

## Model of clothing in yoga (example of duality)

Dragica Kumrić\*

**Abstract:** *In this paper, through a long history of successive development of the yoga system (in theory and practice), we will follow the model of clothing of a yoga practitioner. Under the model of clothing we consider all that in a visual sense determines an individual or a group – clothing, colors of clothing, body markings. The model of clothing could be classified in two periods: 1) traditional clothing; 2) modern clothing. These two models are related to each other and in the same time combined, especially in India where traditional clothing is in everyday use. The papers attached show us dhoti, lower part of the clothing, present since the time of the Upanishads – white color; and is worn in Hindu tradition in all epochs with the same intensity, till today –orange. Cadar, scarf/cloak, the colors of the scarf range in opposing lines: white (Rig-Vedas and Upanishads): orange (Hinduism). The model of clothing of a yoga practitioner was followed through an example of duality, from the period of Rig-Vedas to the 21<sup>st</sup> century "modern yoga". The conclusion is that yoga practitioner's models of clothing range in opposing lines: without element of Hinduism in yoga – white clothing: with total adoption of Hinduism in yoga – orange clothes/body markings. In "modern yoga", the opposing lines are: of total adoption of Hinduism in yoga – orange clothing/body markings: without colors of Hindu religious elements – multicolor/white. Based on the belonging marks to a yoga school, the model of clothing provides key information about the school and its direction.*

**Key words:** *model of clothing, Rishi, yoga, Hinduism, binary coding*

1.

Regarding the reconstruction of a material culture, while studying a yoga practitioner's model of clothing, an anthropologist must focus on some elements of special character that are linked to this paper. Collecting the information on clothing and colors of clothing of a caste/group/school that uses yoga techniques and forms a system – is a complex ideal type reconstruction. Analysis of the model of a yoga practitioner's clothing is based on combination of different sources: linguistic sources, archaeological built, arts (sculpture, visual arts), and written sources. In this paper, the term of yoga is conceptually determined both as an all-inclusive set (techniques, knowledge, experience), and as the ultimate goal of yoga practice: that is "oneness" (*Samadhi*). We don't find yoga practitioners, creators of (knowledge) yoga – Rishi, under the term of yogi in the first period of forming of the systems, term "yogi" for the first time appears somewhere between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, in a description of a Hindu ascetic who seeks omniscience by nurturing his body and mind<sup>1</sup>. The successive genesis of Hinduism and yoga in the Indian culture is, on one hand, connected to the tradition of Veda's society and culture, and on the other, with achievements of Indus Valley or Harappan Civilization, as well as with the relics of many other pre-Aryan cultures. Unlike many other Darshanas, yoga-darshana is not just a "system of philosophy". It has assimilated a significant number of practices, beliefs and pan-Indian aspirations, and in that way adopted and preserved accomplishments of civilizations gone long ago (that haven't faded-out with disappearance of the oldest epoch, but lasted through acceptance of that knowledge till today). Out of this "mosaic" picture, an

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\* Corresponding author: dragica.k@sbb.rs

<sup>1</sup> Diamond, D., (2013). *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, Catalogue, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, p. 28.

anthropologist, while forming the ideal type of description, follows successive phases based on the material available, and extracts the elements of certain groups, directions, schools of yoga.

It's important to point out that such an approach of the ideal type of reconstruction of model of clothing – clothes and colors of the clothes, markings on forehead and body. An appearance of a dressed person, due to time-space adaptation, induces a perception of itself, of its social and professional status, as well as its role in life. For the observer, clothes may in a certain way point out an expression of identity of a person observed. Clothing represents the base of direct visual communication because through it we directly express how we relate to ourselves as personalities, and to other people. Symbolic dimension of a model of clothing is emphasized through appearance: clothes, as well as through additional elements (forehead markings, body markings, necklaces, cords...) and specific colors that visually complete the impression that an observer is getting. When the model of clothing is a uniform, it has for a goal to inspire feelings of belonging to a certain yoga school. Social role of the model of clothing represents an expression of a specific level of social status of an individual and/or a certain group. Standard way of clothing is aimed to structure the society, as well as certain privileges in that society. In that context we may observe the model of clothing as a conventional characteristic of collective identity of an individual. Regarding that, many details or a whole model of clothing could be understood through the need for identification with a certain group.

Following the history of color, and the color of the clothes, we may observe that color has an important role in different cultures and serves to represent traditional, cultural and religious symbols, and nowadays, the psychological aspect is included as well. Colors as means of communication and as symbols may be studied in anthropologic (cultural semiotics) as well as in linguistic settings. Symbolism of colors was built through centuries: through religion, beliefs, tradition, so that practically every culture has its symbolism connected to a certain color. Color of the clothes was used to express and define status. Linguistic and cultural differences point to organizational particularities of conceptual systems and structures of an individual experience, while the resemblances in perception of basic colors may be explained, among others, through the universal structure of the sense of sight. General symbolic meaning of colors is a potential cause of problems, due to the use of symbols in a particular tradition/culture that is studied. The symbolism of colors is also used in linguistic traditions, as may be observed in numerous examples of folk sayings and proverbs. So, in regard to the linguistic sources, and in the sense of its functional use in the traditional practice, an indirect reconstruction of the clothes color symbolism is possible. For example, the meaning of white color for Indo-Europeans: 1) association on white is light and creative force, it marks sacredness, purity, fertility, innocence, guiltlessness, virtue. Such associations are expressed in the language as well: white as snow / pale as a ghost, knight on a white horse, 2) embodiment of white color is day and silver and it has a meaning of “the one that shines”, “silvery”, “clear”, “bright”, “pure”, 3) attribute “white” in national culture means purity and beauty, 4) white color in Slavic people is also connected to the idea of the otherworld: “white grief”, death as a woman in white clothes or Death wearing a white scarf over the head, 5) white clothes worn by pagan priests<sup>2</sup> during ceremonies.

Due to its visible outer characteristics, the color of the clothes has always been imposed as a symbol, since on it we may read the most subtle and numerous information of meaning, from belonging to religious, ethnic, sub cultural groups, to personal style and mood.

Fashion is a modern age phenomena, arising from clothing, but also from an individual understanding that human activities in this domain may be expressed in a distinct, and strictly their own characteristic way. Fashion presents a new and temporary way of life, which resembles the taste of a certain area and certain

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<sup>2</sup> Иванов, В. В. (1980). *Анатолийские языки*. - У: *Древние языки Малой Азии*. Москва: Наука, 163.

time. Modern fashion is linked to a process of liberation of body and civic conventions that used to determine clothing.

2.

Rig-Vedic Rishis perceived their actions as yoga. In hymns, they describe themselves as “harnessing” their minds for poetic inspiration with the help of their mind eye, or cognitive system, and so they traveled over metaphorical distances which separated the world of gods from the words in their hymns. The “harnessed” (*yukta*) stand on ores of their carriages while rushing through the universe in search for a vision. The description of Rishis creative work would be that they are the visionaries who “saw” the truth (in the context of this culture, to “see” is a synonym for “reaching the truth”).

Successive techniques of yoga classified as proto-yoga, performed by the Rishis, includes many elements typical for later yoga: concentration, focus, asceticism, breathing control (related to reciting of sacred hymns), accurate reciting (later mantra-yoga), prayerful invocations, visionary experiences, idea of self-sacrifice (surrender of ego), the experience of Reality beyond ego, and constant enrichment of life<sup>3</sup>. It may be said that the Upanishads are the oldest source of yoga tradition and a proof that yoga ideas were in circulation at that time<sup>4</sup>. Rishis from Upanishads accept the use of yoga as a conscientious inner search or as a striving to find out the truth about reality, and its methods were accepted as a preliminary practice for purification and contemplation. Particular attention was paid to meditation and concentration since the direct knowing of ourselves as subjects is not possible. According to Rig-Vedas, clothes of men (*vasana* or *vastra*) include only two parts, *vasa* (the lower part) and *adhivasa* (the upper part)<sup>5</sup>. The creators of Rig-Vedic hymns – Rishis, wore white clothes, traditional clothes of Brahmin lineage. After withdrawal from duty, Rishis would wear clothes made of hide or grass (*kusha*). The difference between men and women clothing was, according to Rig-Vedas, meaningless.

During the Upanishad period, the clothing of a man was comprised of upper and lower garments. *Dhoti*<sup>6</sup> is one of the earliest known garments in India that structures the clothing by the appropriate folding of the material. This is a male garment that covers the upper part of the body. *Dhoti*, or *dhotan*, originates from Sanskrit word "dhauta". The fabric for *dhoti* is made out of one rectangular piece and is worn without cutting or sewing. The size of the fabric varies, depending on man's wealth. Size ranged from two to five meters in length, and one to one and a half meters in width. That was a white cotton fabric. Colored fabric used to cost more and only the wealthiest individuals were able to afford it. The way of wearing of *dhoti* was: one end of the fabric was folded and tied around the waist, letting the fabric fall down from waist and partially or completely cover the legs with its folds, depending on the size of the fabric and the way of folding and tying. Folds could be bended or tied, since the other end of the fabric was placed between the legs and fitted-in at the rear part.

For the period of Classical yoga, an ideal type model of clothing displayed is based on Yaksha Parikrama statue, now in Mathura museum, dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the times of Maurya dynasty rule (322-185 BC). This is the first data on material culture about clothes of those times. Lower part of the clothing *dhoti*, similar to Parikrama, was wrapped little below the waist, and the length of the garment reached the ankles. This garment was made of a rectangular fabric, long enough to wrap around the waist, leaving

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<sup>3</sup> Feuerstein, G. (2008). *The yoga tradition: its history, literature, philosophy, and practice*. Prescott, Ariz: Hohm Press, p.105.

<sup>4</sup> Pajin, D. (2014). *Joga-duh i telo; tradicija i prakse u 21 veku*, Beograd: Međunarodni joga akademski centar, p.15.

<sup>5</sup> Biswas, A., (2003). *Indian costumes, Quick Prints*, New Delhi: Naraina, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> [www.indianetzone.com](http://www.indianetzone.com)

some extra material on both ends. These parts sometimes were folded over the belly or were used for forming a front fold. Lower part of the clothes was decorated with *patka*, a narrow cord, embroidered fabric with decorative tassels. One end was entangled at the waist, near the belly, while the other was allowed to flow to the ground. The purpose of *patka* was not of a decorative nature only, but to provide an appropriate covering between the legs as well. *Kamarband* (waist band) was tightened over the clothes with a knot, its two ends lowered until the knees. Upper part of the clothing was made of collected fabric ribbons tied with a scarf around the lower part of the chest, with a node near the hand at the front side. Parikrama figure has no cap or footwear. Decoratively, a scarf was displayed as a wreath on its chest<sup>7</sup>.

Due to the lack of data on the garment colors, we are not able to make an adequate reconstruction, but only to make an assumption that the lower part of the clothes was white, as well as the color of the scarf over shoulders.

Among the earliest displays of the ascetics are the ones near the Buddhist Great stupa at Sanchi, built somewhere between 50-25 BC. It shows two ascetics. One of them has tied his legs around knees with a yoga cord (*yogapata*). They sit in front of their *kapa* huts. Although the context of this panel is not clear, we may see that the clothes of ascetics are different from the robes of Buddhist monks, appearing on the second level of relief<sup>8</sup>. Ascetics wear the lower part of the clothes – modest *dhoti*, wrapped around their hips.

Different followers of Hindu cults and sub-cults feature symbols of deities they worship, and these are the forehead, arms and chest markings. Forehead marking is still present today only with the orthodox Hindu people. Some members of the cult put such markings only during festivals or prayers. Some of these cults are: Shaivism – worshipers of both Shiva and Parvati; Vaishnavism – worshipers of Vishnu; Surya – worshipers of Surya (Sun)<sup>9</sup>. Followers of Devi Shakti cult wear a red dot made of turmeric powder with *kumkum*. Hindu ascetic can cover his whole forehead with *tilak* that could be made out of different mixtures. Followers of Brahma cult wear markings of both Vishnu and Shiva. A dot is a sign of Supreme Being and with lines of Vishnu or Shiva it shows that the follower worships Vishnu or Shiva. Cult markings are made in red, yellow, black and white color, made of ash from ritual fire, cow dung, turmeric, sandal, lime and glue made out of rice water. Colors have a significant role in Hindu religion and culture. Colors on deities and their clothes depend on the attributes of the deity. Colors used in ceremonies include red, yellow, green, white and orange.

*Tilak/tilaka* or *pottu* is a mark Hindus wear on their foreheads. This custom wasn't widely spread at the time of the Vedas. It became popular at the Purana period. Its meaning could be emphasized by coloring a mark on that spot. This is the central place where the sixth chakra (*Ajna*) is positioned, also called the eyes of wisdom. It means the uniting of the conscious and unconscious, until all the elements of duality are gathered in one. So, the spot is of great significance and placing of a colored mark on the forehead symbolizes that the practitioner is striving to reach wisdom. As a daily practice *tilak* is worn as a sign of holiness, while on special occasions, such as religious celebrations, as a sign of blessing. There are many types of *tilak*, though it is mostly made with sandal paste or curcuma spice mixed with water. Mixture of sandal paste with musk has a strong cooling effect and is generally made for those who meditate for a long time. Sacred ash of a ritual fire (*yuagna*), or ash collected from the funeral pyre, is considered to be the best material for *tilak* of a yogi and sannyasin since they have given up their attachments to earthly lives, and the symbolism of ash points out that renunciation.

Shapes and the color of forehead marks differ by:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, D., (2013). *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, Catalogue, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Singh, D.V. (2003). *Hinduism an introduction*, New Delhi: Rupa&Co, p.100.

- a) caste,
- b) as worn by priests, sannyasins, yoga gurus and practitioners, followers of a chosen cult,
- c) as a decorative mark (women).

There are numerous visual art sources from all the dynasties that ruled between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century AD that show the lower part of the clothing – *dhoti*. *Dhoti* continues to be worn nowadays as well with certain innovations. During the 10th century, lower part of the clothes, garment – *dhoti*, is still present as clothing. There were several religious and local particularities that changed the way *dhoti* used to be folded around the waist, but they haven't significantly changed the appearance of the garment. The lower part of the clothes, garment – *dhoti*, continued to be worn during the whole of the Middle Ages. In his travel book Moor Al-Biruni, a traveler on his way across the 11<sup>th</sup> century India, noted the details on contemporary life and culture of those times. He made several observations on "dresses" of North-Indian men. At that time, *dhoti* was attached to the waist with a band. The band was decorated with either embroidery or any other ornament. At that time, *dhoti* has gone through some unbelievable modifications in style and length of the fabric. Still, it continued to prevail as the most popular of all the garments of Indian men.

The struggle for the independence of India started in 19<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta, the intellectual center of India. Rejecting Western clothes, many Bengali reformers wore typical yellow-orange robes of Indian saints from the past as a symbol of insurgency against the colonizers.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century Hatha yoga was introduced to the West through the work of two schools: 1) North-Indian yoga school with a traditional approach: Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), that promotes the so called Classical yoga, 2) South-Indian school of Shri T. Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) with a more modern approach to yoga.

At Guru Swami Sivananda and his disciples we recognize three horizontal lines that point to the cult of Shiva. Followers of that cult use *tilak (bhasma) tripundra* in the shape of two or more horizontal lines, with or without a dot below or above them, or on the middle line with or without an oval-shape, or half-oval, typical for displaying the third eye, where we can also find crossing lines; and in the triangle-shaped, pointed or oval object with half-moon and trident (*trisul*). Horizontal lines of Shaivism are white and the dot is red. Sivananda's school, as well as the Bihar school of yoga, has orange clothes, including lower part, *dhoti* or orange pants (*pijama*) and the upper part *kurte* and scarf. Marks on the forehead can be present only during religious holidays. Orange color of *dhoti* and scarf in the color of fire symbolize the light and burning of all the impurities by fire. At the same time, it symbolizes purity and religiousness. It's the color of sayasin/monks, holy persons and ascetics (*sadhu*) who have given-up earthly pleasures and symbolizes their search of liberation.

Based on his religious orientation, Sri T. Krishnamacharya followed the Vaishnavism tradition, though he never emphasized this in his yoga activities. He presented yoga and worked unattached to his spiritual organizations and legacy. Krishnamacharya wore clothes that covered the lower part of the body and had a mark on his forehead of the belonging cult. At Sri T. Krishnamacharya and his disciple Iyengar we notice two horizontal lines alike the letter "U" that point to the cult of Vishnu. Followers of god Vishnu wear *chandan tilak* on the forehead, and symbols of Vaishnavism that are characterized by vertical lines on the forehead, with or without a dot or circle among them. Symbols can also be shaped like chakras or a triangle, shield, cone, heart or similarly shaped symbols with their tops-down, because Vishnu represents the symbol of water. Another disciple, Pattabhi Jois, has three white horizontal lines on the forehead with a red dot. While presenting his yoga to the West, Guru Sri T. Krishnamacharya was wearing shorts, in line with the modern clothing in the West. Despite the fact that its disciples still wear cult marks on the forehead, this yoga way, when presenting itself to the West, brings novelties in clothing having

Krishnamacharya as a model. They wear shorts, or shorts and shirts. Iyengar and the school of Jois don't insist on traditional color and clothes for their instructors.

When it comes to “modern yoga” in Serbia, yoga is recognized by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia as a method for improvement of public health. To many students yoga practice means: going to yoga center with yoga equipment that includes: yoga mats (if the chosen center doesn't provide, or the student wishes to practice with his/her own mat), clothes for yoga, work in groups under the supervision of yoga instructors. Yoga class includes postures (asanas) with breathing techniques for energy control (pranayama) and relaxation at the end of the class. Yoga clothes are comfortable garments that include upper and lower parts, both for men and women. The upper part includes shirts (T-shirt, long sleeves, sleeveless), the lower part: track suit pants (both sexes), shorts (both sexes), tights for women (various length). Part of the equipment includes socks or sneakers for yoga, if student or instructor requires so.

Yoga today is mostly women's activity, so in yoga practice fashion came through the back door. Variety of colors, track suits, tights, shirts, different models, and different brands, all of this is present as an element of yoga practice. Prominent sports companies make special yoga clothes and mats: of different thickness, color, design, as well as sneakers. Some yoga students follow fashion activities and renew their clothes every few months. Yoga today is an integral part of fashion, yoga is inside fashion, and many celebrities who practice yoga have contributed to it: Sting, Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow, Novak Djoković. Regarding that, yoga equipment (mats and clothes) has become a part of fashion and fashion trends, caused by social, economic and cultural changes and influences.

3.

Model of clothing of a yoga practitioner: example of duality:

1) Clothes of Rig-Vedic period:

achromatic: chromatic, unusual sacred: usual secular: white un-white

2) Clothes in Rishi period – Upanishads/Classical yoga comparing to Rishi-Rig-Vedas

usual secular – white: unusual sacred – white

3) Model of clothing in the period of Hinduism

chromatic – secular color: achromatic: unusual sacred: usual secular: orange/forehead and body markings: white

When a model of clothing is very similar or differs in only one detail, binarism becomes explicit: orange: white: follower of the chosen cult / spiritually: family person in Hinduism.

A married man is dressed in traditional white-cotton *dhoti*, lower part of the clothes. Upper part of the clothes, shirts – *kurmu* has been worn since the Middle ages. Men often wear a scarf – *cadar* (white color), that shields their shoulders or the whole torso during the cold weather. When the weather is warm, scarf can be placed over shoulders.

White color in Hinduism represents purity, peace and knowledge. Saraswati, goddess of knowledge, is always shown in white clothes. Brahmin – the highest social caste – is associated with white color. Hindu religious representatives cover themselves with white ash, which denotes spiritual revival. White is also the color of grief in funeral ceremonies. During the funeral ritual, a widow is wearing white sari.

4) Model of clothing of yoga schools in the West (Serbia), “Yoga moderne”:

I

chromatic, secular color: achromatic – unusual, sacred: usual, secular – orange, forehead and body marks: colorful clothes

II

chromatic, secular color: achromatic – unusual, sacred: usual, secular – orange, forehead and body marks: white

Yoga Federation of Serbia recommends its instructors to wear white clothes for classes of yoga. White clothes recommended by the Yoga Federation of Serbia symbolize light and creative force, purity, wisdom, virtues and beauty. At the same time, it follows the tradition of the clothing model of Rishi (Upanishads).

4.

1) We may conclude that *dhoti*, as the lower part of clothing, was present in Hindu tradition since the period of the Upanishads, and was worn in all epochs with the same intensity, until today. This is not just a garment exclusively made for yoga practitioners – this is an exclusive garment of the Indian subcontinent that doesn't go out of fashion. One of the reasons for its long use and 3000 years long popularity of *dhoti* lies in its loose pants-like shape, suitable and very well adjusted to Indian tropical climate.

2) The color of clothes of a Rishi/yoga practitioner: since the time of Rig-Vedas – time of acceptance of Hinduism, is in line of the opposition: white: orange.

3) Marks on the forehead date from the time of acceptance of Hinduism and we may perceive the opposition: without marks (timeframe – Rig-Vedas, Upanishads, classical yoga), foreheads and body marks: no marks (timeframe – 20<sup>th</sup> century).

4) *Cadar*, scarf/cloak, the color of scarf is in line of the opposition: white (Rig-Vedas and Upanishads), orange (Hinduism)

5) Instructors of yoga school (timeframe – 21<sup>st</sup> century): traditional: colorful: sacred: secular; traditional: white: sacred: secular

We have been following the model of clothing of yoga practitioners through the example of duality from the period of Rig-Vedas to 21<sup>st</sup> century “modern yoga”. The conclusion is that the model of clothing of yoga practitioner/school of yoga is in line with the opposition – without elements of Hinduism in yoga – white clothes: of total adoption of Hinduism in yoga – orange clothes – body marks. In "modern yoga" opposition is in line: of total adoption of Hinduism in yoga – orange clothes – body marks: non-colored with Hindu religious elements – colorful/white.

The model of clothing of gurus as a pattern was created during long periods of time, that more or less determined, and still do determine the model of clothing of members of a yoga school/community. In that context, a model of clothing can be understood through the need for identification with a group and acceptance of not just a uniform but of other school elements as well. A model of clothing is at the same time the most remarkable way of nonverbal communication. With yoga school belonging marks, a model of clothing provides meaningful information about the school or its way.

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