frontal pleats.

All the pleats are held by pins and the sari is pulled so that it is as smooth and regular as possible, which is better done with polyester cloth.

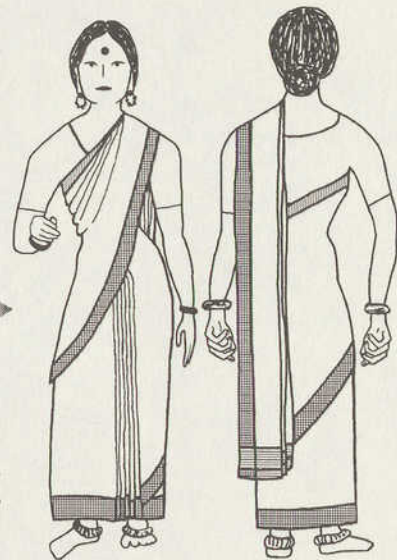


Sari designers and Indian stylists sometimes create new drapes, which are often very daring just like Paris Haute Couture.

The only traditional drape to have made it into fashion is the Gujarati sari (see below, p. 57). As I write (1995), one of its latest designs is worn by daring young women. This style is draped over a petticoat and a *choli* with long puffing sleeves which unlike traditional *cholis* comes down to the waistline and is usually heavily decorated.

◀ Here the pleats are turned towards the right and the *mundanai* is brought from under the left arm, across the back and thrown to the front over the right shoulder.

The *pallav* is pleated in the height and falls as straight as possible.



B The *nivi* saris of Andhra Pradesh

Women of Andhra Pradesh claim that the modern sari is their own traditional drape. Although there are many other styles in this state (for instance the Brahmin saris, pp. 23-4), there is such a variety of *nivi* saris that this claim is probably true.

Only in Andhra Pradesh and Northern Tamil Nadu can we still see old women with *nivi* saris and no petticoat or *choli*. Most often, they use thick cotton cloth with brocaded borders and *pallav*. The drape of the *mundanai* is in this case rather loose. The *pallav* is generally folded in two, passed under the right arm and the fold is tucked in the waistline over the left hip.

1 Uses of the *mundanai*

We find in Andhra Pradesh some interesting uses of the *mundanai*, which would also indicate that the *nivi* sari is of Telugu tradition. These drapes show that in older times, the *nivi* was probably some kind of *veshti* with pleats in front, a sort of opposite version of the *pinkosu veshti*.



Older women at work or during usual activities often drape the *mundanai* around their hips. They fold it in two in the height, turn it and tuck the upper border around their waistline until the whole length is used up. They finally tuck the twisted *pallav* in the closing.

Note the form of the *choli*, typical of Andhra Pradesh, and held by a simple knot between the breasts.

Important: this drape of the *nivi* sari, which doesn't cover the upper part of the body, is also used in Nepal with thick woollen saris. In this case, the woman wears a warm shirt on top. Here it seems that the heaviness of the cloth is the reason for this use of the *mundanai*, rather than the South Indian feeling that breasts should not necessarily be covered. Anyway, Nepalese women add a heavy shirt which fully hides their chest and arms.

In the Gadwal area, south of Hyderabad, most women use the *mundanai* to cover the upper part of their body, but tuck the upper border in the back, at the beginning of the *mundanai* (before the sari passes under the right arm to be thrown over the left shoulder). This unusual drape is probably an evolution of the sari having the whole upper border tucked in, as described above.

When working in the fields, many women cover their head with the *mundanai*, using a drape already described, p. 31). This way of covering the head is also used with many *kaccha* saris in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

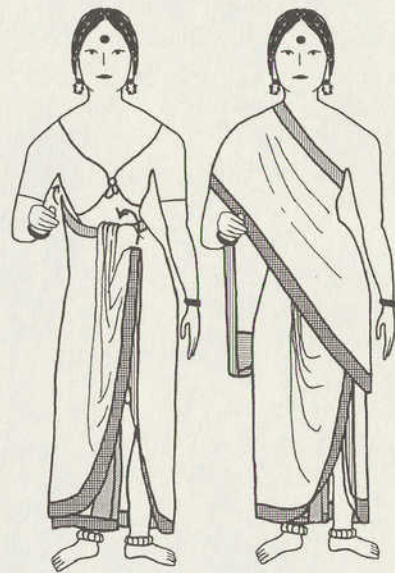
The upper border is passed loosely over the head. While it is held on the forehead, pull it on each side and tuck both parts together at the back of the head.



2 Right-sided saris

In Andhra Pradesh, many women wear modern saris draped towards the right (clockwise), following their caste's tradition. Because it means they are low-caste, this practice has tended to disappear, and it's not unusual to see old women of the family drape their sari to the right whereas the younger ones wear it, as everybody else, to the left. The drape is absolutely the same, except that directions must be reversed.

Harijan women sometimes take the middle pleat of the lower border (in front of the feet) and tuck it over the left side of the abdomen, in the closing (on the right if they drape their sari counter-clockwise). This way, the sari opens over the left leg, or the right leg if the drape is made towards the left. The *mundanai* can be draped any way you like.



C The Gujarati sari

Over much of North and North-West India, from Gujarat to Bihar, women drape what is usually called the Gujarati sari. It has probably been influenced by the dress much represented on miniatures: the Mughal skirt and muslin shawl (*dupatta*) wrapped around the upper part of the body (the North Indian equivalent of the Southern *mundanai*).

This drape is clearly related to the modern sari, although the *mundanai* is draped like a Mughal *dupatta*. It also requires 6 yds and is usually worn over a petticoat and a *choli*.

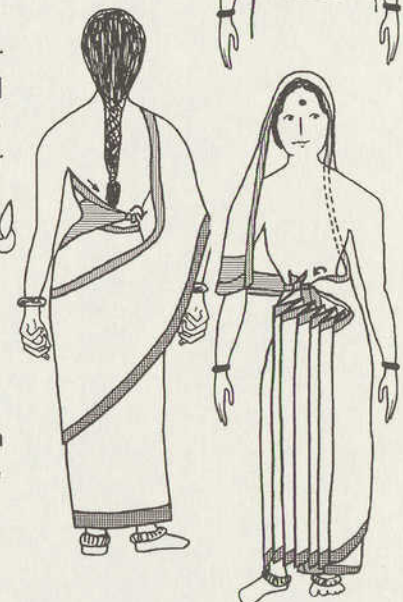


Tuck the upper corner of the *mundi* in the petticoat over the right side of the abdomen. Pass the upper border around the waistline counter-clockwise, making a small pleat over the left and the right hips.

Take the pleated *pallav* or its upper corner and pass it under the left arm, over the head (from behind the left shoulder) and across the chest (from over the right shoulder) to under the left arm. Pull it until it reaches the back. Tie the upper corner of the *pallav* into a knot. Pull it in the back and tuck it firmly in the petticoat on the right hip.



Take the part of the upper border falling between the last tucking in the petticoat (the "closing") and the beginning of the *mundanai*. Make pleats towards the inside starting with the part of the upper border closest to the *mundanai*. Tuck the pleats in the petticoat, towards the right.



Nowadays, many women do not cover their head any more and drape the *mundanai* slightly differently:

Pleat the *pallav* in the height and pass it under the left arm, across the back to the right shoulder, and finally across the chest from the right shoulder to the back of the left hip. Tuck the knotted upper corner of the *pallav* at the back of the right hip. At the point where the sari passes over the right shoulder, pin it on the *choli*, pleated in the height.



The length of the *mundanai* may vary according to individual taste. If it is short, the part of the sari going under the left arm will be short. It will be pulled up, as represented here (above, right).

◀ If it is long, it will fall gracefully under the left arm, creating oval folds over the left leg, as represented in this drawing of a traditional Gujarati sari, seen from the front and back (left).

Right is a representation of the same sari with a shorter *mundanai* draped in the modern way, with the pleats pinned on the right shoulder. (Notice the shorter fall of the upper border on the left hip. It would have been more elegant - but less practical - to let it fall lower.)



All the combinations in the drape of the *mundanai* are possible, depending on individual taste.

D The Bihari sari

An interesting variation of the Gujarati sari is worn in Bihar.



◀ For this style, once you have brought the pleated *pallav* in front over the right shoulder, tuck it over the abdomen in the petticoat (closing).

It is represented here with the *mundanai* falling low over the left hip. ▶ As with most North Indian saris, it is traditionally worn with the *mundanai* over the head :

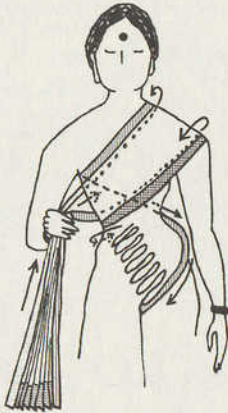
Take the part of the upper border falling from the right shoulder and pull it over the forehead.



E The Ceylonese dancer sari

In Sri Lanka, traditional dancers wear a sari which is related to a style found in Central India: the *Lingayat* sari (see p. 65). Although it is very different from the usual Ceylonese sari, which belongs to the *Gond*-related drapes (see p. 93), it has some common points with it, especially in the way the draping starts.

Although the final result looks very much like a modern sari, it is draped in a totally different manner, starting with the *mundanai*. It is somehow half-way between a *nivi* and a *Gond*-related sari, which makes it all the more interesting and might give clues as to the origins of the Singhalese.



Start by draping the *mundanai*. Let the *pallav* fall in the back from the left shoulder (roughly down to the knees or the feet, depending on your taste). Take the *mundanai* from the left shoulder to under the right arm, across the back, and under the left arm to the abdomen.

Pleat the remaining length of the upper border, all the way to the upper corner of the *mundi*. Firmly hold the pleats on your stomach.



Take the lower corner of the *mundi* and pass it clockwise around the body, under the falling *pallav* (under the left arm, across the back, under the right arm). Make the closing using the upper and the lower corners of the *mundi* to tie a knot over the pleats.



Pull the pleats upwards and let them fall over the knot. Arrange them in a fan-like shape.

Rearrange the *mundanai* as you would for a modern sari, with a South Indian touch: bring the *pallav* to the front from under the right arm and tuck it in the closing on the left side of the abdomen (see p. 41).



This style is worn without petticoat, but sometimes with a kind of trouser (a *salvar*). Always wear a *choli*. You may pin the *mundanai* on the *choli* over the left shoulder.

II *Kaccha saris*

Kaccha means “belt” in Sanskrit. This word has come to mean a drape which separates the legs, like a *dhoti* or the variation of the *nivi* sari to which I have applied this name.

The *kaccha* sari is reputed to be the ancestor of the *nivi* sari. This is far from obvious, since the beginning of the drape is, indeed, a *nivi* sari.

Women wear various styles of *kaccha* in Andhra Pradesh, ► Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Kaccha saris are traditionally worn with *cholis* but no petticoat. In recent years, though, I have seen women draping them above petticoats, usually because they were using “see-through” nylon saris. This makes the drape clumsy, and whatever women say about the advantages of synthetic fabrics, I recommend cotton or silk and no petticoat for a flowing, elegant *kaccha* sari.

All the styles start in the same way, which I will detail here:



Take a 9 yd sari (or longer) and drape it into a *nivi* sari. Start by making a knot on the right side of the abdomen with the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise. Let the sari fall and take the *pallav* to drape the *mundanai*.

Take the *pallav*, either pleated in the height or by its upper corner, pass it under the left arm (at the waistline level), across the back and under the right arm. Throw it from under the right arm to over the left shoulder, pulling it long enough to be able to come again across the back, under the right arm and to the left side of the abdomen.

◀ You are left with many yards of cloth falling in front of you, from the knot to the beginning of the *mundanai*. Pleat its upper border towards the inside, starting from the knot.

Once the whole length is pleated, either tuck the pleats over the abdomen, to the left, or roll them (which is the most common and the best way to hold such a huge bunch of pleats).



◀ To roll the pleats, hold them firmly over your abdomen and take the part of the upper border of the closing that is under the pleats. Roll the pleats and the closing together towards the outside. Make at least one full roll.

Once you have rolled the pleats, the bottom part of the sari ► should look like this, with a tight **banana** over the abdomen. Since the bunch of pleats is thick and heavy, the strength of the drape depends on the closing, which has to be secured tight and with a knot (tucking won't work here).





Spread the pleats evenly on each side of the body, in order to find the middle pleat. Take the lower border of the middle pleat and pass it between the legs.

Pull the lower borders falling in the back forward and up between the legs, over the fold of the middle pleat:

For a successful *kaccha*, it is very important to push the part of the sari falling in the back (there are two layers: the closing and the beginning of the *mundanai*) as far and as high as possible between the legs. The best is to push them as far as the roll.

Take the lower borders (falling in the back) forward between the legs, and up until they come out under the banana. Tuck them in the banana. The cloth must be held in place by the fold of the middle pleat, which is pulled back and up as much as possible.



This basic *kaccha* sari has many local variations.

A The Marwari sari

The most widespread and famous *kaccha* sari is the *Marwari*. It gives an elegant gait to all the Maharashtrian women who still wear it.

Start by following the above instructions, using a 9 yd sari preferably with reversible borders (9 yd saris woven in Maharashtra do).

Pull the middle pleat as much as possible to the back between the legs. Make pleats on the fold of the middle pleat, starting with the lower border and up to the height of the closing.



These small pleats will ensure that the fold passes at the highest point between the legs, holding the cloth of the back of the closing and the beginning of the *mundanai*.

Again, it is very important to push the back of the sari as far as possible between the legs, to the front. If not, it will crumple and go upwards, soon revealing the thighs and more...

Tuck the pleated fold in the closing, in the middle of the back. If the lower border is large enough, the pleats should be just as large, so that only the pattern of the upper border is seen falling from the waistline. Notice that the upper border comes reversed (hence the need for reversible borders).





Once the middle pleat is tucked in the back a tricky operation begins: take the lower border as it passes on your right thigh. Measure about one foot (30 cm) up from it (perpendicular to the lower border, which is going backwards and up on the thigh). Pinch the sari's body at this point and pull it a little.

Tuck this point in the closing on the left side of the abdomen, next to the banana.

The philosophical explanation for this part of the drape is that it makes the right part of the body look like a *dhoti* (a man) while the left part looks like a *nivi sari* (a woman).

The rational explanation is that it pulls the sari very tight and up between the legs, holding - again - the various layers of cloth in place around the thighs.

If *Marwari* women always make this sari for walking, working etc., they sometimes just let the pleats fall naturally over the right leg when at rest.

If well done, the lower border should go up zigzagging from right to left, in front of the body. If the sari is really 9 yds long, some pleats should fall straight over the left leg (as for a *nivi sari*).

The *mundanai* starts from under the tucking in the back, and goes up around the body just as for any *nivi sari*.



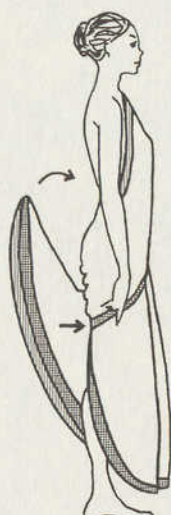
Traditionally, you pass the upper border of the *mundanai* under the right arm, across the chest to the left shoulder and over the head. Let the *pallav* fall over the right arm. The sari's body and lower border follow naturally.

B The Hospet sari

In the area around Hospet, in Karnataka, hard-working women of lower castes wear an interesting style of *kaccha*. This sari, with a trouser-like shape and borders going straight up the legs to the hips, is reminiscent of a drape seen on many bronze statues. It is hard to say whether the ancient drape was a form of *dhoti* (see p. 19) or a topless variation of this sari. I will discuss this again in Chapter 7. It is draped with a 9 yd sari just like the *Marwari* (preferably with reversible borders).

Once you have made the closing and draped the *mundanai* as for any *nivi sari*, pass the lower corner of the *mundi* between the legs and tuck it in the closing, in the middle of the back.





Make pleats with the upper border between the closing and the beginning of the *mundanai*. Tuck or roll them in the closing over the navel. Take the lower border of the middle pleat and pass it between the legs. Tuck it as tight as possible in the middle of the back.

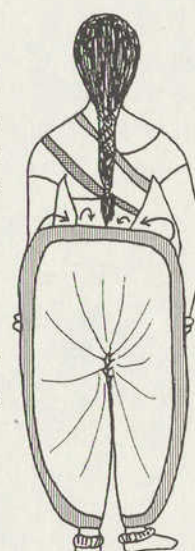
Keep on pulling the lower border of the pleats in the back and tuck it in the closing towards the left and the right hips. Notice that it comes in the reverse. In the back, the lower border of the pleats should be tucked in the closing over the whole waistline.

Because of the drape, it can only be tucked up to the back of the right hip on the right side. (The upper border of the *mundanai* is going up from the right side towards the left shoulder.)



On the left, the upper border can be tucked as far as the front of the left hip, since there is nothing to stop it.

Finally, take the upper border of the *mundanai* and push it loosely over the head. Press a part of the upper border on the forehead and pull it backwards on each side (see p 31 for further explanation). Tie these parts of the upper border at the back of the head into a knot. This way, the *mundanai* stays firmly over the head.



C The short *kaccha*

When working hard, women of Andhra Pradesh often drape their usual 6 yd *nivi* sari in a *kaccha* style. It is very interesting to note that this is in a way a variation of the modern sari: when the woman stops working, she pulls the lower border of the middle pleat off the back, untucks the *mundi*, and is again wearing her usual sari.

Start by draping a modern sari (see p. 53). Depending on the caste, it can be draped towards the right or towards the left. Here I give directions for a sari draped towards the left.



Once the sari is draped, let the *mundanai* fall in front of you. This will make it easy for you to take the lower corner of the *mundi* and tuck it in the closing on the left hip. This folds the sari in two in the height. ➤

Pass the lower border, reversed, along the waistline in the back. If you want to drape this sari very short, tuck it again over the right hip. ➤



◀ If you want it a little longer, let the lower border fall from the left hip, across the back and over the right leg to the pleats, which, in any case, must fall in front.

◀ At this point, drape the *mundanai* again over the upper part of the body, in any way you like.

Take the lower border of the middle pleat and pass it backwards between the legs. Pull it as much as possible. Push forward between the legs the parts of the *mundanai* and closing falling in the back (the closing being folded in two in the height), as for any *kaccha* sari. ➤

Tuck the upper border of the middle pleat in the back, informally (not pleating the fold). In most cases, the lower border falls in the back with one part going towards the left and the other towards the right. ➤



Since this sari is very often draped with synthetic fabrics over a petticoat, it's not easy to make a nice *kaccha*, and the woman tucks in the middle pleat any way she can. When she stops working, she untucks it and lets the closing fall back to a normal modern sari.

If draped in the long way (not tucking the lower border over the right hip), the sari falls down to the knees (see above, p. 63).

◀ If draped short (tucking the lower border over the right hip, hence having the whole closing folded in two in the height), the sari only covers the top of the thighs. Women also tend to wrap the *mundanai* around the hips (see p. 56), which does not leave much of a sari!

To protect the cloth (don't forget that once they finish working, this will be undraped back to a modern sari), they sometimes wrap a piece of thick cloth, a towel or even a plastic bag around their hips, on top of the sari.

D The Lingayat sari

In Northern Karnataka and Goa, women wear a *kaccha* sari which is made quite differently from the usual *nivi* drape. The draping starts with the *mundanai*, not unlike *Gond*-related drapes. It is similar to a Ceylonese dancer sari (see p. 59), but with a *kaccha*.

Since its longer version is mostly (but not exclusively) worn in the *Lingayat* community, I have used this name for the style. It requires 9 yds of cotton or silk.



Start by draping the *mundanai*. Let the *pallav* fall in the back from the left shoulder (roughly down to the knees, depending on your taste). Take the *mundanai* from the left shoulder to under the right arm, across the back, and under the left arm to the abdomen.

Pleat the remaining length of the upper border, all the way to the upper corner of the *mundi*. Hold the many pleats firmly on your stomach.



Take the lower corner of the *mundi* and pass it clockwise around the body (under the left arm, across the back, under the right arm) and make the closing using the upper and the lower corners of the *mundi* to make the knot over the pleats.

Pull the pleats upwards and roll them over the knot. Tuck the pleat that comes on top of the roll carefully on the sides, to make a tight, smooth banana.



Take the lower border of the middle pleat, pass it between the legs. Make a few pleats in the fold, next to the lower border, and tuck them in the middle of the back, just as with a *Marwari* sari (see p. 61).

Finally, take the upper border of the *mundanai* over the head.

Notice that the banana makes a bump over the abdomen, seen even under the *mundanai*.



E The *Waradi* sari

In Eastern Maharashtra women wear a drape which has elements of *Lingayat* and *Marwari* saris. It has many variations in the details. Here is the style as worn by women of the *Waradi* community. The upper part of the pleats comes out in a fan-like shape, as with the Ceylonese dancer sari (see p. 59). I will describe later some other variations. It requires 9 yds.



◀ For the closing, tie a knot on the right side of the abdomen with the upper corner of the *mundnai* and the upper border once it has come around the waistline counter-clockwise.

◀ Drape the *mundnai* as for a modern *nivi* sari. Take the *pallav*, either pleated in the height or by its upper corner, pass it under the left arm, across the back and just under the right arm. Throw it from under the right arm to over the left shoulder pulling it long enough for it to return across the back.



Pleat the whole upper border between the knot and the beginning of the *mundnai*, as it is coming from under the left arm. ▶

Gather the pleats in your right hand, pull the knot away from the abdomen with the left hand, and push the pleats under the knot. Pull them up and let them fall over the knot. ▶



Pass the upper border of the *mundnai* over the head and let the *pallav* fall over the right arm.

◀ Many women roll the pleats over the knot into a banana, as with the *Lingayat* sari (see p. 65).

◀ In Nagpur, women take the lower border as it passes on your right thigh. Measure about one foot (30 cm) up from it (perpendicular to the lower border, which is going backwards and up on the thigh). Pinch the sari's body at this point and pull it a little.

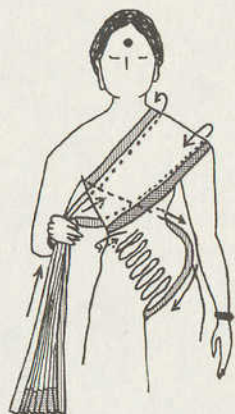
◀ Tuck this point in the closing on the left side of the abdomen, next to the banana.



F The Goa sari

The women of Goa wear *Lingayat* or *Marwari* saris. When working, they drape a shorter style. It also requires 9 yds, and can easily be changed back into a normal *Lingayat* sari when necessary.

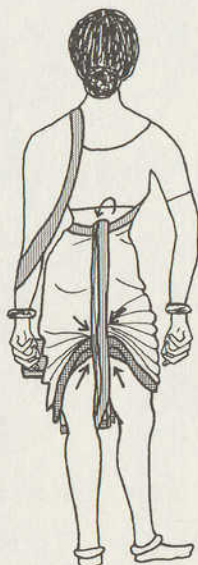
Follow the instructions given above for the *Lingayat* sari:



▶ Drape the *mundanai* backwards, make pleats with the whole upper border between the *mundanai* and the *mundi*. Hold the pleats on your abdomen while passing the lower corner of the *mundi* around the waistline, clockwise. Close by making a knot with the lower and upper corners of the *mundi* over the pleats.



▶ Pull the pleats up until their lower border is at the level of the knees. Fold the upper part of the pleats towards the outside, so that the upper border comes down well under the knot. About 1/3 of the total height should be folded in two, and held in the middle by a tightly made knot (using both ends of the *mundi*). ▶



▶ Pass the lower border of the middle pleat between the legs and tuck it in the closing, in the middle of the back. Push forward the parts of the closing and *mundanai* which are in the back so that they go between the legs.

▶ For a slightly different drape, tuck in the back the lower border of the pleat which is about a third on the right (i.e. leaving a third of the pleats on the right, and two-thirds on the left). This way, the right leg will be draped like a *dhoti* (a man), while many pleats will fall over the left leg, as with a *nivi* sari (a woman).

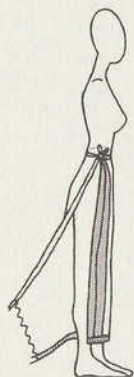
Goan women often wear their *choli* above the *mundanai* rather than under it.

When working really hard (workers digging at construction sites or fisherwomen bringing back the nets), women sometimes drape the *mundanai* around their hips (see p. 64).



G The *Bhil* sari

Women of the *Bhil* tribe in Madhya Pradesh and Eastern Maharashtra drape a Gujarati sari transformed into a *kaccha*. It requires 9 yds.

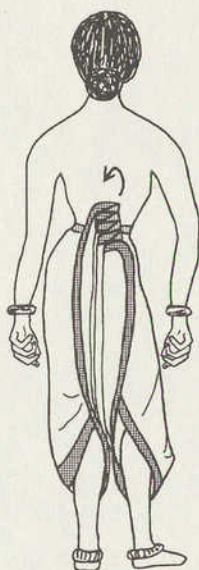


First drape a normal Gujarati sari (see p. 57), draping the *mundanai* over the head.

Since you don't have a petticoat, close the sari by tying the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border into a knot, once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise.



Take the *pallav*, pass it under the left arm, over the head, across the chest from the right shoulder to under the left arm, and tuck the knotted upper corner of the *pallav* in the closing, at the back of the right hip.



Make pleats with the upper border between the knot and the *mundanai* and tuck them over the abdomen, towards the right.

Take the lower border of the middle pleat and pass it between the legs. Pull as much as possible, until the whole sari goes up, the lower border of all the pleats being pulled up to under the knees. Push forward the parts of the sari falling in the back so that they go between the legs.



Make pleats with the lower border brought in the back at the waistline level. Tuck them in the middle of the back (you may twist them a little before tucking).

The finished drape should be as represented above, with the *mundanai* going in the back from under the left arm to over the head. The *pallav* falls from its upper corner tucked in the back to the front, its lower border flowing along the right arm.

Although it's a 9 yd sari, the lower border is pulled so much in the back that it seems a little bit short.

Some *Bhil* women make the same drape with a skirt and a *dupatta*, by making a *kaccha* with the front lower border of the skirt.

III Upper *kaccha* saris

A few drapes from Western Central India have a very interesting form of *kaccha*. Instead of passing the lower border of the front pleats between the legs, it's their upper border which is tucked in the back.

The result is a form of sari which nicely follows the movements of the legs. It is even, in the case of the Khandala sari, a very tightly fitted drape. Although rare nowadays, these styles are important and might explain some of the ancient tightly draped garments.



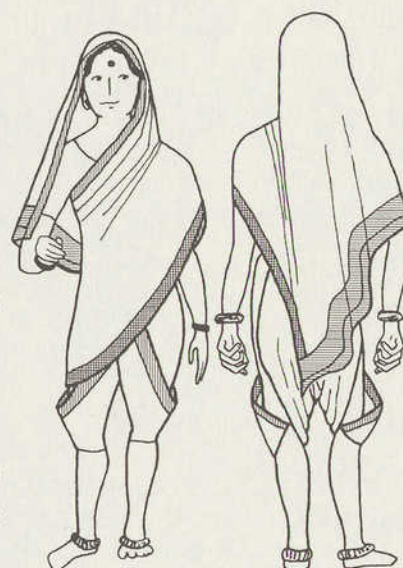
A The Khandala sari



In the countryside around Khandala (Maharashtra), some women seem to wear a tight Bermuda as the bottom part of their sari. This puzzling drape is made with an ordinary 6 yd sari, preferably of thick cotton.

Make a knot over the abdomen with the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise.

Take the lower corner of the *mundi*, pass it between the legs and tuck it in the middle of the back. Pull the part of the closing falling in the back so that it is going forward and up between the legs.

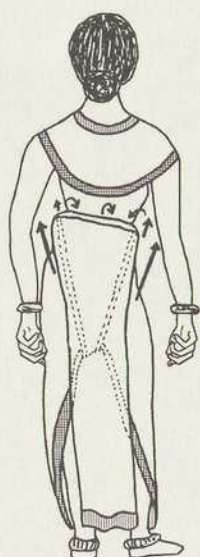


Drape the *mundanai* as for any ordinary nivi sari (see p. 54, but count for covering the head at the end). Pass it under the left arm, across the back, under the right arm, and over the chest to the left shoulder. For the moment, let the *pallav* fall down to the level of the knees in the back.

Tuck the upper border of the beginning of the *mundanai* firmly in the closing, next to the knot (when the upper border passes under the left arm). This is important, and later when you pull the upper border in the back, this tucking should not get undone.

Pleat the upper border between the knot and the beginning of the *mundanai*. Pass the upper border of the pleats between the legs, undoing them as necessary. Finally only a couple of pleats should be left in the back. Pull them up as much as possible, being careful not to untuck anything in front.





◀ Stretch the lower border of the pleats over the waistline, reversed and in the back. Tuck it in the closing, going as far left and right as possible (pull the cloth towards each hip).



◀ Notice that the sari's body has followed backwards, and that the lower border of the pleats passes between the legs at the level of the ankles and falls under the tucking of the upper border in the back. Take the middle of this part of the lower border and pass it up to the front.

Pull up the reversed lower border and tuck it in the middle of the closing, over the abdomen. ▶ Tuck it well so that it hides the parts of the upper border going in the back between the legs.

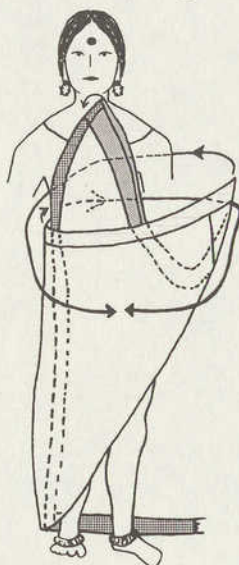
Arrange the cloth over the thighs, so that they are tightly covered, especially in the back.



Notice that the sari is turned upwards and reversed just under the knees. Cover the head with the *mundanai*.

B The Marar sari

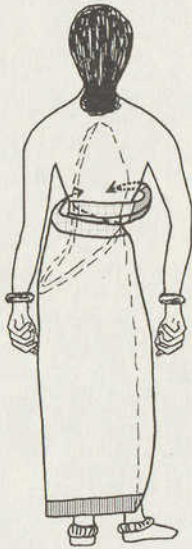
Women of the *Marar* community in Balaghat wear an upper *kaccha* drape made with a 9 yd sari. Unfortunately I was unable to find any woman wearing this sari, learning it instead from the book *Saris of India: Madhya Pradesh*, by Chishti and Samyal. It is a unique and fascinating drape, and further research would be necessary to find out its origins. The closing is unique, although somewhat reminiscent of the *Koli* sari (see p. 96).



◀ Hold the upper corner of the *mundi*, reversed, with the left hand. Take the lower corner of the *mundi*, bring it up under the upper border and hold it up with the chin (it should be with the "good side" up).

◀ Pass the upper corner of the *mundi* (reversed) under the left arm, across the back and pull it from under the right arm until it is in front of the abdomen.





▶ Pass the reversed upper border around the waistline clockwise (from the left side, across the abdomen, under the right arm, across the back, under the left arm) until it reaches the abdomen again from the left.

▶ Notice that the reversed upper border is pulled around the waistline counter-clockwise following the upper corner of the *mundi* and clockwise towards the other end. It circles twice around the waistline (once in each direction).

Let the lower corner of the *mundi* fall towards the outside over the reversed upper border (which is flat over the abdomen, being pulled in each direction as explained above).

Tie into a knot the upper corner of the *mundi* coming from under the right arm and the part of the upper border coming from under the left arm, above the falling lower corner of the *mundi*.



▶ Take the upper border from the knot and fold it backwards. It now has the "good side" up. Pass it under the left arm, across the back and tuck it over the abdomen.

▶ Drape the *mundanai* as you would for a Gujarati sari. Take the pleated *pallav* or its upper corner and pass it under the left arm, over the head (from behind the left shoulder) and across the chest (from over the right shoulder) to under the left arm. Pull it until it reaches the back. Tie the upper corner of the *pallav* into a knot. Pull it in the back and tuck it firmly in the closing at the back of the right hip.

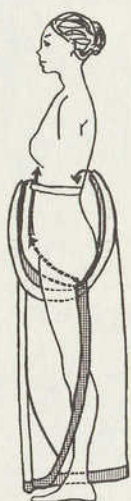
Make pleats with what is left of the upper border between the closing and the drape of the *mundanai*. Tuck the first pleat well (the upper border when it comes from under the right arm) and the last (the upper border at the beginning of the *mundanai*, under the left arm) securely.



▶ Once the first and last pleats are well tucked, undo some of the pleats which are towards the outside, until a loose part of the upper border falls below the knees. Some pleats (towards the inside) should remain. Normally, the bunch of pleats should be divided in half: the half towards the inside remains pleated while the other, towards the outside, is undone.

▶ Tuck the remaining pleats in the closing over the abdomen, towards the outside and turned to the right. The first and last pleats should remain tucked.





Take the lowest part of the loose upper border and pass it between the legs by pulling it inside (it should not go over the lower border in front).

Pass this part of the upper border over the lower border falling in the back; bring it up and tuck it in the closing in the middle of the back.

Take the lower border which was falling in the back and bring it up to the front between the legs. Pull it up under the closing and tuck it in the knot.

Take the lower border of the pleats made loose, which is now reversed in the back, and tuck it in the closing, spreading it as far as possible over the back and the right hip.



Arrange the cloth around the legs to hide the thighs as much as possible.

From that stage onwards, there are two slight variations of the style:

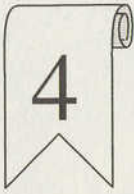


For the first, take a point of the middle pleat (falling in front) about halfway in the height. Bring it up and tuck it in the closing on the left side of the abdomen. The lower border of the pleats should then fall making a zig-zag over the right leg (see far left).

For the second variation, take the lower border of the middle pleat, bring it up and tuck it in the closing over the right hip. The lower border comes up to the right hip as shown here (far right).



Cover the head with the *mundanai*. Let the *pallav* fall over the abdomen as for any Gujarati sari. In the back, the *mundanai* fully covers the left leg, which otherwise is hardly hidden from the back (see above p. 70).



TRIBAL SARIS

Some drapes worn by women considered tribal, the *Bhils* for instance (see p. 68), have already been described. These styles belong to one of the three main families of Indian saris, which have been mentioned earlier (see Chapters 1 to 3).

What are here called **tribal saris** are not necessarily worn by women who consider themselves as belonging to a tribe (this is especially true of the *Coorgs*). This name applies to a family of drapes characterised by a closing made above the breasts. Since almost all of these styles belong to communities deemed as tribes, I have used this name.

Tribal saris are characterised by one important feature: a closing above the breasts. This closing may be the main one, as in the *Irula* sari, or the secondary one, as for the *Pullaiyar* style. In this case, a first closing is made around the waistline and the *mundanai* is brought up and closed again above the breasts. However it is achieved, the drape firmly covers the upper part of the body.

Another feature of several tribal saris is the addition of ribbons, belts and, in a few cases, capes. These drapes often require specific clothes, the *Toda* shawl for instance, rather than a standardised sari.



■ Area where "high veshti" and "right shoulder" drapes are found.

■ Area where only "right shoulder" drapes are found.

I "High veshti" tribal saris

When a *veshti* is closed above the breasts, I have called it "**high veshti**". We have already studied such a sari, the *Nambudiri* (see p. 34), in which we have a "normal" *veshti* tied around the waistline and another one on top, covering the chest. Many tribes all over India wear garments based on such a simple drape.

A The *Irula* sari

The *Irulas*, a proto-Australoid tribe, are famous all over India for their ability to deal with animals. They work in snake farms, or as mahouts, and are called out to deal with rats or other pests. They normally live in the rain-forests of the Ghats between Kerala, Tamil Nadu and South Karnataka. They have a reputation for being very primitive, as they survive using the resources of the jungle.

Although nowadays they tend to adopt the modern sari, their traditional drape is very simple, and made of two pieces of rag. The first cloth is coloured (usually a piece of a normal sari or an unstitched *lungi*), and has varying dimensions, between 1 to 2 yds in length and slightly more in height.





Close it just like a *veshti* above the breasts, holding the *mundi* over the left breast while passing the cloth around the upper part of the body clockwise, under the right and then the left arm. Tuck the *pallav* over the right breast, in the closing. Let the upper corner of the *mundi*, tucked out, fall over the left breast.

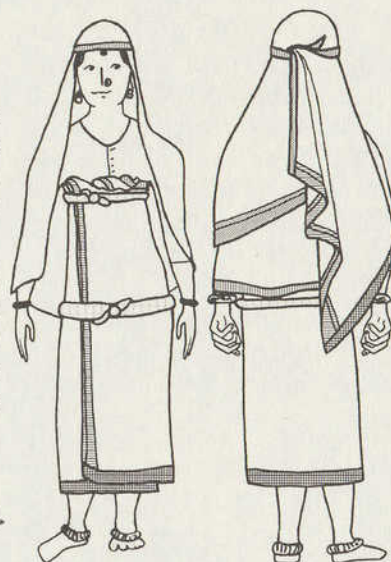
Take a square piece of cloth, preferably white, with a side of about 1 yd. Stretch one of its sides in the back behind the shoulders and bring both corners in front, over each shoulder. Make a knot with the corners. The cloth should fall as a cape.

B The Badaga sari

The *Badaga* tribe lives in the highest mountains of South India, near Ooty (Uthagamandalam). The climate there is usually cool and very humid, which explains why they drape their two-piece sari over a sweater. This tribe claims to have come from North India.

Their drape is made with two white *veshtis*: one of 4 yds folded in two lengthwise (the fold is considered here as the *mundi* by convention), and one of 2 yds. It also requires two belts made of knitted wool, and brightly coloured. To this they add either a shawl to cover their shoulders or, better, a shirt and when it's cold, a woollen sweater.

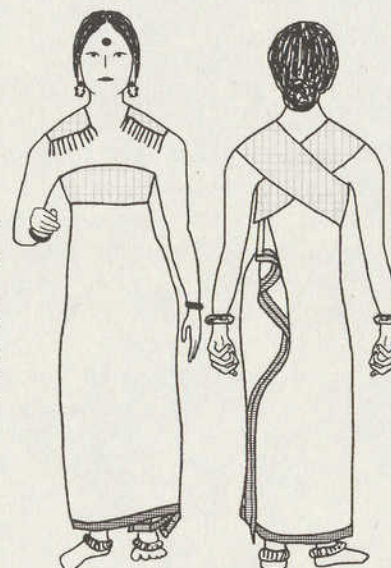
Tie the 4 yd *veshti* (folded in two) above the breasts like the *Irula* sari (see above), but roll the upper corner of the *mundi* or even the whole closing. Take the first belt (which is about 1 yd (90 cm) long and a couple of inches wide) and tie it over the breasts, at the level of the nipples. Make a knot in front and tuck in both ends. Do the same with the second belt around the hips, under the abdomen.

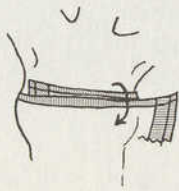


Take the 2 yd *veshti* and put the middle of the upper border on your forehead. Pull each sides to the back and tuck them together. Let the cloth fall over the shoulders.

C The Manipur tribal mekhla

A sari worn in Manipur has already been described in Chapter 2 (see p. 36), a style of *veshti*. Tribal women living in the mountains of this region wear a version of the same drape, tied above the breasts. This style requires a special cloth called *mekhla* (as all North-Eastern typical clothes), 2 yds in length, of heavy cotton with very colourful stripes. To this they add a beautiful scarf with long beaded fringes.

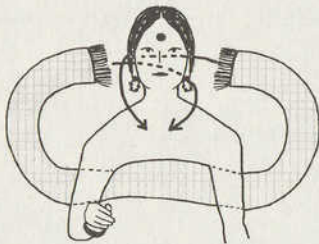




Hold the upper corner of the *mundi* over the right breast, pass the upper border counter-clockwise, in the left armpit, across the back and in the right armpit.

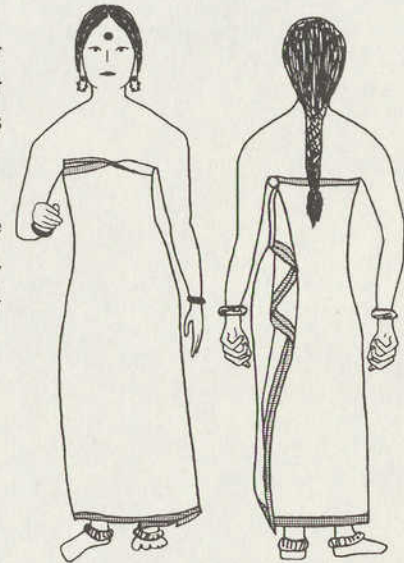
Put together both layers of the upper border across the chest above the breasts and roll them towards the outside. Let the upper corner of the *pallav* fall out of the roll on the left, towards the back.

This is how the drape should be at this stage (right):



Take a scarf a little more than 6 ins in height and 5 ft in length, with long beaded fringes.

Hold the middle of the scarf across the chest. Pass the side falling on the right under the right arm, across the back and over the left shoulder. Pass the side falling on the left under the left arm and over the right shoulder. The beaded fringes should fall over the shoulders.



D The Boro mekhla

Women of the *Boro* tribe, in Assam, wear an interesting drape. Some of its aspects evoke the *Santal* sari (p. 49), especially the way it is brought up and around the hips. It requires a *mekhla* of over 3 yds in length, longer than the Manipur *mekhla*, and 4 ft in height. It is generally made of brightly coloured cotton, with brighter stripes. Nowadays, it is often worn over a *choli*.

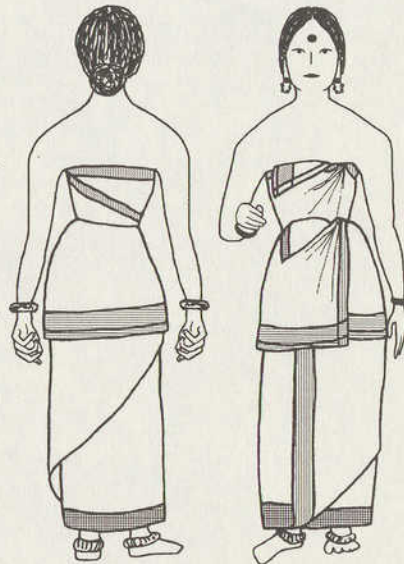
It has two closings, a first one above the breasts and a second one, made with a fold, around the waistline.

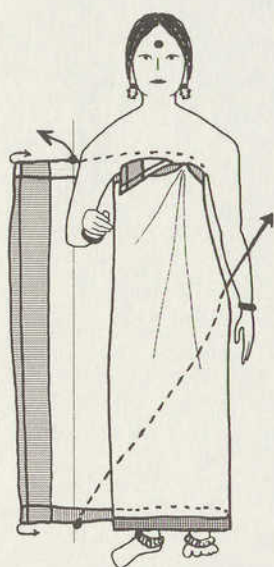


Take the upper corner of the *mundi* and hold it over the right breast. Pass the upper border around the body counter-clockwise, in the left armpit, across the back and under the right armpit.

For the first closing, tuck over the left breast the part of the upper border that comes from the right side.

Let the upper corner of the *mundi* fall over the closing, over the right breast.





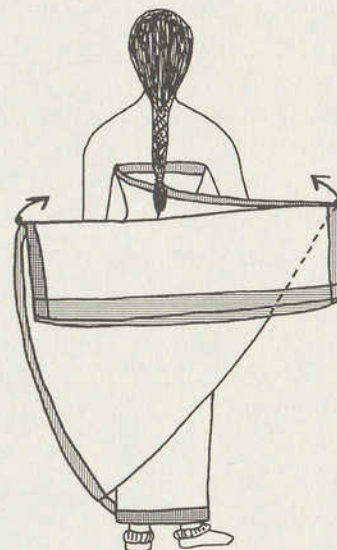
At this stage, to secure the closing, you can either pin the tucking on the *choli* with a safety pin or pass a small string around the body above the closing, rolling it in the tucking.

Take the upper border after the tucking and pass it under the left armpit, and horizontally in the back. Take a point on the upper border a little more than a foot away from the edge of the *pallav* with the right hand.

Take a similar point on the lower border (it should be in the back) with the left hand. Bring up and across the back the point on the lower border, so that both points are held at waist level.

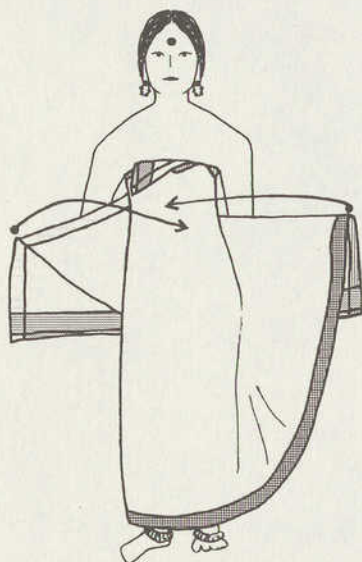
Using these two points, make a fold about 16 ins (40 cm) away from the edge of the *pallav*. Let the *pallav* fall over the fold towards the outside, the "good side" up.

The fold should be horizontal, and in the back. Another fold is then created: it goes from the point on the upper border to the lower border in front of the body.



Bring both points (edges of the fold) to the front; the one on the upper border goes under the right arm and the one on the lower border under the left arm.

Take the point on the lower border and hold it over the right side of the abdomen.

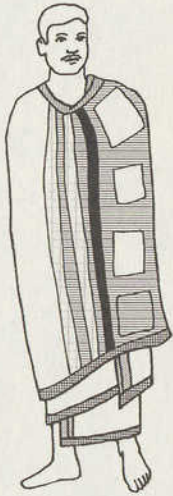


Bring the point on the upper border over the fold and tuck it in, over the left side of the abdomen. (Repeating the tucking of the first closing in the same order.) Let the corner of the fold and the lower border fall over this second closing, on the right side.

The lower border should be going up, reversed, from the end of the diagonal fold to the horizontal fold. Note that the diagonal fold goes around the body counter-clockwise from the point where the lower border goes up to the corner of the horizontal fold and the upper border. It looks like the fold found in several Dravidian saris (see pp. 40, 45, 48).

A smaller piece of cloth, about 1 x 3 ft is added. It should be of matching cloth and colour and is thrown over the shoulders.



E The *Toda* drapes

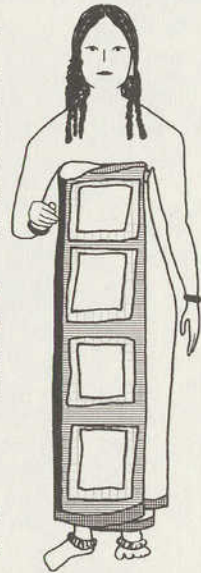
The *Todas* are a fascinating tribe living, like the *Badagas*, in the highest part of South India, the Nilgiri mountains. They are very different from their neighbours, and have been studied by several anthropologists, notably HRH Prince Peter of Greece. Men and women wear a *veshti* (see p.36) on top of which they drape their famous shawl.

Toda shawls are made of two pieces of very thick cotton, 13 ft long and 2 ft 3 ins high. The two pieces are stitched in the length, and then folded in two and partially stitched, making a shawl of about 4 ft 6 ins x 9 ft 2 ins, having two layers. (See exact dimensions in Appendix I.)

The part that will come in front, the *pallav*, is heavily embroidered with wool and cotton. Patterns may vary but, roughly, we have first four squares on top of each other, then a long black line, followed by two pinkish-red ones, made with natural dyes. These are surrounded by intricate geometrical patterns in wool made mostly in black, with a little red and purple. Smaller patterns are sometimes sewn over the rest of the shawl.

Each *Toda* has only one shawl. When it is worn out, a woman of the family embroiders another one, taking care not to stitch the two parts together. When the new shawl is ready, the old one is destroyed and the new one sewn together. *Toda* women also make shawls for tourists, of a lesser quality and using chemical dyes.

It seems that until recently *Todas* did not wear anything to cover the breasts, except for the shawl that they often wrapped under the arms, much like the *Irula* or the *Badaga* saris. *Toda* shawls are always draped to the left (counter-clockwise). This style (right) is preferred for working and in summer.



When the weather is cooler, *Todas* drape their shawl over one shoulder, especially when working.

Let the upper corner of the *mundi* fall over the left shoulder, pass the upper border in the back, under the right arm, and throw the upper corner of the *pallav* on the left shoulder.



Women now wear *cholis*, shirts or sweaters. *Toda* men and women do not always wear their ceremonial shawls. They sometimes use the same drapes with coloured pieces of cloth, of varying dimensions. Living in a rather cold and humid climate, they tend to add jackets, sweaters etc. According to them there was a time, not so long ago, when they were too poor even to have shawls, and many would die of cold.

From that time they probably have kept their main drape of the shawl, which evokes the idea of someone being cold ...



Put the upper corner of the *mundi* on the left shoulder. Pass the upper border around the neck counter-clockwise, the whole shawl being wrapped around the body over the arms. Throw (with your right hand and from inside) the upper corner of the *pallav* over the left shoulder.

Needless to say, this style and the following variation are worn when at rest or walking (but not working).

You can also take the upper corner of the *mundi*, throw it on the right shoulder, pass the upper border around the neck counter-clockwise and throw the upper corner of the *pallav* over the left shoulder. This time, again, the shawl is wrapped around the body and over the arms.



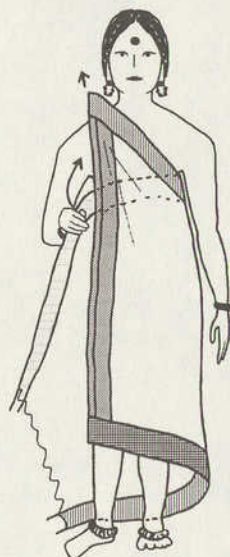
II "Right-shoulder" tribal saris

Many tribes, mostly in South and Western India, wear drapes knotted on the right shoulder. Although these styles are worn by very different communities, from the dark *Kurumbas* to the fair *Coorgs*, they undoubtedly derive from the same source.

A The *Kurumba* saris

Kurumba tribes, like the *Irulas*, are proto-Australoid and live in the rain-forests covering the western slopes of the Ghats, mostly in Kerala.

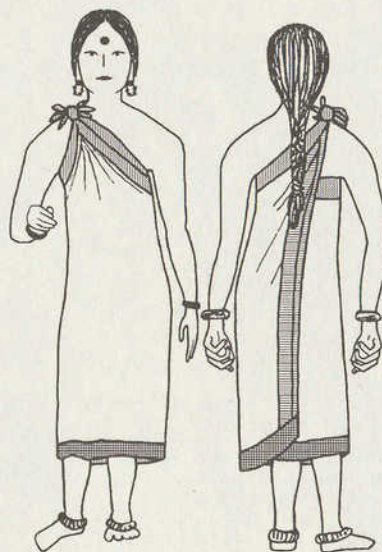
Kurumba women have two drapes. The first one is often made with a rag, what is left of a sari or a *veshti*. The second style is a variation of the first, meant for a real 6 yd sari, since they are now more and more able to afford it.

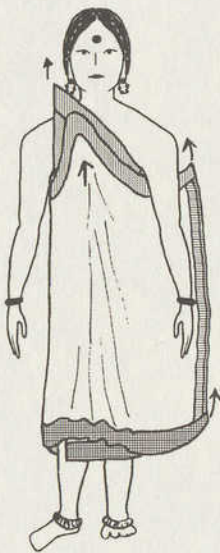


1 The traditional drape

Take a piece of cloth 3-4 yds in length (usually an old sari cut out), preferably thick and white (although it's very often coloured).

Hold the upper corner of the *mundi* on the right shoulder and pass the cloth around the body counter-clockwise, under the left arm, across the back, and under the right arm.



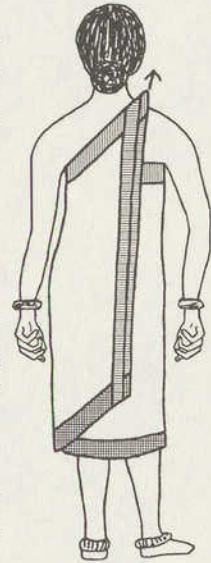


◀ When coming from under the right arm, pull the upper border on the right shoulder and hold it with the upper corner of the *mundi*. Pass the sari under the left arm to the back. The *pallav* should be close at hand.

Take the upper corner of the *pallav* and pull it in the back, over the right shoulder. ▶

Tie a strong knot over the right shoulder with the upper corner of the *mundi*, the part of the upper border once the sari has been passed around the body counter-clockwise and the upper corner of the *pallav* (in the back).

This single knot holds everything, so tie it carefully. If the cloth is thick, it's really difficult! You can tie it slightly in front, above the right breast.



Usually nothing is worn underneath; but when it's cold, a *choli* or a sweater may be added under the drape.

Women frequently wear a cape on top of it. Put a square piece of cloth, preferably white and with a side of 1 yd, in the back.

Take both corners of the upper side, pass them over each shoulder and make a knot in front of the neck. Notice that it's the same cape as that of the *Irulas* (see p. 74), another tribe of South Indian aborigines (*Adivasi*). ▶

Always add a belt, made of a thin piece of cloth about 1 yd in length (preferably red). Tie it around the hips under the abdomen (not unlike the second *Badaga* belt, except that this is not knitted, see p. 74). Make a knot in front and tuck in both ends. ▶

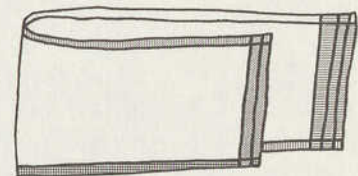


2 Drape with a 6-yard sari



This style is more modern, since it is an adaptation of the traditional drape made to suit a standardised 6 yd sari, often of nylon.

Fold the sari in two, leaving about one extra yard on the side of the *pallav*. ▶



◀ Take the upper border of the fold and hold it on the right shoulder. Pass the sari folded (the two layers) around the body counter-clockwise: under the left arm, across the back and under the right arm.



From the right arm, take the upper border of both layers and pull them over the right shoulder. Take them with the upper part of the fold and keep on holding them up on the right shoulder. Then pass them under the left arm.

Pass both layers under the left arm and in the back. The *mundi* should come to the middle of the back, while the *pallav*, reversed, goes 1 yd (90 cm) longer towards the right.

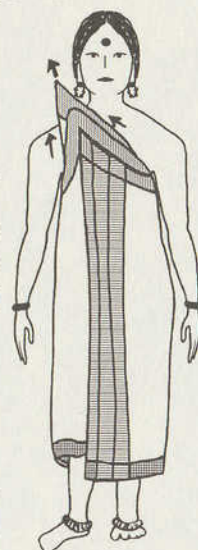
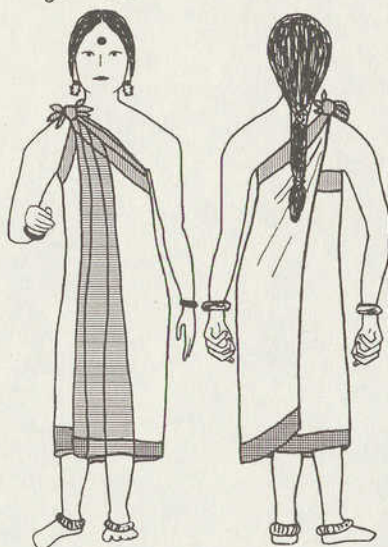
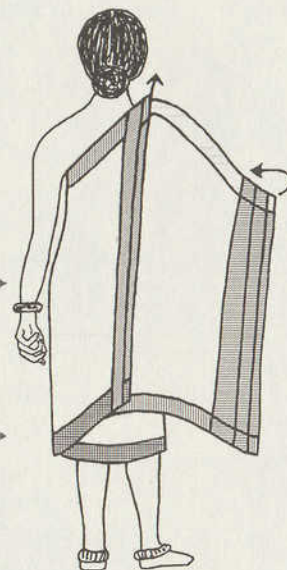
Take the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border of the second layer of the sari (reversed).

Pull them over the right shoulder and seize them with the hand that already holds the fold and the other layers from the front. Turn the *pallav* towards the left, over the *mundi* (it will turn back with the "good side" up).

Pass the *pallav* under the left arm and pull it towards the right shoulder. Make a knot with everything. (In front: the fold, both layers once you have passed the cloth around the body, and the *pallav*. In the back: the *mundi* and the fold around it.)

Never add a belt to this style. Some women wear a cape (see p. 74) over this sari. It is

usually draped over a *choli*. The knot is often pulled down a little from the right shoulder and stays above the right breast (this is also true of the traditional style, above).



B The Pullaiyar sari

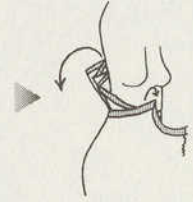
The *Pullaiyars* are members of a "scheduled caste", and usually work as labourers in Tamil Nadu. The women of the communities living in the Ghat mountains, west of Madurai, wore a cross between a *pinkosu* and a *Kurumba* sari. This is not amazing since *Pullaiyars* are well integrated in Tamil society and their women often wear *pinkosus*, yet they are also considered *Adivasis*, like the *Kurumbas*.

Today this drape has practically disappeared. I learnt it from a very old woman who was the last one to drape this style in her village. The others preferred regular *pinkosus*.



This sari is worn without *choli* or petticoat. The drape has two variations, one for an 8 yd sari and one for a 6 yd. I will begin with the explanations for a 6 yd sari:

Drape the bottom part following the instructions given for a *pinkosu* sari (see p. 40). Make a *kosu* of about 6 pleats. Pass the upper border around the waistline counter-clockwise, making 1 1/2 turns, and tuck or roll it over the right part of the abdomen.



Take the upper border after the closing, and pull it up loosely towards the right shoulder. Hold it there. Pass the remaining portion of the cloth under the left arm and across the back to the right shoulder.

Tie both parts of the upper border, one coming from the front and the other from the back, into a knot on top of the right shoulder or above the right breast.

If the drape is made with a 6 yd sari, the *pallav* is not very far from the knot and falls in the back, along the right arm (see p. 80 for the front view).



With an 8 yd sari (which seems perhaps more traditional), make a *kosu* of 8-12 pleats. Make the closing on top and let the pleats fall towards the outside. To close, you may use the loose method (see p. 38) with a thumb knot.

Drape the *mundanai* just as described before. The only difference is that, once you have made the knot on the right shoulder, you should have over 1 yd of cloth falling over the right arm, and not just the *pallav*.

Take the whole body of the sari falling in the back, gather it and even twist it if you like.

Pass it as a belt around the waistline, counter-clockwise. It should do at least one full turn. Finally tuck the twisted *pallav* in this belt.



C The Coorg sari

The *Coorgs* are a community living in the mountains around their capital, Mercara (Madikeri), in South Karnataka. The sacred river of South India, the Cauvery, has its sources in this lush, cool and humid country.



According to the legend, a *Coorg* woman was caught in the flood of the Cauvery and her sari (it must have been a modern sari) was turned. The front became the back. Yet, and although *Coorgs* do certainly not consider themselves a tribe, this style belongs to the tribal family rather than the *nivi*. Although the primary closing is made around the waistline, the *mundanai* is draped over the chest and tied above the right breast.

This style requires a 6 yd sari and is worn on top of two petticoats (one over the other) and a long-sleeved *choli*. A scarf is also added to cover the head. Nowadays, most of the shy *Coorg* women only drape their commanding traditional saris during festivals.

First put on a petticoat, or even two. Tuck the upper corner of the *mundi* on the left hip, the sari towards the back. ▶

Pass the upper border around the body counter-clockwise, tucking it with small pleats in the petticoat all around the waistline. Finally close by tucking the upper border in the back. ▶



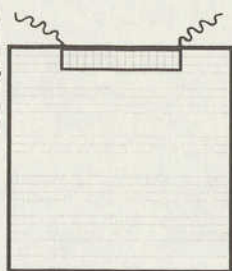
◀ Then drape the *mundanai*. Take the upper corner of the *pallav*, pass it just under the right arm (from the back), above the breasts, under the left arm, across the back and over the right shoulder to the right breast.

◀ Let the corner fall over the breast, down to the level of the waistline. Take a brooch and pin the point where the upper border of the *pallav* passes over the part of the upper border going horizontally above the right breast.

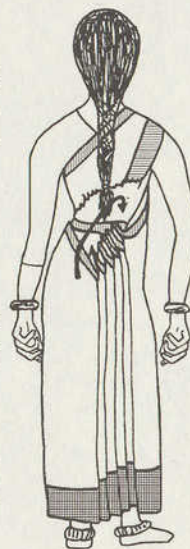
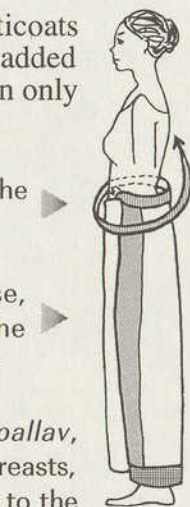
Pull the sari backwards from the *mundanai*, now secured with the brooch (and sometimes also a safety pin). This should leave a part of the upper border loose in the back, between the closing and the *mundanai*. Pleat it towards the inside and tuck it in the middle of the back, with the pleats towards the right. ▶



◀ Let the *mundanai* fall in the back over the pleats. This drape is best done with a sari having a large lower border. Finally, put a scarf on your head.



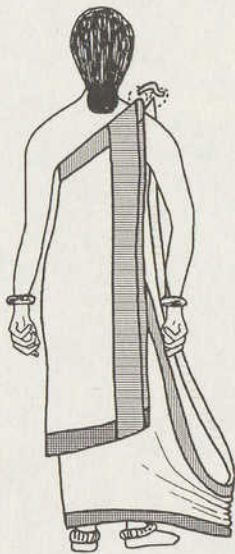
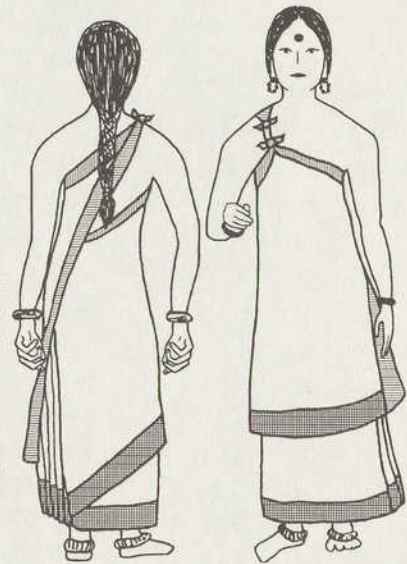
Traditional *Coorg* scarves are made of a piece of silk muslin about 1 yd square. In the middle of one side, a band is heavily embroidered with gold thread. This is long enough to go around the face. A ribbon is stitched at each end of the band. Put the embroidered band over the forehead and tie the ribbons behind the back of the neck. Spread the scarf on the shoulders.



D The Hallaki Gauda sari

The *Hallaki Gaudas* live in North Karnataka. Their drape is clearly tribal, yet it reflects the strong influence of *nivi* saris. Since they do not live in cold areas like most of the South Indian tribes, the *mundanai* is not really meant to protect the upper part of the body, like it does with these other communities. Nevertheless, we find here again the closing with a knot over the right shoulder.

This drape requires a 6 yd sari and a little piece of ribbon, about 6 ins (15 cm) in length. It is never worn with a *choli* nor a petticoat.



Take the upper corner of the *mundi* and hold it over the left hip, the sari falling towards the back. Pass the upper border around the body counter-clockwise and make a knot to close.

Now drape the *mundanai*: take the upper corner of the *pallav*, pass it in the back from under the left arm (at the waistline level) to under the right arm (in the armpit).

Pull the cloth across the chest above the breasts to under the left armpit. Pull it across the back until holding the upper corner of the *pallav* just over the right shoulder.

Tie the upper corner of the *pallav* to one end of the ribbon. Knot the other end to the upper border passing above the right breast. If you don't have a ribbon, twist the upper corner of the *pallav* and pull it to make it long and thin, then knot it with the upper border above the right breast.



When the closing is secured on the right shoulder (1), pull the upper border away from the *mundanai* (2), as much as possible.

Tuck the upper border coming from the back (the beginning of the tightly draped *mundanai*) in the closing, on the left hip (3).

You should have a length of cloth of about 2-3 yds falling on the left side, from the knot to the beginning of the *mundanai*. Pleat this part of the upper border towards the inside, with pleats towards the right.



Lift the pleats and twist them together, clockwise. If you like your sari short, pull them high and twist the upper third of the height. Otherwise only twist the upper border. Hold the twisted cloth horizontally over your left hip.



Take the upper border of the closing and pass it outside and down over the twisted pleats. Arrange the upper border of the closing, reversed, to "fall down" with more or less the same height all around the closing, except at the back of the left hip where the upper border of the *mundanai* goes up towards the right armpit.

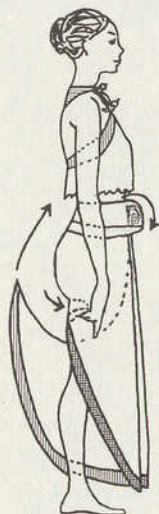


Let the *mundanai* fall naturally. The *pallav* should be pulled towards the left, so that if it is long enough, it falls mostly in front (see above, p. 83). On top of this drape *Hallaki Gauda* women wear numerous strands of small glass beads. It practically covers the upper part of the chest, between the neck and the breasts, and hides the ribbon.

E The Gaudi sari

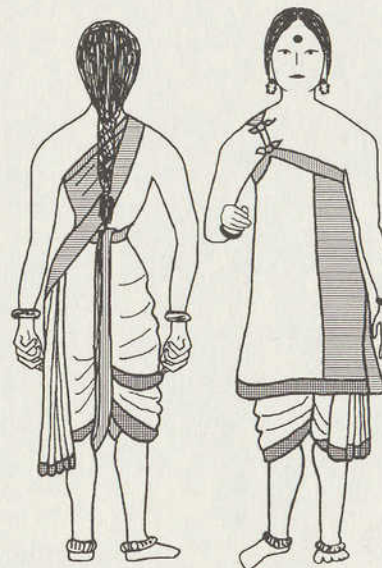
The *Gaudis* of Goa are closely related to their neighbours, the *Hallaki Gaudas*. Their style is based on the same drape, but shows the influence of the Goa sari (see p. 67). This drape requires a 9 yd sari, although you can make it with a shorter cloth (and less pleats).

Notice that this drape too requires a piece of ribbon. This style is never worn with a petticoat, but *Gaudi* women sometimes wear a *choli* on top of the drape (a typical Goan custom). Follow the instructions of the previous paragraph. Since the sari is longer, you will have about twice as many pleats.



Once you have made the pleats, lift them up as much as possible. Twist one-third of the height, and hold it horizontally on the left hip. Pass the upper border over the twist and adjust it as explained above.

Take the second or third pleat on the right, pass it between the legs, pull it as much as possible and tuck it in the middle of the back. Don't forget to push the cloth falling in the back forward between the legs. As a result, you have a short *kaccha* sari (shortened by a third of the total height) with pleats falling on the left leg. In the back, the *pallav* is pulled from the right shoulder to the left hip, just as for the *Hallaki Gauda* sari.



F The *Khond* saris

The *Khonds* are a tribe living at the North-Eastern border of Andhra Pradesh, south of Orissa, in a mountainous area. Although *Khond* women now use modern polyester saris, it is clear that in a not-so-distant past they wore either rags made from cut saris or their own textiles. The “one-shoulder” drape seems to be the oldest. It requires only half the length of a sari, and can easily be draped from rags. The “two-shoulders” drape was probably created to accommodate a full sari when the tribeswomen became able to afford one. Although nowadays *Khond* women often add a *choli* and a petticoat, both styles are traditionally worn alone.



1 The “one-shoulder” *Khond* sari



Take a cloth made of half a 6 yd sari (3 yds long). To make the closing, hold the *mundi* on the abdomen, and pass the upper border clockwise around the waistline. Make a knot with the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border above the navel.

Take the upper border and pass it under the right arm, across the back and under the left arm. Pull it up from under the left arm to the top of the left shoulder.

Holding the upper border on top of the left shoulder, pass the rest of the *mundanai* across the chest, under the right arm, and up across the back to the top of the left shoulder (in the back). Tie a knot with the border held on top of the left shoulder (in front) and the upper corner of the *pallav* (in the back). The rest of the cloth follows naturally. The *pallav* should be falling in the back, its upper corner being held on the left shoulder.

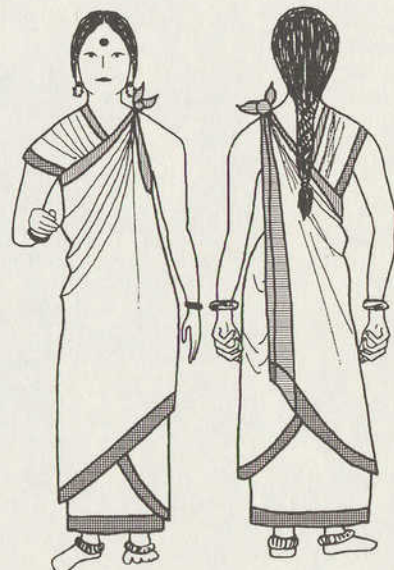


2 The “two-shoulders” *Khond* sari



Take a 5 yd sari (such as those from Bengal or Orissa, which are traditionally shorter than the modern 6 yd sari). To make the closing, hold the *mundi* on the abdomen, and pass the upper border clockwise around the waistline. Tie the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border into a knot above the navel.

Take the upper border and pass it under the right arm, across the back and under the left arm.





Gather the height of the sari in front, and throw the whole height of the sari over the right shoulder, the upper border closer to the neck and the lower border falling loosely over the top of the right arm (crumple the height of the sari, don't make regular pleats).

Pass the upper border across the back and under the left arm. Pull it up from under the left arm to the top of the left shoulder.

Holding the upper border on top of the left shoulder, pass the rest of the *mundanai* across the chest, under the right arm, and up across the back to the top of the left shoulder (in the back).



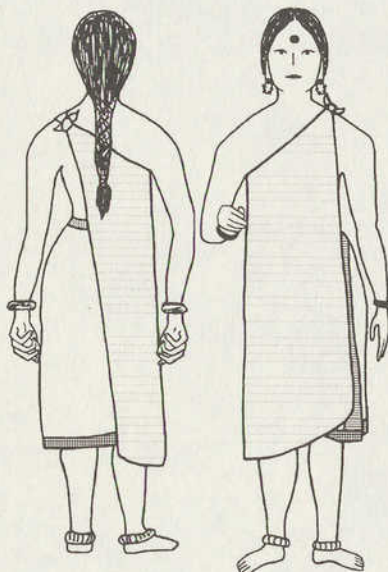
Tie the border held on top of the left shoulder (in front) and the upper corner of the *pallav* (in the back) into a knot.

The rest of the cloth follows naturally. The *pallav* should be falling in the back, its upper corner being held on the left shoulder.

III Other tribal saris

Tribal saris in various forms can be found all over India. Some tribes, such as the *Bhils* (p. 68), *Gonds* (p. 87), *Kolis* (pp. 95 and 106) etc. wear drapes belonging to other families and were studied in the appropriate chapters.

Nevertheless, the majority of Indian tribeswomen and men drape styles which are *veshtis* or tribal saris. These drapes are very simple and do not require lengthy explanations.



Many tribal women wear *veshtis* shorter than usual, made with their own textiles. They often add a scarf or even pieces of stitched cloth. Here (right) we have a drawing of a *Chakma* woman from Tripura, with a *veshti-mundu* draped with specific fabrics.

The *Gadabas* of Orissa (left) wear a short *veshti*, on top of which they tie a second cloth passed under the right arm and knotted over the left shoulder with both ends of the upper border. It is made with two small pieces of white cotton.

Most Indian tribes wear drapes that are variations of Dravidian (Chapter 2), tribal (Chapter 4) or "*Gond*-related" (Chapter 5) saris. It would have been impossible and a little lengthy to have them all listed here.





GOND-RELATED SARIS

Usually a family of saris coincides with a definable group of ethnic or local communities. For instance, Tamil saris are worn by non-Brahmin Tamil castes. With tribal drapes, it is hard to relate the styles of a family to a specific set of tribes. The *Coorgs*, the *Pullaiyars* and the *Hallaki Gaudas* wear similar saris. Yet they are very different in culture, physical appearance and social status, and live in places ranging from a hot sea-coast to a cold mountain top (although all are in South-Western India).



- Gond area, where many styles are found
- Kolis
- Ceylonese saris

This is also true of the *Gond*-related family. Some communities wearing these saris are very far apart from each other; they do not speak the same language or share anything in common. One of them is not even Indian. Yet, their drapes are clearly related to the *Gond* sari, of which many variations are found on women of all castes living in what was the *Gond* kingdom. It would be interesting (and beyond the scope of this study!) to find out why.

The cloth of these styles is first arranged on the left shoulder (the upper part of the body). It is then draped clockwise from the shoulder to around the hips. The closing in most of these saris is typical of this family: a knot is simply tucked in the upper border as it passes under the right arm, coming from the left shoulder and going around the waistline.

These drapes are somewhat similar to the *Lingayat* sari (see p. 65), which belongs to the *kaccha* family.

Gond-related saris are also different because they require a sari with two elaborate *pallavs*, or, as with the *Koli* sari, no marked *pallav* at all. Since one *pallav* is draped over the left shoulder and the other makes the closing on top of the sari, both ends of the cloth have an equal importance. The Telugu Brahmin (see p. 24) is the only sari that also requires a cloth with two elaborate *pallavs*, although its drape is in no way related to this family.

Important note: By convention, I will use the word *mundi* for the *pallav* used for the closing. I will call *mundanai* the part of the cloth covering the upper part of the body, ending with the *pallav*.



A The *Gond* sari

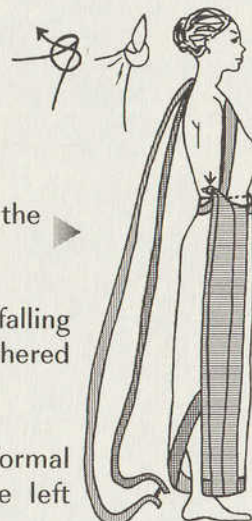
The *Gonds* are a tribe living in Central India (mostly Eastern Maharashtra and Southern Madhya Pradesh). Their women wear a sari of coarse cotton with sometimes heavily embroidered *pallavs*. Its length is about 5 yds of a very thick cloth. It is usually worn without *choli* or petticoat.



Throw the *pallav* and the long *mundanai* to the back, over the left shoulder. Leave just enough cloth in front to make the closing: pass the upper border (towards the *mundi*) across the chest from the left shoulder to under the right arm. Pass it around the waistline clockwise (in the back, under the left arm, across the abdomen).

Make a knot with the upper corner of the *mundi* and tuck it in the upper border that already passes under the right arm (coming from the shoulder and going to the back).

Pull the lower border so that it falls in front from the left shoulder to the right foot (under the *mundi*).



The *mundi* should be in front of the legs, its edge falling vertically along the right leg. Most of the sari is gathered and drops in the back from the left shoulder.

Gather the sari on the left shoulder, making informal pleats. Pass the sari across the back from the left shoulder to under the right arm.

From that point of the drape, there are two variations. One style relates to the "right-shoulder" tribal saris while the other is more typical of the Gond-related family, in which the *pallav* is traditionally passed tightly around the waistline. Notice that the *mundi* is draped clockwise while the *pallav* goes counter-clockwise.

I will first describe the "right-shoulder" variation:



Bring the upper border of the *mundanai* under the right arm and pull it over the right shoulder. Pass the remaining cloth under the left arm and across the back to the right shoulder.

Make a knot with the upper corner of the *pallav* and the part of the upper border pulled in front of the right shoulder. (Since the cloth is coarse, it makes a big knot.)

For this style, you can easily manage with a 4 yd sari. The next variation requires at least 5 yds.



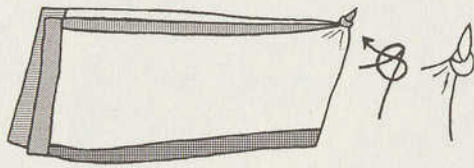


Once you pull the *mundanai* away from the left shoulder, fold it in two in the height. Push the middle pleat close to the neck, over the upper border. Pass the folded *mundanai* around the hips, making about two turns counter-clockwise (from the left shoulder to under the right arm, across the abdomen, under the left arm, across the back, under the right arm and across the abdomen). Tuck the middle fold of the *pallav* on the left hip or in the back if the cloth is long enough.



B The Mul sari

Mul is a village of Eastern Maharashtra, in what was once the *Gond* kingdom. Many castes of that village have adopted a short and simple drape that is very practical to work in the fields. It requires a 9 yd sari, which is easy to find all over Maharashtra and is still very commonly worn (in the *Marwari* style, see p. 61) in the nearby city of Nagpur.



Fold the sari in two lengthwise and make a knot at the corner of the fold and the upper border.



Throw the *pallav* and the *mundi* together to the back, over the left shoulder. Leave just enough folded cloth in front to make the closing: pass both layers of the upper border across the chest from the left shoulder to under the right arm.



Pass them around the waistline clockwise (in the back, under the left arm, across the abdomen). Tuck the knot in both upper borders that already pass under the right arm (coming from the shoulder and going to the back).

Pass the upper borders falling from the left shoulder over the head. Bring the *pallav* and *mundi* from over the head to the front, going under the right arm. Tuck their upper borders in the closing, on the abdomen. If necessary, make some small pleats with the upper borders so that the cloth doesn't fall too much under the right arm (but first make sure it covers the head).





Pleat the height of the *pallav* and tuck it in the closing over the abdomen.

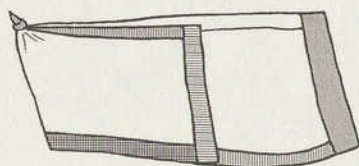
Take the lower corner of the *mundi*, pass it between the legs while pushing the cloth falling in the back forward and up, just as with a *kaccha* sari. Tuck the corner in the closing, in the middle of the back.

This sari, once it is fully draped, should not fall very low on the legs, just to under the knees.



C The Kurumar sari

The *Kurumars* living in the *Gond* area wear a drape with a typically *Gond* closing. But once it is draped, this style looks like a *Lingayat* sari. It requires a 9 yd cloth, such as those commonly used for *Marwari* or *Lingayat* drapes.



Make a knot on the upper border, approximately 6-7 ft (2 m) away from the edge of the *pallav*.



Throw the *pallav* over the left shoulder and pass the upper border around the waistline clockwise: from the left shoulder to under the right arm, in the back, under the left arm, across the abdomen.

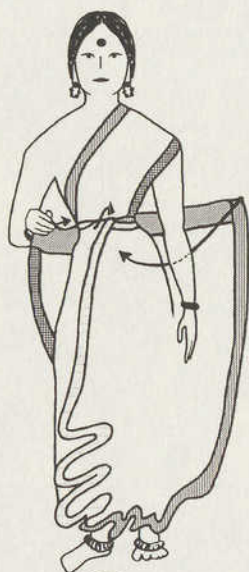


The knot should come as the upper border passes again under the right arm. Tuck it in the upper border that passes under the right arm coming from the shoulder.

Once the knot is tucked in, fold the upper border backwards, and take it counter-clockwise around the waistline again (across the abdomen, under the left arm, across the back, under the right arm).

Tuck it in the part of the upper border that passes twice over the abdomen (just before and after the knot). Notice that from this point onwards the sari is draped with its reversed side up (hence it is better to start with the "good side" towards the inside).

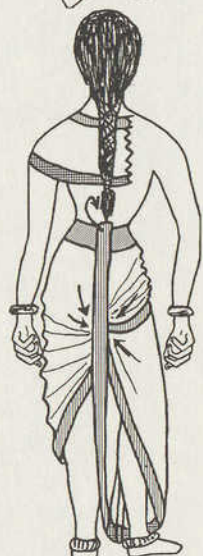




Take the lower corner of the *mundi* and pass it in the back, behind the right arm. Take the upper corner of the *mundi* and hold it behind the left arm. The "good side" of the *mundi* is towards the body. Bring both corners to the front under each arm and make a knot with them over the abdomen. Pleat the remaining part of the upper border.

Once the upper border falling in front (between the tuck over the abdomen and the *mundi*) is pleated, pass the pleats under the knot of the *mundi*'s corners.

From now on, the sari is draped just like a *Lingayat* style, except that there is no banana (see p. 65).



Take the lower border of the middle pleat and pass it between the legs. Pull the lower borders falling in the back forward and up between the legs, over the fold of the middle pleat.

Pull the middle pleat as much as possible to the back between the legs. Make pleats on the fold of the middle pleat, starting from the lower border and up to the height of the closing. (See p. 61 for full details about this *kaccha*.)

Tuck the pleated fold in the closing, in the middle of the back. If the lower border is large enough, the pleats should be just as large, so that only the pattern of the upper border is seen falling from the waistline. Notice that the upper border comes with the "good side" up.

Once the middle pleat is tucked in the back a tricky operation begins: take the lower border as it passes on your right thigh. Measure about one foot up from it (perpendicular to the lower border, which is going backwards and up on the thigh). Pinch the sari's body at this point and pull it a little.

Tuck this point in the closing on the left side of the abdomen, next to the upper part of the pleats falling over the knot of the *mundi*.

Notice that, unlike the *Marwari* or *Lingayat* styles, the *mundanai* comes from below the closing, which is characteristic of all *Gond*-related drapes.

Some *Gond* women also wear this drape, with a slight change:



Once the *kaccha* is made, take the cloth falling along each leg at the level of the knees and tuck it in the closing, all along the waistline. This way, the sari is shortened in half and only falls to the knees.

D The Saura sari



This Brahmin subcaste lives in the *Gond* area and wears a style clearly *Gond*-related, but also inspired by *dhotis* and *Marwari* saris. The result is an interesting and very asymmetrical drape. It requires a 9 yd sari.

Throw the *pallav* over the left shoulder. Let the sari fall in front of the legs. Pass the upper border loosely under the right arm, then in the back and under the left arm. The part going under the right arm should be falling a little. The rest of the sari should follow around the legs.

Take the part of the upper border that falls under the right arm and the part of the upper border which is under the left arm. Pull them a little, bring them towards the front and use them to tie a knot over the abdomen (and over the part of the *mundanai* falling in front, coming from the left shoulder).



Pleat all that remains of the upper border, starting with the *mundi*, until it reaches the knot of the closing. Tuck the pleats in the closing, over the knot. The *mundi* should be on top of the rather big bunch of pleats.

Pleat the *mundi* in the height and tuck it in the closing on the right side of the knot. Spread the tucked pleats in the closing over most of the right side of the abdomen.

Take the lower border as it reaches the foot, falling from the tucking in the closing (the lower border of the outermost pleat). Pass it between the legs. Tuck it in the middle of the back as you would do for any *kaccha* sari (see p. 61).

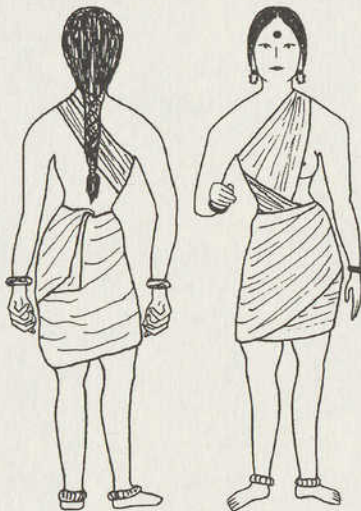


Pull the lower borders falling in the back forward and up between the legs, ► over the fold of the pleat.

The sari should be falling loosely over the right leg, while you have to pull down the cloth on the left leg, which hardly reaches the knee.

E The *Muria* sari

The *Murias* live in the mountains of southern Madhya Pradesh, close to Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. They are famous for their *ghotul*, a kind of dormitory shared by all adolescents of the village, girls and boys. In puritanical India, such an institution and the sexual freedom enjoyed by the young *Murias* has attracted much attention.



◀ I did not research drapes with *Murias* themselves, but base my drawings and understanding of the drape on photographs from Sunil Janah (*The Tribals of India through the Lens of Sunil Janah*, 1993).

Women of the tribe seem to wear a sari very similar to that of the nearby *Gonds*. To drape it, follow the instructions given earlier, p. 87, (the version in which the *mundanai* is wrapped around the hips), but make it with a shorter, creased white cotton cloth (without any kind of border).

Although the cloth is draped across the chest, it often leaves at least one breast out, and is worn alone (without *choli* or petticoat).

The *pallav* should be tucked in the middle of the back folded in two in the height.



F The Ceylonese saris



In Sri Lanka, women traditionally drape a sari which has several variations based on a simple style. The main feature distinguishing this sari from that of the *Gonds* is a bunch of pleats tucked out, not unlike a Tamil *kosu*. We could easily conclude that the women of Sri Lanka were inspired by their neighbours and ancestral enemies, the Tamils.

It is probable that the length of the cloth used and the elegant fan-like shape of the pleats falling on the left hip were indeed influenced by Tamil saris, but the idea of making pleats tucked out is also seen on some *Gond* drapes. These are sometimes very similar to Ceylonese saris, except that the pleats are arranged more simply over the closing. Creating pleats makes sense, giving more room for the legs and helping the drape maintain its shape. It is thus probably a natural evolution of the *Gond* style.



Nowadays most Sri Lankan women wear a stitched adaptation of this sari, made of three distinctive parts: the *choli*, the *veshti* and the pleats, all stitched independently. I will not describe these, but will start with the description of the modern version of the drape, which is most common today. The drape of the *mundanai* is strongly influenced by that of the modern Indian sari, now the norm in Sri Lanka.

This style requires a 6 yd sari, preferably having reversible borders. You also need a string or a ribbon to make the closing. It is usually draped on a petticoat and a *choli*.

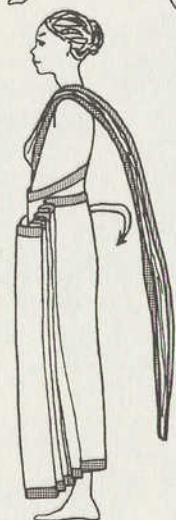


- ▶ Pleat the *pallav* in the height and let it fall down in the back to the ankle.
- ▶ Arrange the beginning of the *mundanai* in a fan-like shape over the chest, the upper border going from the left shoulder, under the right armpit and down to the waistline in the back. The lower border falls from the left shoulder to the right foot. Take a string and tie it around the waistline over the sari in front, but let the *pallav* fall freely in the back.

The cloth is then taken in front from the left hip. The upper border passes in front of the abdomen, over the right hip and in the back, under the falling *pallav*. Measure enough cloth from the *mundi* to make one turn (around the waistline from a point over the navel).



- ▶ The upper border, once it is held by the string on the left side of the back, goes tightly once around the waistline, clockwise. It will eventually make a second turn, measured from the *mundi*. In between a length of sari should be loose on the left hip. Pleat this loose part making small pleats (using three fingers).

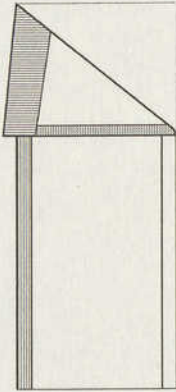


- ▶ Once the pleats are made, pass them under the string almost as a *kosu* passes under the upper border of the closing (in this case, the string) and falls towards the outside over it. Turn the upper corner of the *mundi* around the body once clockwise and finally tuck it in front, in the string, over the navel. All these turns should be made around the waistline and under the falling *pallav*.

Pull up the pleats from under the string and the last turn of the upper border. Pull them as much as you can, especially those in the middle. Spread the pleats from the back to the front over the left hip, making a semi-circular, fan-like shape.

The pleated *mundanai* is pinned to the *choli* on the left shoulder. This way, it falls freely in the back.





It seems that at the beginning of the century, Sri Lankan women used 8 or 9 yd saris to have more pleats, which were arranged very carefully to form a graceful cascade of pleats almost all around the waistline, its lowest point being on the left hip.

Older women do not follow the fashion borrowed from the modern Indian sari in the drape of the *mundanai*. Their drape is more typical of this family (see the next sari).

Before starting the drape, fold the height of the *pallav* on the lower border, starting from the lower corner of the *pallav*. The fold is made towards the inside, the upper border making a right angle under the *mundanai*.



Put the folded *mundanai* over the left shoulder. The lower corner of the *pallav*, being the outer point of the triangle, should fall in the back until it reaches the level of the thighs.

Drape the rest of the sari as explained above. Since the *mundanai* of this style is shorter, it will make more pleats.

After the drape is finished and the upper corner of the *mundi* has been tucked over the navel, take the lower corner of the *pallav*, pull it under the right arm towards the front and tuck it in the string.

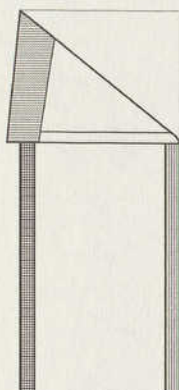
Until the beginning of this century it was common, once the sari was draped as I have just described, to finish by wrapping the folded *mundanai* around the waistline counter-clockwise, instead of leaving it on the left shoulder. This way, the upper part of the body was not covered by the drape, but an elaborate shirt or a *choli* was worn to cover the chest.



G The Koli sari

Along the coast of the Bombay area the *Kolis*, the aborigines of this part of India, are mostly fishermen. They live in separate villages where men and women still wear their own peculiar drapes. (For the men see p. 106.)

The women wrap a curious and complicated style clearly related to *Gond* saris. Although the final result often does not cover much of the body, a full 9 yd sari is required. In fact, it seems here that the twisted belt of the past has grown to hide the essential parts of a woman's body, and is hence worn alone.



The basic drape does not really change, but women make important variations in the length covering the legs by adjusting the pleats and folds. Here (right) is a drawing of the drape at its longest.

The 9 yd sari is traditionally made of thin cotton cloth, but nowadays nylon and polyester are more popular.

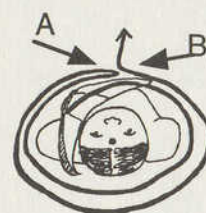
Begin by folding the height of the *pallav* on the lower border, starting from the lower corner of the *pallav*. Make the fold towards the outside, the upper border making a right angle under the *mundanai*.



Throw the lower corner of the *pallav* over the left shoulder in the reverse (the "good side" and the folded upper border towards the body). Let it fall in the back to the level of the thighs.

The upper border should start under the folded *mundanai* at the level of the breasts. It should be on the reverse side. Take the reversed upper border and pass it under the right arm, across the back (all at the waistline level), and under the left arm. Pull it slightly over the navel. Hold this point (A) to tie the knot of the closing.

Fold the upper border backwards (it now comes with the "good side" up) and pass it back under the left arm, across the back, under the right arm and finally pull it in front (B). Make a knot with the fold of the upper border coming from the left (A) and the upper border once it has come around the waistline (B). Notice that the closing is made on top of the *mundanai* falling from the left shoulder in the back and in front.



The lower border falls straight from the left shoulder to the left foot. It is held by the closing, made over it. Once the closing is thus secured, pass the upper border around the waistline counter-clockwise.



Take the lower border and bring it loosely (reversed) to the level of the waistline. Tuck it in the closing on the left side of the abdomen, then pass it around the body counter-clockwise.

The sari is then folded in two in the height and a part of the cloth should be falling in front of the legs. Hereafter, I will call this part the apron. Pull down this apron as low as possible and hold it between the thighs. Once the sari has come around the waistline folded in two in the height, take it from under the right arm and twist it.





▶ Pass it twisted counter-clockwise around the waistline, across the abdomen, under the left arm and across the back.

▶ Untwist it as it reaches the right hip. Notice that in the back you have the first turn of the sari, folded in two in the height and covering the buttocks, and the belt-like twisted second turn over the waistline. In front, the apron still falls under the twisted sari. It should be pulled down and firmly held between the thighs (I have represented it here falling loosely, and not held, for a better understanding of the drape).

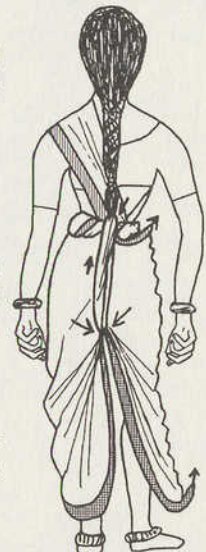
▶ Untwist the sari as it comes from under the right arm. Pass the upper border counter-clockwise around the waistline once more. Tuck it in the closing on the right part of the abdomen after this third turn.



▶ The lower border falls in front from the right hip to the left foot and then goes around the feet counter-clockwise.

▶ Take the apron, which was held until now between the thighs, pull it down and pass it between the legs. Pull it up in the back as much as possible and tuck it in the closing on top of the belt.

▶ Take care to push the cloth falling in the back up and forward between the thighs. This drape has to be extremely tight, to the extent that the apron passes between the buttocks. The belt can be placed either under or above the third turn of the cloth, according to personal taste. (Right, it is represented above the sari, seen from the back; and left, under on the sari, seen from the side.)

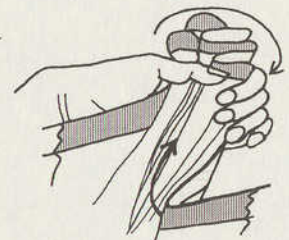


Now we have reached the most important and difficult part of the drape. Tuck the upper border well into the closing over the abdomen.



▶ The upper border should be very loose at this point, compared to the lower. Take the upper border in your left hand and start making tiny pleats or rather creases with the right hand, starting from the part tucked over the abdomen. In other words, take the cloth inch by inch and bring it into the left hand. Hold the cloth firmly, making informal pleats.

▶ Make such pleats over the loose part of the upper border and then across the height of the sari until you reach the lower border.





◀ Since you are making the pleats one by one, you have a great freedom in arranging the fall of the sari. You can have it fall fully along the legs and come up in a large fan-like shape, which can be rounded or made a little squarish (which seems more traditional and is represented here).

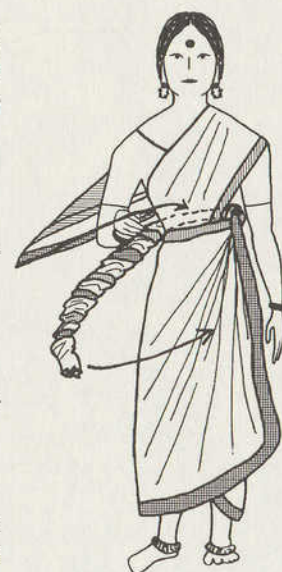
By pulling more of the cloth into the left hand you can also make the sari fall very short and cover only the thighs (see lower). This way, once finished, the sari will hold better.

◀ Once you are happy with the way the sari falls, twist the pleats which are in your left hand and hold everything by twisting tightly the lower border around the top of the pleats.

Twist the rest of the sari tightly up to the *mundi*. Pass it around the waistline counter-clockwise. It should make at least one full turn and come on top of the first belt of twisted cloth (the second turn). Finally, tuck it in itself. ▶

Pull the lower corner of the *pallav* from under the closing in the back, pass it under the right arm to the front and tuck it in the belts on the left side of the abdomen or over the left hip. ▶

The first belt can be placed either under or above the third turn of the cloth, according to personal taste. Depending on how you arranged the sari, one or two belts of twisted cloth should appear in the back.



◀◀ Finally, untuck the apron, pull it up again between the legs and tuck it in the middle of the back over everything (both belts). Optionally, you can keep on holding it between the thighs and wait until now to tuck it in the back.

When following these instructions, you can let the cloth fall to cover the legs or pull it to have a much shorter drape, which is preferred by women when working. In this case, much of the 9 yds of the cloth is twisted around the waistline.



UNIQUE SARIS

I have included in this chapter a small family, the *Lodhi* saris, because there are only two styles in this group. They share this chapter with three other drapes that are half-way between the *nivi* and Dravidian families and two styles which are truly unique and could not be classified in any way. So we must consider that there are altogether six main families of saris, and not five, as well as a few oddities.

I *Lodhi* saris

The women of the *Lodhi* community in Madhya Pradesh wear two drapes that combine different elements of the Dravidian and *nivi* families. We can also detect an influence of the *Gond*-related saris in their apron-like feature. These two saris are very distinctive and deserve to be placed in a family of their own.

The draping of one sari is quite different from the other, but both are tucked between the legs and have a sort of apron falling in front, covering the legs.

A The 6-yard *Lodhi* sari

The shortest sari seems like an attempt to make a *kaccha* with a Dravidian sari. It requires 6 yds, with reversible borders, and is worn over a *choli*.



▶ Hold the upper corner of the *mundi* over the right side of the abdomen.
▶ Pass the sari around the body counter-clockwise and secure the closing by tucking (or rolling) the upper border over the left hip and in the middle of the back. The upper corner of the *mundi* should be tucked out.

▶ Tuck the upper border well into the back and fold the sari, the reversed side going again under the left arm, this time towards the front.

▶ Throw the sari over the right shoulder, the lower border making a fold over the right foot and the upper border falling down to lower than the knee on the left side. If the cloth is really 6 yds (5.5 m) long, let it fall in front a few inches lower than the feet. This will make it easier when this part of the drape is tucked in the back.

The beginning of this drape is similar to the basic *Santal* sari, also found in Madhya Pradesh (see pp. 49-50).

▶ Tuck the upper border in the closing as it passes on the left hip and the lower border as it passes on the right hip. The upper border will eventually be passed from the right shoulder to over the forehead so that the sari covers the head. Remember to leave enough cloth for this when making the rest of the drape.





Take the lower border falling over the feet and pass it between the legs. To make it easier, pull the sari falling all around the closing up and between the legs.

Pull as much as possible, adjusting the draped cloth around the legs. Tuck the lower border in the back on the right side. Pull as much as you can of the sari and tuck it in the back.

In front, the upper border should fall only to the knee. Notice that the sari is seen in the reverse both in front and in the back (in the part that passes between the legs).



Take great care to adjust everything well and tuck as much as you can of the sari in the back.



The *mundanai* is falling from the right shoulder. Take the upper corner of the *pallav* and pass it in front under the left arm. The sari passes in front in the reverse. Fold the upper border towards the inside and hold the upper corner of the *pallav* over the chest, the corner up and the sides falling in the oblique.

Let the upper corner of the *pallav* fall over the upper border held across the abdomen (in the reverse, while the *pallav*, when held up, is with the "good side" up).



Tuck the upper border in the closing over the back of the right hip (at the point where the upper border is folded up) and the back of the left hip (at the point where the edge of the *pallav* falls over the upper border).

The upper corner of the *pallav* should be falling over the *mundanai*, which is covering the front of the legs. Notice that everything you see when the drape is finished is on the reverse side.

If your sari doesn't have reversible borders, start the drape with the "good side" towards the inside (the sari reversed when making the closing). Otherwise, choose this variant:





Bring the *mundanai* in front from under the left arm. Fold it about half-way towards the outside (the "good side" and the *pallav* come on top). Hold both layers of the folded *mundanai* about 8 ins (\pm 25 cm) lower than the upper border and fold the upper part horizontally towards the outside.

Tuck each edge of this fold as far as possible in the back. The edge of the *pallav* and the beginning of the *mundanai* should go under the left arm and the vertical fold under the right arm.

However you drape the *mundanai*, once the drape is finished, take the upper border as it passes on the right shoulder and pull it over the forehead so that the sari covers the head.



B The 9-yard *Lodhi* sari

The longest sari requires 9 yds. It is somewhat reminiscent of Tamil Brahmin saris (see pp. 25-7), but is truly unique.



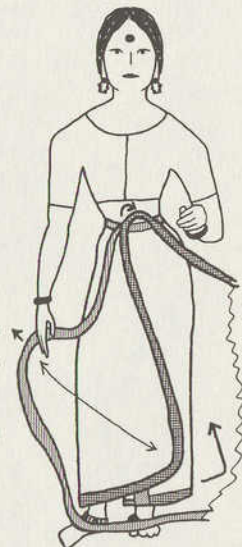
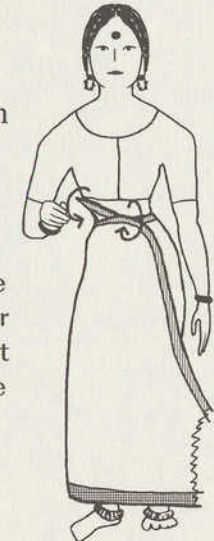
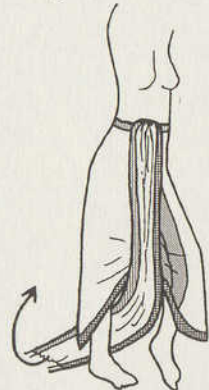
Hold the upper corner of the *mudi* on the right side of the abdomen and pass the upper border around the waistline counter-clockwise. Once the upper border is back in front, roll it with the upper part of the *mudi* over the abdomen to secure the closing.

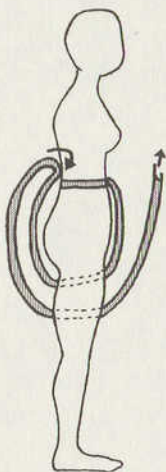
Take the lower border after it has come around the legs and bring it up loosely, while pushing the upper border to the right. The lower border should fall over the feet then go up to the closing where it is firmly tucked in.

This way, you should have both borders falling down after being tucked in the closing over the abdomen.

Take the sari from this point and pass it between the legs. Pull it up as much as possible while adjusting the cloth covering the legs.

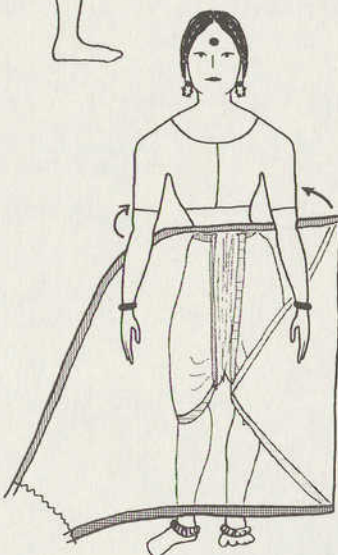
Tuck the whole sari in the back, just as you would do for a Tamil Brahmin sari (see p. 26).





Take the upper border after it is tucked in the middle of the back, pass it forward between the legs and hold it in front on the left side. It should come in front from between the legs in the reverse.

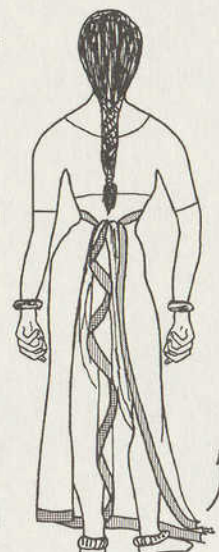
Take the lower border after it is tucked in the middle of the back, pass it forward between the legs and let it fall in front on the left side. It should come reversed from between the legs.



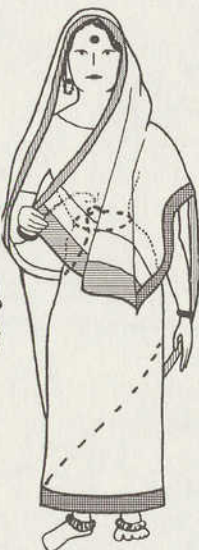
Hold the upper border in front on the left and let the sari fall straight. Fold it towards the right so that it comes with the "good side" up. Stretch a portion of the upper border horizontally in front of you. It should be long enough to go all around the waistline.

Hold it at each end and pass the left side (coming from between the legs) under the left arm and tuck it in the back.

Pass the right side (the beginning of the *mundanai*) under the right arm and tuck it in the back.



This way, a portion of the sari falls straight around the legs, with an opening in the back. On the left there is a fold of the sari and on the right the beginning of the *mundanai*.



Take the upper border after it has been tucked in the back, pass it loosely over the right shoulder, over the forehead, over the left shoulder and across the chest.

Pass the upper border of the *pallav* under the right arm and tuck the knotted upper corner of the *pallav* in the middle of the back.

The *pallav* should fall in front, from under the right arm to over the left hip, not unlike a Gujarati sari but in the opposite direction.

The *mundanai* falling from the head over the back hides the opening in the back.

II Drapes with *nivi* and Dravidian influences

Three drapes belong equally to the Dravidian and *nivi* families.

The Tondaimandalam sari has a bottom part similar to a modern *nivi* sari, while the *mundanai* is typically Tamil. The Muslim *pinkosu* and the Chhattisgarh sari both have a *veshti*-like drape around the legs and a Gujarati *mundanai*.

A The Tondaimandalam sari

In the North-East part of Tamil Nadu, the region called Tondaimandalam, peasant women wear a drape which starts like a *nivi* but ends with the *mundanai* of a Tamil sari. This is not really surprising since the land is between Andhra Pradesh and the ancient Tamil kingdoms.

This sari has been represented in the 19th century, but I doubt that it is much older. It used to be worn by most non-Brahmin women in the area, and is now restricted to a few old low-caste women. It requires an 8 yd sari, preferably of Kanchi cotton (plain body with thin brocaded, contrasting borders) or a silk cloth with similar patterns. It should be worn alone (without *choli* or petticoat).

Since the drape of the *mundanai* is similar to the Salem, Chettiyar and Madurai saris (see pp. 42, 43 and 45), it is best to drape the bottom part with the "good" border patterns turned towards the inside. In other words, start the drape with the cloth up-side down. In the following drawings, I have not reversed the patterns, but followed my usual conventions.



Make the closing with the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border once it has been passed around the waistline counter-clockwise. Secure it with a knot over the right side of the abdomen.

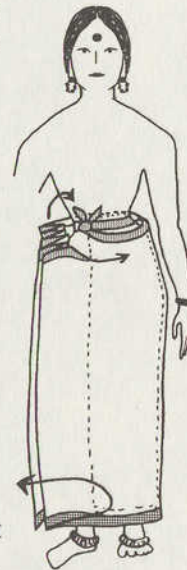


From the knot, pass the sari across the abdomen, over the left hip and in the back, the upper border following the waistline.

Make 8-12 large pleats (depending on the sari's length and the size of your body) with the upper border over the left hip, towards the inside. Tuck the pleats in the closing, turned towards the front.

Tuck the upper border following the pleats on the left side of the abdomen or on the left hip.

Take the lower border of the outermost pleat and fold it backwards (it is then reversed). Pass it up loosely in the back.



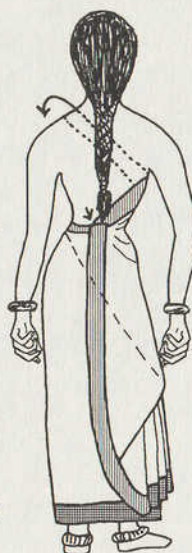
Tuck the reversed lower border in the closing in the middle of the back. ▶ Ideally, the lower border should go up in the middle totally vertically. The fold should come behind the feet. Once it is well tucked in the back, pass the lower border under the right armpit, across the chest and over the left shoulder.



◀ Let the upper border fall down a few inches from the tuck on the left side of the abdomen, then throw it reversed over the left shoulder.

Make pleats on the left shoulder so that the sari does not fall over the left arm. Mark a pleat in the middle of the sari's height and bring it close to the neck.

◀ Fold the *pallav* in two in the height. Make this fold (already marked on the left shoulder) come down loosely from the shoulder to under the right arm. Bring the folded *pallav* to the front from under the right arm. Let it pass loosely across the front and tuck it on the left hip.



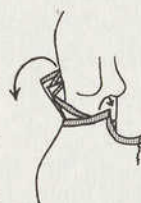
The *mundanai* is rather long. Most of the time, it is attached in a loose manner on the hip. It can also be used as a bag, or, twisted and rolled on top of the head, as a cushion for carrying large pots or baskets.

B The Muslim *pinkosu*

Tamil women converted to Islam are faced with a problem: their traditional drape does not cover the head. Some adopt the modern or Gujarati sari, but older women wear a *pinkosu* with a Gujarati *mundanai*. It requires a 6 yd sari.



Make the closing with a *kosu* ▶ falling either over the back or the right hip, as with a *pinkosu* (p. 40) or a Karaikkal sari (p. 38). Make large pleats with the upper border, starting from the *mundi* (about 5 or 6). While holding the *kosu* over the shoulder-blades, pass the upper border counter-clockwise around the waistline and secure the closing with a thumb knot.



◀ After the knot, tuck the upper border in the closing over the left part of the abdomen. Pass it loose under the left arm, over the head and over the right shoulder. Knot the upper corner of the *pallav*, pass it under the left arm, across the back, and tuck it close to the *kosu*. The sari follows, covering the back and the head. The *pallav* falls across the abdomen.



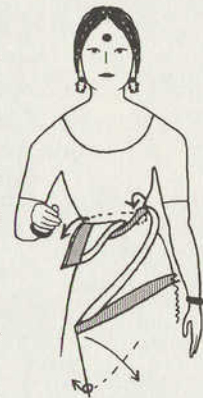
C The sari of Chhattisgarh



I learned this style from the book *Saris of India: Madhya Pradesh* by Chishti and Samyal. I have tried it on myself and hope I have understood its finer details correctly. It is worn by many communities in Madhya Pradesh.

This sari is a cross between a Dravidian drape and a Gujarati sari (see p. 57), which is not surprising since the area where it is found is between Orissa in the east (see p. 46) and Bihar in the north (see p. 58). It requires 6 yds.

To make the closing, hold the upper corner of the *mundi* on the right side of the abdomen. Pass the upper border around the waistline counter-clockwise and tuck it in on the left side of the abdomen. The upper corner of the *mundi* should be tucked out and fall over the closing.



Take the upper border after the closing and make a large fold towards the right. Take this fold about 8 ins (20 cm) down from the lower border and tuck it into the closing under the right arm.



Tuck the upper border after the fold into the closing under the left arm.



Once tucked, pass the upper border under the left arm, over the forehead, down the right shoulder, across the chest, under the left arm and under the beginning of the *mundanai* (when it is going up towards the head).

Pass the whole sari behind the back under the part of the *mundanai* going up, covering the head. Pull the *pallav* across the abdomen and finally tuck the upper corner of the *pallav* over the left hip. For a better hold, tie the upper corner of the *pallav* into a knot before tucking it.



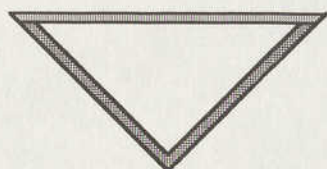
The lower border follows naturally.

III Unique saris

There are two drapes that do not fit into any family, and do not show influences from other saris. The cloth *Koli* men wear is very interesting because it has been depicted on several ancient sculptures from many places throughout India, as early as the 7th century. It must have been quite common, but is now restricted to the men of this tribe. The *Kappulu* sari is a total mystery; it has never been described or represented before in sculptures or paintings, and it is truly unique.

A The drape of *Koli* men

Koli women drape a complicated style of *Gond*-related sari (see p. 95). Their men too have their own drape, made with a triangular piece of cotton, brightly coloured with printed patterns. There are a few representations of this drape all over India, from the early centuries of the Christian era.



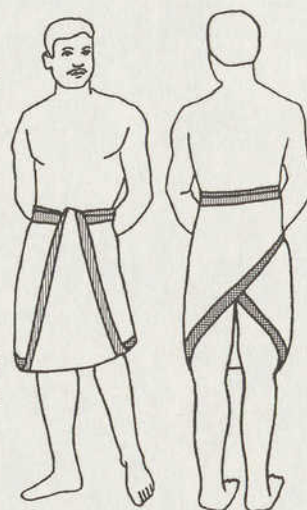
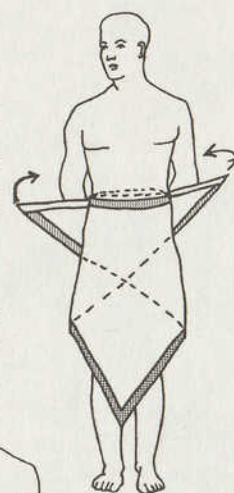
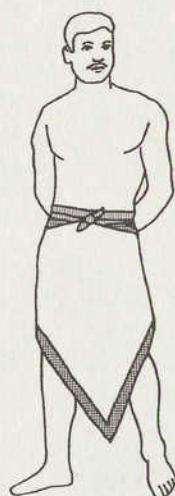
Take the cloth (it is probably especially made for this drape, since it has contrasted borders). Its upper border is approximately 2 yds long.

Hold the upper border across the abdomen, with the point of the lower border falling downwards between the feet. Pass the right half of the upper border under the right arm, across the back, and under the left arm until it is back in front.

Pass the left half of the upper border under the left arm, across the back, and under the right arm until it is back in front.

Tie both ends of the upper border once they are in front into a knot.

Take the point of the lower border falling in front between the feet, bring it up reversed and tuck it into the closing, over the navel.



Some men let the point of the lower border fall (see above), but the most common drape is with the point up and tucked.

B The Kappulu sari

This last drape is rather simple, elegant, yet only a few old women of the *Kappulu* caste wear it. I learned it from women living around Masulipatnam (Machilipatnam) on the coast of Andhra Pradesh. Their husbands grind an auriferous stone commonly found in this area to extract gold.

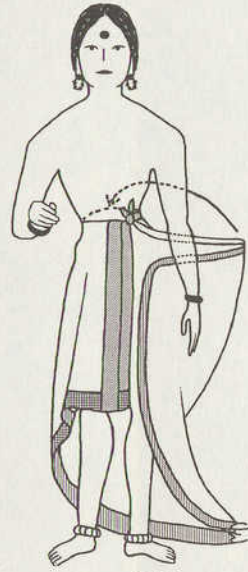
It is like no other sari, with pleats in the back. Since the bottom part of the sari finishes with a tucking and the *mundanai* is only casually thrown over the upper part of the body, it seems obvious that the drape was only meant to cover the lower part of the body, and might have been worn with a separate scarf or even alone in a not-so-distant past. The drape requires 7 yds. It is worn without *choli* or petticoat.



First secure the closing by tying into a knot the upper corner of the *mundi* and the upper border, once it has been passed around the waistline clockwise. This knot should be on the left side of the abdomen. (Note that it is a sari draped towards the right, worn by a "right-handed" caste.)

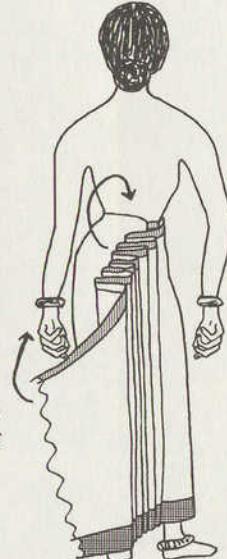
Take the *mundi* in the middle of the height and tuck it into the closing over the abdomen. This shortens the sari in front.

Take the upper border falling on the left, pass it reversed under the left arm along the waistline. Tuck it in the middle of the back, and then fold it, bringing it again under the left arm with the "good side" up. In a way, this makes a very large fold to the left, right up to the middle of the back. Tuck it well into the closing.



Pass the upper border across the abdomen and under the right arm. Tuck it in the middle of the back over the fold coming from the left.

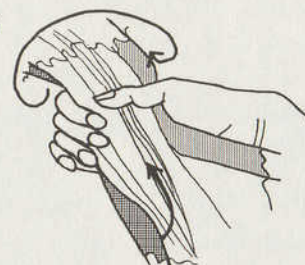
Measure a length of about 3 yds (2,5 m) from the *pallav* to drape the *mundanai*. There should be about 1 yd or a little more (1 m) of cloth left between the last tuck of the upper border coming from under the right arm and the cloth left for the *mundanai*. Pleat this part of the sari, which is falling in the back. Make the pleats towards the outside and tuck them in the closing in the middle of the back, turned towards the right.





Once the pleats are tucked, pass the upper border under the left arm and across the abdomen.

Gather the whole height of the sari in your right hand, close to the right hip, making tiny informal pleats.



The sari should rise in front in an elegant drape, with a fan-like shape. Twist the point where the sari's height is gathered and tuck it well on the right hip.

Pass the informally pleated (creased) sari in the back and under the left arm. Take the upper border from under the left armpit. Throw the sari across the chest and over the right shoulder. The *pallav* falls from the right shoulder to the waistline only.





SARIS IN PERSPECTIVE

Hindu women and men have draped their main garments since prehistoric times. They have created and worn many different styles, some better known than others, following the fashions and expressing the moods of their times. The history of costume in India still remains to be studied fully and an analysis of clothing has yet to be made. My aim here has been to record as many contemporary drapes as possible. I hope it will help future research and provide a basis for an new understanding of drapes.

For instance, although it is well demonstrated that nowadays saris mark caste or ethnic origin, none of the historical studies on Indian clothing has suggested that the different drapes represented on paintings or sculptures could relate not only to fashion but also to ethnic origin. It could be argued that since most of the time we do not have enough information on the people depicted, it is hard to draw conclusions from archaeological evidence only. But on the other hand, it is impossible to imagine that there was absolutely no link between ethnic origin and drapes in the past, and that this relation has appeared only recently.

To provide clues for future researchers and start the difficult task of analysis, I would like to offer some of the findings and conclusions I have come to during the years in which I have studied draping. When I started this study, I classified drapes according to each of the Indian states, as everyone else had done so far. Soon it stopped making sense and the families of saris imposed themselves. But beyond the techniques of draping, do these families have deeper meanings in both cultural and religious terms and historically?

I The family tree of saris

I do not believe in spontaneous generation. Each time I learned a new drape, I wondered how it had been inherited, and how it could relate to those of past times. I am still searching for unique saris. For the other families, answers often came by themselves.

In the 2,200 years covered by archaeological evidence, it is surprising to note that, although there are definitely fashions (for instance the spectacular "jewels only" of the 13th century in South India), drapes did not change much. This is especially true of *dhotis* and *veshtis*, since some of their styles have been worn in totally similar ways through more than two millennia. On the other hand jewels, which were usually added to the garment, have undergone spectacular changes and have eventually tended to decrease. The belts, so numerous and elaborate in the past, have practically disappeared. Even today, much of the fashion concerns the shape of the *choli* and the accessories rather than the drape itself.

Two important cultural influences have deeply modified Indian feminine costumes. From the 8th century onwards Muslim invasions started in North-West India, and Islamic clothing had a tremendous impact in the region. Stitched apparels became common and women started covering their heads and breasts. For the South, we have to wait until the Vijayanagar Empire (14th-16th centuries) to feel the growing need for women to cover their breasts.

In the 17th century, British influence became predominant, and by the time the English left, they had persuaded Indians that only "primitive, uncivilised" women dared go topless. By this point, we are very far from the time (early 13th century) when Marco Polo stopped at St Thomas Mount near Madras and wrote that Hindus wore hardly anything more than jewels, a fashion well represented on the sculptures of that time.

I must say here a word about *cholis*. Paintings from the caves of Ajanta, Maharashtra, to the Kailasa Natar in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu (2nd-8th centuries) have representations of *cholis* as we know them today, covering the breasts and shoulders, with short sleeves. But these were not exclusively a woman's garment. Quite the opposite, they were worn by kings, warriors and mahouts. Queens or high-class women used them sometimes, but certainly not always. In the Kailasa Natar, *Siva's* whole family (including baby *Muruga*) and the king are represented wearing them. Ancient texts confirm that wearing stitched jackets was a privilege. We can safely assume that if *cholis* have existed since the dawn of Indian history, they were not meant to cover women's breasts but were rather an honorific cloth, forbidden in Hindu temples (where even the king must humble himself).

The veil, often mentioned in ancient literature, covered the head, but was rarely draped over the chest, such as commonly represented on sculptures and still worn by some village women in various parts of India.

A Evolution of the *dhotis*

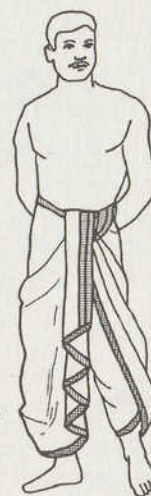
What are now men's *dhotis* have not evolved much. There are sculptures from the 2nd century BC showing drapes that are unmistakably what so many men still wear throughout India. The main changes have been with women's drapes.

For instance, the beautiful reliefs on the *stupa* of Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh, represent women and men wearing beautifully zigzagging classic or Andhra *dhotis* (see pp. 14 or 15). Archaeological evidence shows women with such drapes up to the 14th century at least. An old Tamil Brahmin woman even told me that on special religious occasions, she would wear a *dhoti* to cook.

Three feminine drapes of Andhra Pradesh are clearly adaptations of classic *dhotis*. These are the *Naidu*, Tamil Telugu Brahmin and Telugu Brahmin saris (see pp. 21 to 24). In the first two, the left part of the drape is exactly similar to that of a *dhoti*.

When women decided to use the *mundanai* to cover their breasts, they borrowed from other drapes. The *mundanai* of the *Naidu* sari shows the influence of Gujarati styles, common in nearby Madhya Pradesh and found over most of North India (Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar). The *Naidus*, who were probably culturally closer to North India, imitated the Northern women, whereas the Telugu Brahmins copied the local *nivi*.

The inspiration for all these forms of *mundanai* might very well have been the *dupatta* of North India, such as often depicted in Mughal miniatures. These *dupattas* were draped in several different ways, one of them being similar to the Gujarati *mundanai* and another to the modern sari. It is then very likely that when women decided to wear an upper garment, they borrowed from already well-established drapes, coming from Mughal tradition or from even



older veils that are depicted on numerous sculptures, mostly on men. They might also have been inspired by *Gond*-related saris, for which the drape of the *mundanai* across the chest was probably an ancient tradition.

The Telugu Brahmin sari (see p. 24) is very interesting because the left leg is draped differently, and probably prefigures the Tamil Brahmin sari (see pp. 25-8). Instead of pleating the *mundi* and passing it tightly between the legs, the sari's body passes loosely to the back, giving a very different feel to the sari.

Tamil Brahmin saris are really puzzling. I have not found any representation of these drapes older than the beginning of this century (as with most other saris), and how such complex garments have evolved is not easy to guess, especially since they are quite different from a *dhoti*. The *Aiyar* Brahmin sari (see p. 24) starts with a *kosu*, the characteristic feature of Tamil saris. As I pointed out, it is probably a cross between a *pinkosu* and a Telugu Brahmin sari. It shows that *Aiyar* women were much more closely related to Tamil culture than they think, and that at some point they were familiar with the early forms of *pinkosu* (such as depicted on pp. 34-5).



◀ We have to take a closer look at the symbolism of this garment. On the left side, the pleats of the *kosu* are visible (actually, much more than with a real *pinkosu*) and are supposed to be the feminine part of the sari. The right leg evokes a *dhoti*, and is the masculine part. This refers to the representation of *Siva* as *Ardhanarishvara*, half female (the left), half male (the right). We find the same symbolism with a few other saris, especially the *Marwari* (see p. 61). The lower border appears five times over the lower part of the body, which is a reference to *Siva*'s sacred number. Thus, *Aiyar* Brahmin women use their drape to mark their preference for this god.

Aiyangar saris (see pp. 27-8) are clearly a cross between a *nivi* sari and a *dhoti*, following the same solution as the *Aiyar*. They also have two distinctive sides which could be interpreted as male and female, but *Aiyangar* women do not point it out. The problem is that the *Tengalai Aiyangar* sari wouldn't follow the "female-left, male-right" pattern, since it is the right side which evokes a *nivi* sari. This implies that the symbolism of these drapes is probably an afterthought, and could not be applied in this embarrassing case.

We have to remember that *dhotis* became an exclusively male drape only after the 14th century, at the earliest. It is unlikely that the *Aiyar* or *Aiyangar* saris are older than the 19th or even the beginning of the 20th century. The Brahmin women painted in Madurai in the 17th and 19th centuries wear fishtail saris (see p. 19) and probably reflect what was worn in those days by upper-caste women. It could be argued that these paintings represent scenes of a distant past, but Indian artists always depicted contemporary fashions. Today goddesses wear *nivi* saris with *cholis*, and this is even truer of artwork representing ordinary people in a daily setting, such as these Brahmin women of Madurai.

This takes us to the famous fishtail sari, which is represented in South India on paintings from the 16th to the 19th century. It was not exclusively feminine, although men often preferred the simpler *Chettiyar dhoti* (see p. 18). From the end of the 16th century, women started wearing a separate *mundanai*, a piece of cloth that was usually thinner and smaller than the sari, something like a long scarf. They would drape it sometimes over their chest, but also across their shoulders. It did not necessarily cover the breasts, but was rather an elegant and often transparent addition to the sari. This persisted well into the 18th century.

Only in the 19th do we find the *mundanai*, still separate, being a real part of the fishtail sari. The cloth and colour of this garment were at that time similar to those of the sari. The drape covered the chest and was roughly the same as the *mundanai* of the modern sari.

Eventually the *mundanai* was attached to the *dhoti*, and became the flower-seller's sari (see p. 20). By that time, it seems that this drape was not worn anymore by high-caste women (who had by then invented the Brahmin drapes) but by much lower-caste female workers. Sari styles do "go down the caste ladder". I will discuss this point later in section III.

B Evolution of the *veshtis*

The basic *veshti* is probably the world's most ancient drape. Various styles of it flourished throughout India from the earliest times. The closing was not always made in front but often on one side. Adornments such as zigzagging *pallavs* or belts of twisted cloth reflected the influence of fashion.

One of these changes that would become essential in the South is the *kosu*. It is easy to imagine that, faced with a length of cloth much longer than was necessary to make the closing, some people started to pleat the extra upper border starting from the *mundi*, and let those pleats fall outside over the closing. The *kosu* exists potentially in even the simplest *veshti* drape, as the upper corner of the *mundi* is tucked out of the closing.

It is probable that until the 19th century, non-Brahmin women in Tamil Nadu wore saris similar to the Salem *veshti* (see p. 35) or the pinkosu *veshti-mundanai* (see p. 35). This second drape is very interesting because it has some features which were common in the past but are extremely unusual today. For instance the closing is made on the side rather than in front, and part of the *mundanai* is twisted and used as a belt. Belts made of twisted cloth are very ancient and were often represented on sculptures all over India. Yet today they have practically disappeared, with this notable exception. To some extent we can also consider that the *Koli* sari (see p. 95) has such a belt, although it is not made of a cloth different from the sari.



It is then likely that the Dravidian *mundanai* has evolved from a piece of cloth that could be worn either as a scarf (especially a scarf covering the head as the *mundu* sometimes does, see p. 31) or as a twisted belt. In this case, when women have felt the need to cover their breasts, they have simply let a part of the cloth fall over the chest from the left shoulder, while the rest was twisted and tied around the waistline. Eventually, the *mundanai* joined the *veshti*. We can be quite affirmative about this since the Tamil word *mundanai* refers to a separate piece of cloth worn over the chest, but is also used for that part of the sari which has the same drape. It is also quite obvious that the *kosu* was an already established drape at that time.

If Tamil women until very recently - and some still today - did not feel shy about their breasts, they were much more conscious about their legs. As I pointed out, joining the *mundanai* to the *veshti* has one major inconvenience: it pulls the cloth up, and this opens the bottom part of the sari, revealing the legs (Karaikkal sari, p. 38). One solution is to wrap the cloth twice around the hips (*Tevar* and Madurai saris, pp. 44-5). However this can be inconvenient. Making a large *kosu* in the back is another, far more comfortable solution (*pinkosu* saris, pp. 40-2). Having a small *kosu* on the left hip is also an easy way (*Chettiyar* sari, p. 43).

At some point, *veshtis* must have been common all over India. From medieval times onwards they seem to have been more popular in the South and the East. We still find them in places like Manipur and, indeed, South-East Asia. Women of Orissa are represented with *veshtis* closed on the side in most medieval artwork. They felt the need to cover their breasts much earlier than their Southern counterparts, and it's very likely that the Eastern saris developed the attached *mundanai* in the 17th or 18th century, if not earlier.

Seventeenth-century paintings from Orissa show women wearing a kind of *dhoti* or *kaccha* sari with a separate *mundanai* draped twice around the chest, in the way Oriya and Bengali women wrap the upper part of their saris (see pp. 46-7). This shows that, here again, women borrowed from an already established drape. It is interesting to note that nowadays no woman in these regions wears anything close to a *kaccha* or a *dhoti*. The *mundanai* of the ancient sari was attached to a most simple *veshti*, and the tight-fitting bottom disappeared completely, as did the similar fishtail sari.

C Evolution of the *nivis*

Nivis are quite a puzzle since there is no archaeological evidence which could help in tracing their origin. Since they are the most famous Indian drapes, many writers have conjectured about them, often saying that they might be an adaptation of what is often called a "half-sari", a skirt with a *mundanai*, which I call the **Mughal costume**. Others pretend that they come from the *kaccha* sari, that would have been common in ancient times - the drape of Puranic times.

It seems quite obvious that the drapes of ancient times were *veshtis* and *dhotis* and not *kacchas*. It is true that some of them do tend to look like a Hospet sari (see p. 62), but they might very well be *dhotis*, especially drapes like the *Chettiyar dhoti* (see p. 18). Other drapes (especially men's) are similar to upper *kacchas*, but are most certainly short *dhotis*. From what can be seen on sculptures and paintings, ancient "trouser-like" saris did not have pleats either tucked or rolled on the abdomen, something which is a distinctive feature of *nivis*.

Despite the lack of hard evidence, I give a certain credit to the Telugu claim that *nivi* saris are their own. As I have pointed out, in no other Indian state do we find such a variety of traditional styles. Older women often wear it alone (without *choli* or petticoat) and still drape it only over the lower part of their body. In this way, it could be interpreted as a kind of *veshti* with pleats in front instead of in a *kosu*. We do find drapes akin to *veshtis* but having a bunch of pleats in front of the legs on medieval sculptures, mostly from Orissa, South Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The drape of the *mundanai* might very well have been borrowed from Mughal costumes, brought in the region with the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire. The modern sari might then result from the merging of this *veshti* and a *dupatta*. It might also have been inspired by *Gond*-related drapes, which are probably older and have a similar *mundanai* (although draped first and coming under the closing).

In this case, the modern sari would have come first, and *kacchas* would be an adaptation of the drape to make it look like a *dhoti*. In Orissa and Tamil Nadu we find many 19th-century representations of drapes that are probably fishtails but could also be *kaccha*



saris. In both cases, the separate *mundanai* hides the abdomen and makes it difficult to ascertain the drape's family.

A better clue comes from Mysore where Maharanis wore modern saris made with very long and high clothes, having an incredible number of pleats falling far lower than the feet. Indeed, from the late 19th century, Indian and Sri Lankan aristocracy and upper-class women made their drapes with such huge materials, reported to be more than 11 yds (10 m) long. On some paintings, the middle pleat is tucked in the back in an elegant *kaccha* and it seems that it made it easier to walk with such an impressive cloth. Some authors have also suggested that it made it possible to ride horses (as with the famous Rani of Jhansi).

In any event, *kacchas* are easier to live with than *dhotis*, especially for women, or *nivis*. It is then very likely that they gave up their ancient garments for this more convenient one, having the appearance of a *dhoti*. (Compare the *Marwari dhoti*, p. 17, and the *Marwari sari*, p. 61.)

The *Lingayat* sari (see p. 65) might have a different history. It might have come from a *Gond*-related drape which would have first become the Ceylonese dancer sari (see p. 59) and then evolved to look like a *dhoti* or a *kaccha*. Since, once draped, we cannot distinguish it from any other *kaccha*, it is impossible to study it from visual documents. The sari represented on Oriya paintings might very well be such a drape without the banana, but with the upper border of the pleats arranged like those of a Ceylonese dancer sari. Close to Orissa, the *Waradis* still wear a similar sari.

Upper *kacchas* are another enigma. They are worn by communities in which we also frequently find regular *kaccha* saris. They might have been created for practical reasons, since they are very comfortable to wear and work with.



D Evolution of the tribal saris

"High *veshti*" drapes are rarely represented on ancient paintings or sculptures, but we do find some as early as the beginning of the Christian era. For instance, a dark-skinned woman on a painting in Ajanta (Maharashtra) wears a colourful "high *veshti*" sari and attests to the antiquity of this drape.

"High *veshti*" tribal saris are worn by tribes living in mountains close to areas where normal *veshtis* are common. The cool and humid climate that tribeswomen have to endure probably explains why the closing was brought up above the breasts. We find such an evolution in South India, in the mountains between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and in Eastern India. In both cases the drape of the "high *veshti*" is similar to the non-tribal sari, except that the closing is made above the breasts rather than on the waistline.

Compare the details of the closing in these drapes: on one hand both Manipur saris (pp. 36 and 74) and on the other the Keralese *veshti* and the *Irula* sari (pp. 30 and 73). Both cases show that the *veshti* has simply been raised above the breasts to make the corresponding tribal sari. None of the details of the drape has really changed.

The *Boro mekhla* (p. 75) is interesting because of its second closing around the waistline. It might have been influenced by some Dravidian drapes, especially the *Santal* saris, which have the same oblique fold.

The addition of scarves, shawls, capes, sweaters etc. is also a result of the environment. For instance, the *Irula* capes (p. 73) and the *Badaga* (p. 74) or *Coorg* (p. 81)

headdresses protect the woman from the frequent rains and the permanent humidity of the forest. The *Toda* shawl (p. 77) is thick and protective, and helped the tribesmen pass the severe winters of their lofty abode. The beautiful Manipur scarf (p. 74), which ends in beaded fringes falling over the shoulders, is, on the other hand, a rather decorative addition.

The "right-shoulder" tribal saris are more of a puzzle, since they are worn by such different ethnic groups, living in very varied conditions. The *Coorgs* and the *Kurumbas* (p. 78) have to adjust to the cool and humid climate of the upper slopes of the Ghats, but the *Hallaki Gaudas* (p. 83) live in a rather dry and hot environment. The only thing they have in common is that they dwell more or less close to the Western seacoast.

Although both *Hallaki Gauda* and *Gaudi* saris (p. 84) show the strong influence of the other local drapes, they have preserved almost as a token of their identity the knot of the *mundanai* on the right shoulder. Since these tribes do not cover the upper part of the body to survive in a cold and humid climate, they have reduced the *mundanai* to hide mostly the breasts, and not the back. To achieve this they needed the addition of a ribbon. Because these tribeswomen do not wear *cholis*, their *mundanai* is such that it safely covers the breasts. (Note that they live in areas where women traditionally wear *cholis* and feel shy about their chest.)

Many tribes in Eastern India (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland) wear saris or shawls draped in the "high *veshti*" or "right-shoulder" styles, and sometimes both types can be found on members of the same tribe. The shawls are usually in addition to stitched clothes. Others wear drapes akin to the *veshti-mundu*. This shows that most tribal saris come from the simple and universal drape, the *veshti*, adapted to fit harsh climatic conditions.

E The *Gond*-related and unique saris

The *Gond*-related family is really a challenge. How come that some *Gonds* and Sri Lankan women share the exact same drape (see p. 93)? Why do the unrelated *Kolis* (p. 95) have a similar style? Could it be purely by chance or are there other links between them? These are some of the questions a study on sari's draping techniques raises. To find answers, it would take an in-depth study of the ethnic groups concerned, to see if there are other similarities, and if there is, indeed, a link. It is far beyond the scope of this modest book.

Three drapes combine elements of two main families, the Dravidian and the *nivi*. The Muslim *pinkosu* and the sari of Chhattisgarh (p. 105) are *veshtis* with a Gujarati *mundanai*. The Tondaimandalam sari (p. 103) is a cross between a *nivi* (with pleats almost in front) and a Dravidian sari (the drape of the *mundanai* is similar to that of many other Tamil saris, like the *Chettiyar* for instance, see p. 43). Note that the drapes come from areas where styles of both families are common.

The *Lodhi* saris (pp. 99-103) show influences from Dravidian and *kaccha* families, but they are also quite distinctive. I could not find any ancient drape to which they could have been related.

The drape of *Koli* men (p. 106) has been depicted in a few sculptures from various places all over India. It is then very ancient and might have been more common than it is today.

The *Kappulu* sari (p. 107), which is far from being a simple drape, does not seem to have any precedent, and it is hard even to find an influence from another family. All I can say is, given the way it is draped, it is very likely that at some point the *mundanai* was either tied around the waistline or did not exist at all.

II The Geography of saris

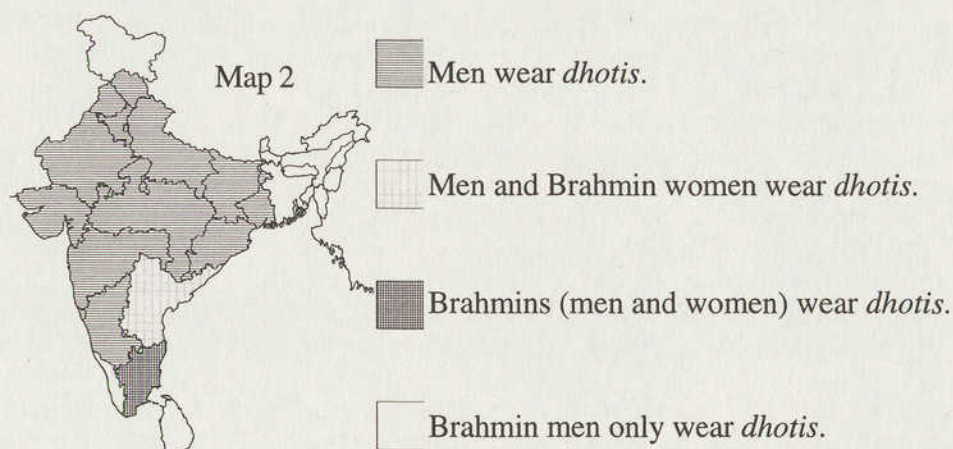
Map (1) of India indicating the states:



Saris are worn all over India and beyond. Drapes that come from *dhotis* or *veshtis* are found not only in neighbouring countries but also in most of South-East Asia. Only in the West has Muslim influence imposed stitched clothes (in Pakistan, Rajasthan, Punjab, Kashmir - see map 6).

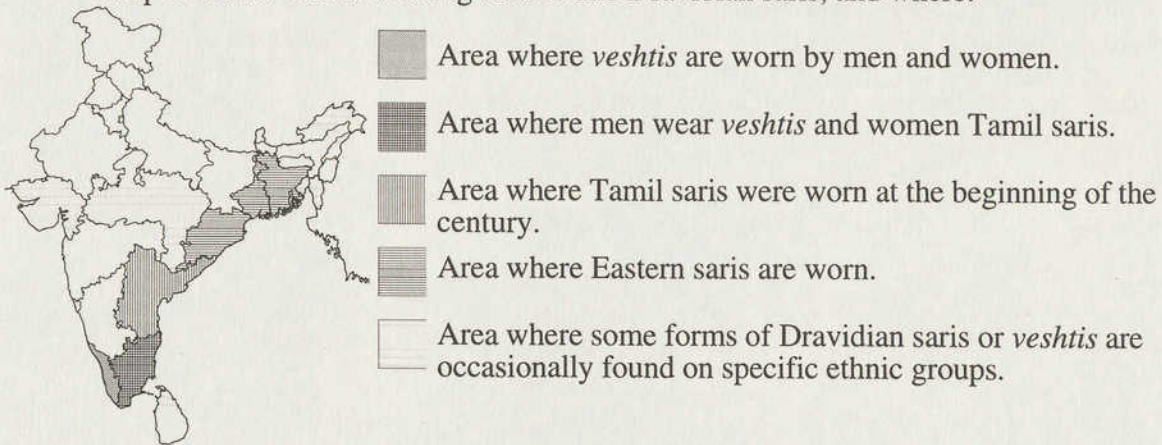
In a distant past, *dhotis* and *veshtis* were worn everywhere and some fashions seem to have swept the whole country. It is not then surprising that today we find forms of these two basic drapes everywhere in the subcontinent.

Map 2 shows who is wearing *dhotis*, and where (including *dhoti-saris*):

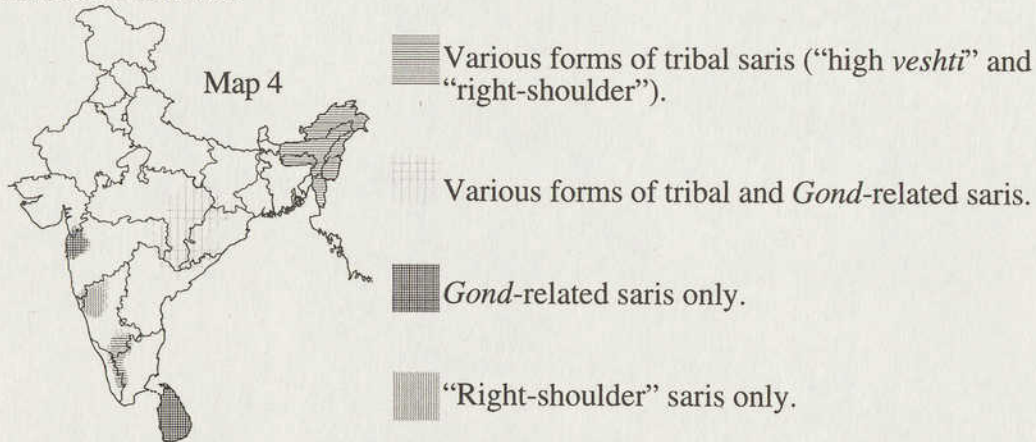


Compare this map (2) with the following (3). *Veshtis* are absent from most of North-West India. Yet, if South-East Asia was added to these map, then *veshtis* would appear as far more widespread than *dhotis*.

Map 3 shows who is wearing *veshtis* and Dravidian saris, and where:

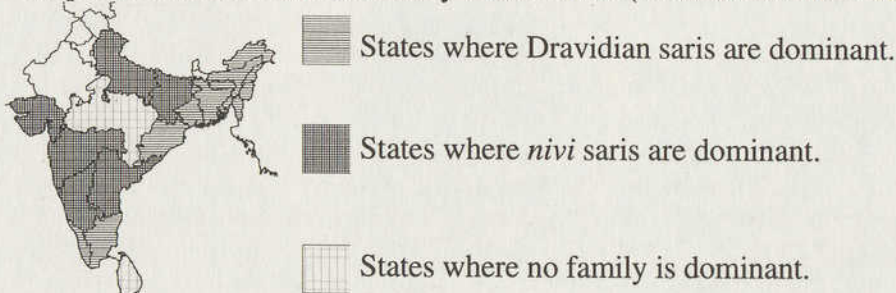


Compare this map (3) with the following one (4), showing the distribution of tribal and *Gond*-related families:



Notice a certain convergence between the two maps. Tribal and *Gond*-related saris are mostly worn in mountainous areas, and hence are more limited than Dravidian saris. Yet, apart from the "right-shoulder" saris worn by *Hallaki* and related *Gaudi* tribes who live in the middle of the Western Ghats, tribal and Dravidian saris are often neighbours. Since many tribes (in Surat and in Madhya Pradesh, and Eastern India) wear Dravidian styles, these families obviously share a common ground, and probably not only in the physical sense of the term.

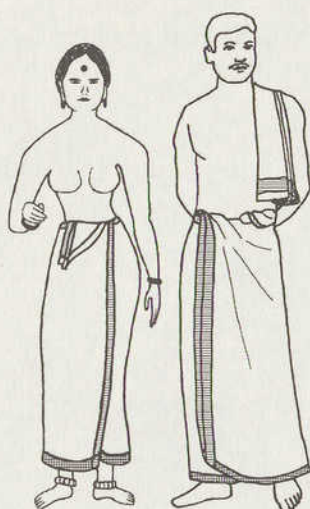
Map 5 shows the dominant family in each state (for women's saris only):



From these maps we can see that there is a convergence between *veshtis*, tribal and Dravidian saris as well as between *nivis* and *dhotis* when worn by men of all castes.

Sometimes, we also have a relation between men's and women's drapes. This is especially true in Tamil Nadu and Kerala where both are from the same family, the *veshtis*, or the *dhotis* for the Tamil Brahmins:

A Keralese couple:
(see pp. 30 and 31)



A Tamil non-Brahmin couple:
(see pp. 42 and 31)



A Tamil Brahmin couple:
(see pp. 27 and 13)

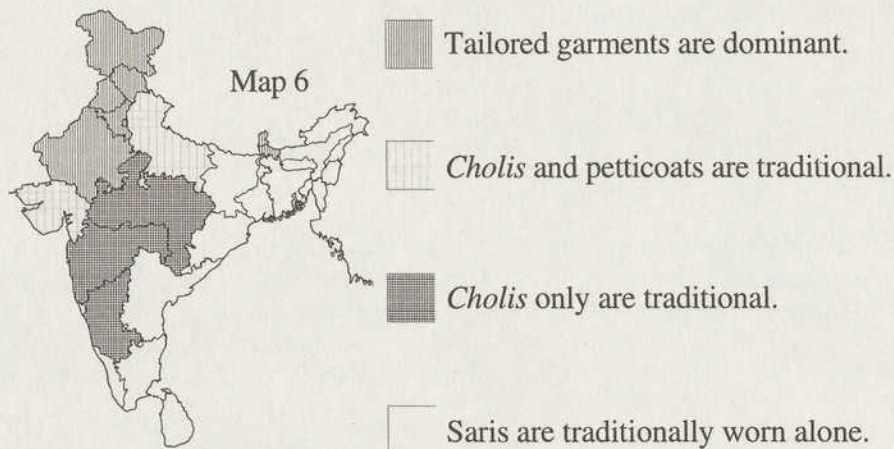


The external resemblance between the *Marwari dhoti* (see p. 17) and the *Marwari sari* (see p. 61) is striking. Yet these drapes are completely different and do not belong to the same families.

They have probably influenced each other, but it's impossible at this time to say how.

We know that Indians wore stitched clothes since at least the beginning of historical times. The oldest Tamil literature speaks of jackets - for kings and generals. Hinduism, probably under the influence of Jainism which abhorred any reference to weapons and needles, banned stitched clothes from temples. For centuries drapes became the only proper clothes, except for deserving men and higher-class women. (Although there were always exceptions to the rule.)

Women from the states under the direct and oldest influence of Islam are the only ones to have adopted stitched garments at an early stage. This is still obvious today when looking at map 6, below, showing where tailored clothes, cholis and petticoats are traditional:



In relation with the following section (see p. 121), the map below (7) shows what Hindu women feel important to hide with their drapes and other clothing. Of course nowadays most women think they should cover everything, and would not even dare go out without a sleeved *choli*. This map is true of the situation at the beginning of this century. It is rather conservative in the sense that, at home, many women even in North-West India did not wear an upper garment and were topless. This is a very broad and imprecise map. In each state, each caste had different standards. This is just an indication of dominant trends.



III Saris and social values

The clothing of humanity is full of profound significance, for the human spirit not only builds its own body, but also fashion its own dress ... (Carl Köhler, *A History of Costume*, 1963, p. 52)

Köhler points out very rightly in his book that the study of costume is far from futile and helps us understand not only how people were clothed but also what values were important to them. Understanding ancient societies goes through a careful analysis of clothing:

We are far too ready to carry back to the costumes of bygone days our modern conceptions of what is becoming... (ibid., p. 49)

How true this is of India!

The saris of today are very different from that of past centuries because the values of Indian society have changed a lot. The modern sari is a reflection of democracy and Victorian puritanism. It is meant to hide the wearer's caste and body.

The numerous drapes I call traditional are not much older than the 19th century and reflect the end of the British Raj. They evoke a society with a strict hierarchy marked by a strong caste identity. They have evolved to hide a woman's body from men who have lost their self-control. Yet, they carry the memory of ancient garments and act as a link between the future, when only the modern sari will survive, and the past.

A Drapes and social hierarchy

Hierarchy is an essential element of Indian society, which of course is reflected in the values attributed to the different styles of drapes. This hierarchy of drape is very clearly expressed. For instance, both the *Aiyar* (p. 25) and *Aiyangar* saris (p. 27) are called in Tamil *madisaru*, meaning "superior sari". Tribal drapes are deemed inferior, to the extent that Sri Lankan women give up their traditional costume (which belongs to the *Gond*-related family, with clear tribal association) for the modern Indian sari.

The modern sari is, in this context, a revolution, a truly egalitarian, democratic drape. It shows a real modernity, leading Indian women towards a new society. It is a strong, marked break with the preceding century, in which the number of drapes increased and diversified to the effect that almost each local caste had its own particular style.

It is interesting to note that drapes were most numerous and indicative of caste during the time of the British Raj. It is certainly not a pure coincidence. As Derrett rightly pointed out in his book *Religion, Law and the State in India* (1968), in the 18th and early 19th centuries the British made their own interpretations of Sanskrit legal scriptures and thus strengthened the caste system. Derrett says: "In India theory got the upper hand of the Hindu Law, but it was theory almost uncontrolled by experience" (p. 341). And it was the Brahmin's theory, with an idealistic view of his role in Hindu society. The census, in which people had to indicate their caste, also had a strong impact on Indians. They were forced to define their place in a tighter hierarchy and this probably led to the marking of this newly reinforced identity by a distinguishing drape.

Archaeological evidence often depicts the higher strata of society (the gods, kings, or patrons rich enough to build a temple). Only occasionally do we see representations of poorer people. The Tamil saint *Kannappa* is a good example, since he was a tribesman. He is invariably shown wearing a very short *veshti*. From these few paintings and sculptures we can clearly see that clothing also indicated hierarchy in the past.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, women and men wore *dhotis* (as represented on the sculptures of the *stupa* of Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh). From medieval times it seems that *dhotis* were mostly worn by high-class people, and later by men only. *Veshtis* were for commoners, poorer people and women. Today, *dhotis* are only worn by men, and saris evolved from *dhotis* are exclusively meant for Brahmins and a few higher castes.

Since *dhotis* are thought superior, it might be possible that *nivi* saris became *kaccha* in an effort to rise in the social hierarchy. At the beginning of the century, *kaccha* drapes were worn by aristocratic women, either because it was the only way to walk with an out-of-proportion sari or because it allowed them to ride horses (an explanation sometimes given for the *Marwari* sari). Nowadays it is considered low-caste, probably because it's practical, and is mostly worn by hard-working women.

Because women tend to adopt higher drapes, saris go down the caste ladder and are eventually given up. For instance, tribeswomen in Tamil Nadu adopt *pinkosus* rather than their traditional "high *veshti*" or "right-shoulder" garments. Villagers, who wore *pinkosus*, are changing them for *nivis*. Brahmins, who wore fishtails, probably abandoned them when lower-caste women started draping them. These in turn gave them up when the British convinced them that a decent woman hid her legs and breasts properly.

The sari which prompted me to do this study, the Tondaimandalam (p. 103), is thus vanishing. Earlier in this century it was worn by most non-Brahmin women in the region. A few decades ago it became a low-caste sari and now only a few old *Harijan* women drape it. The modern sari is now the only one found in Tondaimandalam (the part of Tamil Nadu south of the Andhra border).

B Drapes and nudity

On my first trip to India, in 1980, I was in a bus, wearing a sari, when an older man came and sat next to me. He soon explained that he was a Brahmin and was very happy to see that I was "dressed modestly like an Indian woman". At the time I knew nothing of Indian clothing and couldn't reply that this had not always been the case.

Educated Indians are nowadays only too eager to pretend that their womenfolk have always been as puritanical as they are supposed to be today. They associate nudity with the loose morals attributed to Westerners. They have fully adopted the views of Moslems and Victorian Britons that the only way to control sexuality is to hide women's body.

This was not the case in Ancient India. Indian society was by no means permissive. Chastity was an essential value, but so was self-control. Women did not feel the need to cover their breasts, and often wore very transparent clothes. It was normal, accepted by everybody and did not have any immoral connotation.

Veils, shawls, *dupattas* and *cholis* abound in ancient literature, on sculptures and paintings. But they were not specific feminine garments and did not necessarily cover the breasts. For instance, a Tamil ballad of the 19th century says that non-Brahmin women use a

cloth to cover their head, because they work outside. But old women who still do are often topless.

In interpreting ancient texts we must be very careful not to use our modern conceptions of drape and of what we consider proper. Even today in many rural villages women do not wear blouses or even go topless. Ancient paintings and sculptures show us that the veils were usually a decorative addition to the main sari. Women draped them in various ways, but rarely across the chest.

Modern Indians will have to deal with the fact that their ancestors did not think that breasts should be hidden, even though it was thought a sensuous part of the body (in women and *men*). According to ancient Indian literature, not many parts of the body have no appeal. Descriptions of even chaste women go down from the elegance of the parting of their hair to the beauty of their toenails. Here is a small part of a description of a girl who is "The Perfect Bride" (van Buiten, 1959, p. 158). A man describes the prospective bride he is meeting with her parents:

The calves are perfectly curved, and the knees are hardly noticeable, as though they were swallowed by the sturdy thighs. The loin dimples are precisely parallel and square and shed lustre upon buttocks round as chariot wheels ...

The broad-based breasts with proud nipples fill the full region of her chest. Her copper-red fingers, straight and well rounded, with long, smoothed, polished nails like glistening gems, adorn hands which show the happy signs of abundance of grain, wealth and sons ...

The description goes on and on, and this is not unusual. The girl is depicted as if naked, because she only wears a transparent *veshti*. Even so, this text is rather moral and ends with:

Conquered by her virtues, her husband put the entire household in her charge and, depending body and soul on her alone, applied himself to the pursuit of Virtue, Wealth, and Love. Thus, I say, a wife's virtue is a man's happiness. (*ibid.*, p. 160)

The chaste and virtuous wife does not have to cover her beauty. The power of her chastity is enough to protect her, even though her perfect body is indeed sexy. In fact, men more often than women used their *mundanai* to cover the upper part of their body. We might think that since they are never chaste, their bare chest could be attractive. In ancient Tamil poems, desire often rises in women as they watch the muscular breasts of warriors.

Nowadays, most women in North-West India traditionally wear *cholis*, and this is probably a result of Muslim influence. Women in South and Eastern India did not feel shy about their breasts until very recently, and many old women still don't. Yet, when it comes to showing the legs, it's practically the opposite. Only in Orissa do women wear no *choli* and have a sari that opens widely in front. See maps 6 and 7 (section II, p. 119).

Muslim influence has also imposed the covering of the head over a very large part of North India. Only in the land protected by the Vijayanagar Empire (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, the South of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh), as well as with some tribes in various places (especially in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and the Eastern States) have women kept their heads uncovered.

Last but not least, the puritanical influence of the British has convinced a majority of women that *cholis* and petticoats are a must. Of all the Indian queens, Victoria was the only one "modestly dressed".

Conclusion

Everywhere in the world people give up their traditional garments for Western clothes. From the richest Saudi wives who can afford to wear France's Haute Couture under their Islamic veils to the poorest slum-dweller of Manila in nondescript T-shirt and blue jeans, daily dress is no more a statement of identity, but rather one of wealth and social class. Our clothes make us citizens of the world. Except for Indian women, and even men to a large extent.

Before 1947, India did not exist. It was a collection of small kingdoms and separate British territories. In each of these, there was a great variety of castes and tribes. Each group felt apart and there was no subcontinent solidarity at any level, even among Hindus (Hinduism fully reflects ethnic variety). It took Mahatma Gandhi to unite these thousands of castes, people and tribes, and this only at a fairly superficial level, especially when it comes to South India where state culture comes first.

Indians, too, are giving up the garments that marked their caste or their culture. Now they show their "Indianness" by wearing the modern sari (or, for men and young women, other specific clothes like the punjabi, the "Nehru style" etc.). For the great majority of them, belonging to India is already a big step, the rest of the world can wait.

We cannot stop time and evolution. Education and progress are desirable, and also inevitable. But if we fight hard and spend millions to save endangered animal species, why not make a little effort to preserve human cultural heritage too? Drapes are an important part of India's culture, yet not much has been done to record and understand their variety.

The past century or so has been very important for the art of draping in India. It is almost certain that at no other time in the world's history will we find such a large and meaningful variety of drapes. It is almost already too late to study these traditional saris. I remember the day I saw a photograph of the flower seller's sari (see p. 20). I wondered how this drape could be achieved and couldn't sleep that night until I had figured it out. I managed to understand this one, but many (the *Koli* drape for instance, p. 95) required real field study, with the women who still wear them.

There are so many fields in India to be researched, such huge parts of culture and history that have barely been studied with any objectivity, that to spend time on the art of draping may seem utterly futile. Indian civilisation has too often been understood through the exclusive use of Sanskrit, a language spoken by a tiny male minority. The women I met usually spoke only a couple of local languages or dialects. For too many scholars, they are only illiterate women, in other words, nothing. Because most of their rituals, culture, and gestures when draping a sari have never been described in Sanskrit, they are deemed uninteresting. Yet, it was a great privilege for me to meet them and learn from them not only how to drape, but other traditions which they thought important to teach me.

The woman who taught me the *Pullaiyar* sari (p. 80) was about 4 feet tall, and so old that no-one in the village knew her age. She was illiterate and spoke a dialect of Tamil I hardly understood. But I could see she was happy to give me what she clearly perceived as part of her culture and identity. When I left she took my hand and said: "Go and tell others who we are." From her village, I walked several miles through the jungle to the nearest road - a mountain road partially destroyed by the rains - and eventually came back to France, keeping the photograph I had taken of her as a treasure.

Now she is probably dead, but not the drape she was the last one to wear. Her children live in a better society, and are a little less "untouchable" than she was. Her daughters wear *pinkosus*, her grand-daughters modern saris. Does it mean that her life was totally unimportant? That her culture was not worth anything? Is peasant, low-class India (non-Brahmin) so meaningless that it doesn't deserve study outside what Sanskrit texts tell us about it? More and more academics don't think so. Yet until now no-one has ever had any interest in the way the different styles of saris (especially those worn by low-caste and tribal women) are draped.

I didn't do this lengthy and difficult research just for the sake of glorifying the past. I made it for the future. This book is not an achievement, but a beginning. I hope it will raise an interest in drapes, not only in India but in general. Archaeologists, ethnologists, artists, stylists, etc. need such studies to understand the clothing of the past, present and future.

To a large extent, saris are also the expression of women's creativity and could inspire anyone. I don't believe that these drapes should simply be recorded and then be confined to dusty libraries in the future. Most of us Westerners think that people drape because they don't know how to stitch. This wasn't true of the Romans, and Indians have always had additional stitched garments. Even though Indian women, clad in their elegant saris, evoke in us visions of our antiquity, they live right now in the 20th century. Drapes have many advantages over stitched clothes, especially when beauty is an important value. Saris are much more practical than we think, especially since they can be so easily modified.

Saris are fun to wear. From the material of this book, they can be tried by anyone, and more styles can be created. By teaching workshops on draping, I have learned that there is for each woman one drape that fits her perfectly. It's not often the modern sari, and can be any of the styles in this book, or even one the woman invents for herself. I also made this work for anybody who wants, at least once, to wear a drape, any kind of drape.

Draping is an art. I hope this book will help it take its place as a heritage of mankind.

Appendix

I Dimensions of some actual saris:

Saris were measured in centimetres. Yards, feet and inches are indicated in brackets. Since cotton shrinks when washed, I have indicated whether these saris were new (not yet washed) or had been washed. This was not relevant for silk or synthetic fabrics.

- *Mundu* (towel): bought in Kanchipuram, light white cotton with maroon borders, new: 79 x 174 cm (2 ft, 7 ins x 1 yd, 2 ft, 9 ins).

- *Mundanai*: bought in Kanchipuram, light white cotton with red/green borders (night/day borders), new: 106 x 187 cm (3 ft, 6 ins x 2 yds, 2 ins).

- 2-yard *veshti*: bought in Kanchipuram, thick white cotton with little borders, washed: 106 x 166 cm (3 ft, 6 ins x 1 yd, 2 ft, 4 ins).

- 4-yard *veshti*: bought in Kanchipuram, light white cotton with red/green borders (night/day borders), new: 122 x 348 cm (4 ft x 3 yds, 2 ft, 4 ins).

- 5-yard *dhoti*: bought in Kanchipuram, light white cotton with yellow and green borders, new: 134 x 405 cm (4 ft, 5 ins x 4 yds, 1 ft, 4 ins).

- 5-yard sari from Orissa, silk and cotton mix, *ikat* with lion motifs, from Nuapatna, new: 113 x 464 cm (3 ft, 11 ins x 5 yds, 3 ins).

- 5-yard sari from Bengal, green cotton with one white brocade border, at least 20 years old, washed: 108 x 412 cm (3 ft, 7 ins x 4 yds, 1 ft, 6 ins).

- 6-yard sari from Orissa, silk, *ikat* with floral motifs, from Nuapatna: 114 x 544 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 5 yds, 2 ft, 10 ins).

- 6-yard sari from Orissa, cotton, *ikat* with landscape *pallav* and forest body, at least 30 years old, from Sambalpur, new: 115 x 556 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 6 yds, 3 ins).

- 6-yard sari from Bengal, *tussah* silk, *jambdani* floral motifs, from Calcutta: 115 x 508 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 5 yds, 1 ft, 8 ins).

- 6-yard sari from Bengal, white cotton with *jambdani* floral motifs, from Calcutta, new: 128 x 556 cm (4 ft, 2 ins x 6 yds, 3 ins).

- 6-yard sari from Kanchipuram, silk, yellow body and one violet border with *zari* brocade, at least 20 years old: 113 x 500 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 5 yds, 1 ft, 5 ins).

- 6-yard sari from Kanchipuram, silk, pink body and red borders with *zari* brocade: 123 x 544 cm (4 ft, 2 ins x 5 yds, 2 ft, 10 ins).
- 6-yard sari from Kumbhakonam, silk, blue body and one large violet border with elaborate weaving patterns: 117 x 516 cm (3 ft, 10 ins x 5 yds, 1 ft, 11 ins).
- 6-yard sari from Madurai, cotton, green body and one red border with small *zari* brocade, washed: 115 x 520 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 5 yds, 2 ft, 1 in).
- 6-yard sari from Poochampalli, silk, *ikat* with animal motifs and red borders with *zari* brocade: 115 x 484 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 5 yds, 11 ins).
- 6-yard sari from Poochampalli, silk and cotton mix, double *patola*, for export to Gujarat, new: 111 x 500 cm (3 ft, 7 ins x 5 yds, 1 ft, 5 ins).
- 6-yard sari "Kashmiri silk", green and black prints on a white background: 116 x 468 cm (3 ft, 10 ins x 5 yds, 4 ins).
- 6-yard fashionable sari, synthetic fabric with fancy motifs, bought in Kanchipuram: 113 x 512 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 5 yds, 1 ft, 10 ins).
- 7-yard sari from Guntur, cotton, red body and one small dark blue border with *zari* brocade, washed: 115 x 594 cm (3 ft, 9 ins x 6 yds, 1 ft, 6 ins).
- 8-yard sari from Kanchipuram, cotton and synthetic mix, green and blue checks with blue borders: 111 x 660 cm (3 ft, 8 ins x 7 yds, 8 ins).
- 9-yard sari from Madurai, cotton, dark blue body and red borders with *zari* brocade, two pallavs, washed: 120 x 826 cm (3 ft, 11 ins x 9 yds, 1 in).
- 9-yard sari from Maharashtra, cotton, green body and borders with *zari* brocade, washed: 121 x 766 cm (4 ft x 8 yds, 1 ft, 2 ins).
- 9-yard sari from Maharashtra, silk, violet body and red borders with thin *zari* brocade: 126 x 786 cm (4 ft, 2 ins x 8 yds, 1 ft, 10 ins).
- 9-yard sari from Kanchipuram, silk, light blue body and dark blue borders with yellow brocade: 112 x 830 cm (3 ft, 8 ins x 9 yds, 3 ins).
- Real *Toda* shawl, thick white cotton with wool embroideries, red and black lines made with natural dyes: 138 x 403 cm (4 ft, 6 ins x 4 yds, 1 ft, 3 ins), folded in two.
- *Boro mekhla* from Guwahati, thick cotton and synthetic mix, with lines of blue, red and green brocade: 132 x 280 cm (4 ft, 4 ins x 3 yds, 2 ins).

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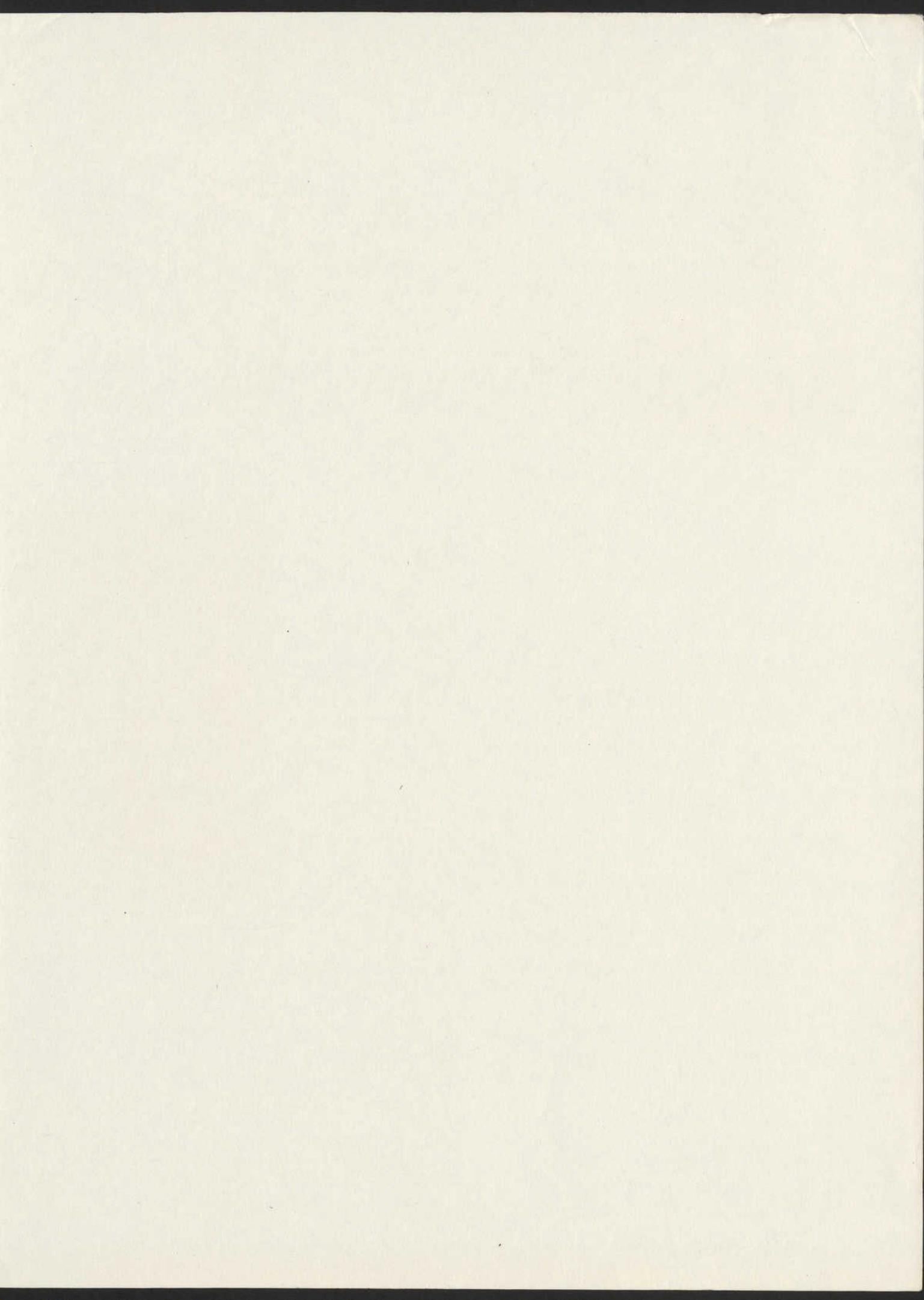
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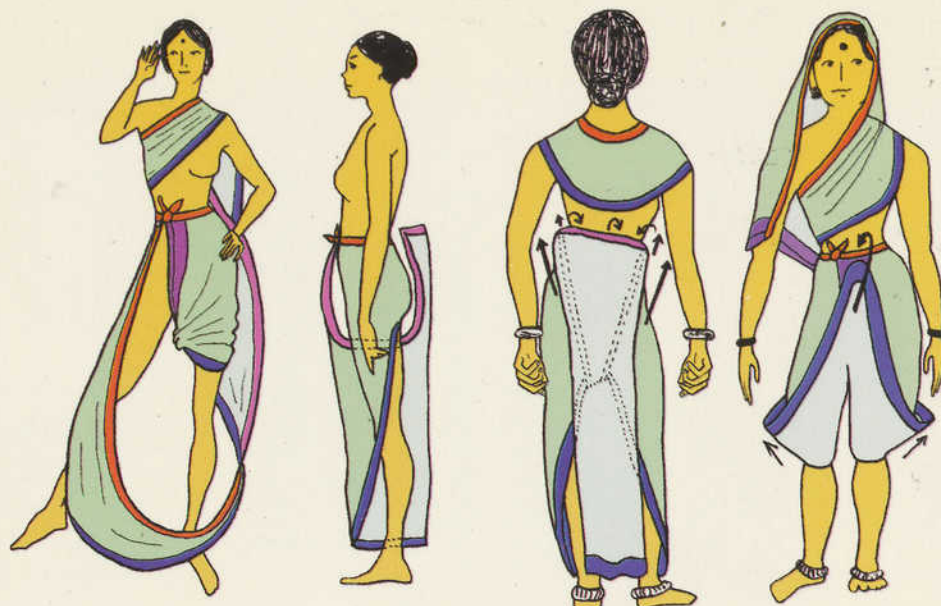
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Of all the arts that have flourished in India, one of the least known and studied is that of draping. This is all the more extraordinary because it is a unique art and craft which offers special insights into the ethnology of Indian and South-East Asian peoples and the archaeology of the periods in which it developed. I have spent years researching sari drapes and recording over 100 different styles of draping. My findings bring out new ways for classifying Indian costumes and open different perspectives on the meaning of drapes. It demonstrates that most saris fit into a few "families" corresponding to ethnic origins.

Saris are also the expression of women's creativity and could inspire anyone. I don't believe that these drapes should simply be recorded and then be confined to dusty libraries in the future. Drapes have many advantages over stitched clothes, especially when beauty is an important value. Saris are much more practical than we think, especially since they can be so easily modified.

Saris are fun to wear. From the material of this book, they can be tried by anyone, and more styles can be created. By teaching workshops on draping, I have learned that there is for each woman one drape that fits her perfectly. It's not often the modern sari, and can be any of the styles in this book, or even one the woman invents for herself. So I made this work for anybody who wants, at least once, to wear a drape, any kind of drape.

Draping is an art. I hope this book will help it take its place as a heritage of mankind.

Chantal



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