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Western Consumption of the 'exotic', incorporating a case study of Shree as an example of this.

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List of Colour Plates

Introduction

This thesis will address and seek to answer the question of motivation for our 'western' consumption of 'exotic' commodities. The word 'exotic', to give it its dictionary definition, refers to strange, bizarre goods (plants, words, fashions) introduced from abroad. As consumption of exotic goods is not a new phenomenon, I will discuss the motivation for consumption of such goods from both historic and contemporary angles. European-Asian trade began in earnest during the sixteenth century, the goods becoming highly fashionable at the end of the nineteenth century. Today, although not normally considered 'high fashion', exotic and other-worldly goods are extremely popular among a certain, more alternative group.

I am also concerned with what happens to goods once they cross cultural borders, both East to West and vice versa. Goods are constantly being given different meanings and contexts to those imagined by their manufacturers and natives of their country of origin. An example of this is the Egyptian scarab beetle (fig 2), merely a decorative symbol to us, but in its country of origin it has powerful religious significance.

Having Particular interest in the textiles of India, I will concentrate on goods from India and their relationship to Ireland. Mrs Asha Chawla's shop 'Shree' (figs 4 & 5), as Dublin's first Indian boutique, will provide a case study of Indian goods imported to Ireland, changes in the market over the last thirty years, and a study of the textiles themselves; concentrating on methods of production and how these compare to traditional methods. The motivation of the manufacturers of these products is therefore of great importance, and it is especially interesting to note that these goods are produced specifically for export. This of course raises the issue of whether the goods should be termed 'Indian' at all - Are they only Indian to our 'western' eyes?

In examining Shree's goods, I will pay particular attention to textiles, looking at clothing, fashion accessories such as scarves and bags, and interior textiles such as throws. Shree stocks a wide variety of textile goods, and I will discuss the use of the three basic methods of decoration: print, weave and embroidery. As a student of embroidery, and given the fact that there is such an abundance of embroidered goods, displaying a variety of techniques, stitches etc. in Shree, I will pay particular attention to embroidered items. Mrs Chawla's personal collection of saris, all hand produced in India for Indian consumption, will provide a comparison, against which to discuss Shree's goods.

Books and articles concerning consumption of exotic goods (see Bibliography) will provide secondary source information for the first chapter, while literature regarding traditional Indian embroidery, along with an interview with Shree's proprietor Mrs Asha Chawla, will provide source material for the more specific discussion of Dublin's consumption of Indian goods.

In discussing Ireland's consumption of Indian goods, we cannot ignore Ireland's past relations with India - those Irish members of the British Army who were stationed in India during the second World War, Religious orders and missionaries who travelled to India with the purpose of educating and 'civilising' this 'backward' country, Ireland's connections with the English East India Company from its early days
in the seventeenth century, and Ireland's travelling community, descendants of the Romani Gypsies who travelled from India to parts of Europe during the fifteenth century.

Chapter I: Attraction of exotic goods to the Western consumer.

This thesis is concerned with consumption - consumption of the 'exotic' (Indian) in the western world (Dublin). The enjoyment of things other-worldly in Dublin has become so commonplace that we almost take for granted the widening variety of Chinese, Thai, Italian and Indian restaurants in the city centre. This is not a new phenomenon in Dublin - one of Dublin's oldest restaurants, Bewleys, established in 1847, boasts its 'oriental' origins. Its 'orientalness' may have been obvious in the nineteenth century, when tea-drinking was a relatively new and 'exotic' activity - at least for the middle classes, but until its reopening this year, it seemed, in 1990s Dublin, anything but oriental. The staff's clothes are now distinctly Chinese in style, and the restaurant's interior has been modified accordingly.

That I use food as a marker of cultural identity is not accidental. Food and eating rituals have long been a yardstick by which to measure foreignness and cultural differences: "They eat frogs' legs - we don't", "They eat with chopsticks - we don't". Therefore adopting a nation's cuisine is akin to adopting their culture - or so you might think; the habitual visit to 'the Chinese' on the way home from the pub, has become a part of Irish life. Those who engage in this activity, do so with little or no regard for the intrinsic 'chineseness' of the food.

So what of clothes? The Dublin clothing market isn't nearly as saturated with exotic' goods as the food market, and those shops we do see selling Indian, Nepalese and Chinese clothes are, for the most part, tucked away in places like George's Arcade or the top floor of shopping centres, away from mainstream shoppers; Indian (fig 3) and Egyptian (fig 1) shops on the top floor of the St. Stephen's Green Centre. This relative scarcity of such shops may be part of the reason for the clothes retaining their potency, their exotic flavour. The restaurant market has become so saturated with foreign restaurants that the food doesn't even seem foreign anymore. When looking for a clothes shop, it would take more effort to find an 'exotic' shop. Garments are also a bigger commitment - they will be worn long after a meal has been forgotten. It seems to be the case that the wearing of foreign clothing is a true example of Western consumption of the exotic, as it involves considerably more thought, effort and commitment.

This gathering, consuming, collecting of exotic goods is not a new phenomenon - ancient trade links between Europe and Asia were re-established in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to feed the growing demand for spices, cheaper textiles and other eastern goods. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the possession of Chinese porcelain and Persian rugs, and the drinking of tea, gave the impression of one being well-travelled and therefore wealthy and well-bred. This reason for the pursuit of the exotic (as an indication of one's social standing), seems to contradict today's use of ethnic goods to make one appear alternative and non-conformist.

Malcom Waters in his book "Globalization", has described a consumer culture as one where the goods consumed take on a symbolic value almost greater than their material value. An extreme case of this would be a pair of Nike trainers, where the consumer purchases the name as much as the product, paying a much higher price as a result. The consumption of exotic goods in such a consumer society would appear to be the antithesis of this. The goods are produced in third world countries, where brand names have a much lesser importance, or at least play a different role, than in Western capitalist society. Exotic goods bear no distinct logos, and don't appear to be mass produced. However, there is one important similarity between the consumer of the Nike trainers and that of an Indian block-printed shirt; they both use consumption as a form of self-expression - the former more blatantly by the use of specific, easily recognisable symbols and logos. The latter makes more general comments against such symbols logos, and therefore against Western capitalism. It is ironic that a consumer should use one of the chief characteristics of Western society (consumption as a form of self-expression) to renounce it. However ironic this communication of ideals is, it is at the same time successful to some degree. What better way to demonstrate one's opposition to capitalist society, than through the consumption of goods produced in a non-capitalist society.

These Western consumers enjoy their exotic goods, happy in the knowledge that they have purchased 'authentic', hand-crafted objects. Even if we are not told that the goods are handmade, the loose and irregularly woven cloths, and cruder printing techniques lead us to believe this; and surely goods produced in a third world country could never be mass-produced! Carol Hendrickson in David Howes' *Cross-Cultural Consumption* (1996) draws attention to this phenomenon, using the example of Guatemalan goods, as advertised in US mail-order catalogues. She notes the use of phrases such as "handmade in a tiny town high above the Guatemalan rain forests", where the word 'handmade' is used to emphasise the idea of the primitive, and the 'tiny' town (though the term 'village' is more often used) could have a population of up to sixty

thousand. It is interesting to note that even those companies with more 'honourable' motives use such tactics in promoting their wares; almost half of these companies are non-profit making and development-oriented, such as Oxfam.

What, surprisingly, Hendrickson hasn't remarked upon, is the blatant contradiction of advertising and selling these 'traditional', 'hand-crafted', 'authentic' goods through a mail-order catalogue, a fine example of the sale of 'exotic' goods into a consumer culture.

Consumers of Indian goods may similarly be confused or misled by their manufacturers - although in this case it is not quite so underhand. Indian clothes sold in Europe tend to display a mismatch or combination of cultural influences; Indian fabrics are cut in 'Western' styles. At least this is the manufacturer's intention - to our eyes the empire-line, loose-fitting blouses (figs 19 & 30) and long, gathered skirts (fig 12) look distinctly eastern. The point here is that Indian designers have 'westernised' Indian ideas (the wide bands along the hem-line of a sari have influenced the long, banded skirts), in order to make selling to a western market possible. Wearing a sari in Irish weather is extremely impractical, so Indian manufacturers had to create their own market by modifying styles just enough that they still look Indian and exotic.

This modifying of Indian garments to suit European tastes and, more particularly, Europeans consumption of such garments, also raises the question of whether these Europeans really want Indian goods. It seems more likely that they simply want something other-worldly, different, rather than particularly Indian. A European woman dressed in a sari is a rare sight; and often Indian-produced clothes such as cheese-cloth shirts, will be teamed with blue jeans, thus retaining an essential component of Western dress.

I have used the term 'exotic' in describing these goods, because to our western eye that's exactly what they are. They become 'different' and 'other-worldly' as soon as they cross the East-West cultural barrier. Meanings of goods constantly change as they are passed from one cultural context to another. David Howes uses the example of Coca-Cola to illustrate what he calls 'creolization' or 'localisation' - where an imported commodity is attributed meanings and uses quite different to those of its country of origin. Creolization has meant that Coca-Cola can smooth wrinkles (Russia), revive a person from the dead (Haiti), and turn copper to silver (Barbados). This of course is an extreme example - nothing quite so magical happens when we burn incense or wear some Egyptian jewellery.

Igor Kopytoff in The Cultural Biography of Things, (The Social Life of Things, Ed A Appadurai), makes an interesting comparison. He likens goods which pass from one cultural context to another to slaves. These goods are first stripped of their original social identity. The goods are then, like slaves, acquired by a person or group, and are 'resocialised' by being attributed a new social identity. In the case of the goods I will discuss, however, it is not quite so simple. I will discuss Indian textile goods which were designed and produced in India, for the export market. Therefore, at the production stage of these goods, the assumptions, preconceptions and stereotypes of the Western market were taken into account. As the goods were produced with the Western market in mind, terms such as 'captured' cannot be used quite so easily. The goods are, to some extent, given a new social identity to that held in their own country, but it is a social identity intended by the manufacturers. These goods were produced, so that we might find them 'exotic', 'other-worldly', 'different'.

Chapter II - A Short History of Trade Between India and Europe

Although the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries are the period most synonymous with European consumption of Asian goods, trade links with the East actually go back as far as Roman times and their imports of fabrics (particularly Chinese silks). The travels of the Great Explorers (such as Magellan and Diaz), in the fifteenth century, and subsequent travels, for the specific purpose of trade, re-established these ancient trade links, and also opened new trade routes by sea. This trade was initially concerned mainly with the purchasing of spices from the Spice Islands, and textile trade with countries such as India happened quite accidentally. The natives of these islands would not accept anything in exchange for their pepper, cloves and nutmeg, except Indian cloth. Thus, Europeans' first motivation for the purchasing of Indian fabrics, was the demand of other Asian markets (Brewer & Porter, 1994). This cloth, being mostly of low quality, was very cheap. However, until the late seventeenth century, the European market for these cottons and cheesecloths was not very large. It was around 1690 that calico became fashionable in Europe for the production of shirts, neckcloths and handkerchiefs and women's petticoats. There appear to be two main reasons for this huge interest in Indian cotton: i) cotton's practicality when compared with wool or silk - more comfortable and easier to clean. ii) the relative cheapness of this cotton. Exoticism is hardly an issue when purchasing plain white cloth.

The popularity of Indian textiles continued until the late nineteenth century, by which time the possession and use of exotic goods had become extremely fashionable. It seems to be the decoration of interiors around this time that most clearly displays the desire for foreign goods because they are foreign, rather than because they are cheap or practical. While clothing fashions retained their tailored, European style, interiors displayed a distinctly 'oriental' feel, achieved by the use of Persian rugs, Chinese painted screens, China porcelain. Oscar Wilde's depiction of a late nineteenth century interior in his 1891 novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray", illustrates this regard for such exotic commodities:

> "...the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a momentary Japanese effect and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio [sic]."

In this novel, Wilde also refers to the smoking of opium, imported mainly from China, and very popular in Britain at this time:

> "...his heavy opium-tainted cigarette."

It seems that while there was a huge European market for Indian cotton, for clothing purposes, at this time, most decorated, patterned or ornamental goods originated in China or Japan. In other words, when people sought cheap, good quality cotton they looked to India, when they sought exoticism they looked elsewhere.

The English East India Company was founded in the late sixteenth century by a group of London merchants for the purpose of trading with India and other parts of Asia. By 1620 it was one of the largest employers in Great Britain and it remained in operation for around three hundred and fifty years. Narender Kapur in *The Irish Raj* points out that Ireland's trade links with India can be traced back as far as the founding of the East India Company. William Burrell, an Irish man, was an original member of the company, and it was on his advice that they bought land in Dundaniel in Northern Ireland and built ships there. Consequently, as well as introducing Indian trade to Ireland, the company offered employment to many Irish as ship builders.

Chapter III - Ireland's social and economic links with India

Although Indian goods were first introduced into Ireland around the time of the English East India Company, Ireland's links with India may actually go back a lot further. The Romani gypsies, a nomadic tribe from the North Indian region of Rajastan, first came to Europe in the fifteenth century. They settled mainly around Eastern Europe (Romania), but one band travelled as far as Ireland; and Narender Kapur in *The Irish Raj* has discussed the theory that the Irish travelling community are descendants of these Romanis. Meanwhile, others argue that there is no evidence to suggest such a link between these two groups. Textiles (particularly embroidery) and metalwork were the main crafts of this nomadic people - the Banjara tribe from northern India. Although this is hardly evident among the Irish travellers, for those Banjara Indians still living around Northern India, these are still important to their culture.

More recently (1930s and '40s) Ireland's links with other parts of Asia became more defined. Religious groups and missionaries travelled to India to spread Christianity and to 'educate' and supposedly 'civilise' the people of this 'backward' country. What they were, in fact, doing was bringing their western influence to Asia in the name of 'civilisation'. They taught children to speak English, and even introduced Western foods to their diet. The religious groups most known for this missionary work were The Sisters of Mercy, The Christian Brothers and, probably most famously, due to the work of Mother Teresa, the Loreto Order. These religious orders brought back to Ireland an awareness of the poverty and adverse conditions of these Indian people.

The 1930s and '40s also saw the beginnings of immigration of Indian nationals to Ireland. This was especially noticeable in Northern Ireland; as a lot of these immigrants came via Great Britain, Northern Ireland (rather than the Republic), was the natural progression. With this immigration and settling of Indians in Ireland, began Ireland's modern trade with India (since the East India Company). This selling of goods imported from India was done mainly by 'suitcase' traders; men who travelled initially on foot or by bicycle (cars only became common in the fifties) and called to people's homes selling small, light items such as socks, underwear, shirts, ties etc. Most of the goods (with the exception of some ribbons and Indian ornaments), although produced in India, were made to Western designs. Therefore, when they were bought, it was not for their exotic flavour, so much as for their low prices and the convenience of door-to-door selling. These Indian businessmen were far more successful in rural areas than in cities, where people were close enough to shops not to be reliant on this service. These traders built up regular customers who would often place orders with them, rather than depend on what happened to be in the suitcase. Such trade was also convenient because credit

facilities were available, so customers did not have to pay for the goods in full when they received them. They could make regular small payments over a period of time.

By the 1950's door-to-door selling had become more popular in Ireland, and not just for the Indian community. Domestic labour-saving devices were 'must-haves' in the fifties, and salesmen would eagerly demonstrate 'Hoover' vacuum cleaners to housewives who were given the option of buying on hire-purchase. Other non-Indian door-to-door merchants included a toy man who, rather than actually calling to each door, reached his market more effectively by simply opening his suitcase on the street, where the children would flock to him. As recently as the early eighties, I can recall 'the gypsy woman with the basket', a dark-skinned woman with long plaited black hair and woollen shawls. Her wicker basket contained odds and ends, the most exciting of which (to a young child) were the coloured hair ribbons. Hair clips, plastic nail brushes, clothes pegs and sewing needles were also available. Most bizarre about this woman was the fact that she would accept barter, normally by way of cheese or a loaf of bread. One neighbour tells of how her mother, if there was not such a variety of goods in the basket on a particular day, would just give this woman money, without having made a purchase.

Gradually, as these Indian 'suitcase' traders became established, they began to set up retail outlets in cities, using the same suppliers and selling the same type of goods as they sold from the suitcases. There are still stores today reminiscent of these Indian owned shops, such as 'Catch' (fig 8) - a chain of stores in Dublin selling cheap Asian-produced clothes. They are still Indian-owned and -run, but sell western clothes. Although an Indian-owned retail outlet, Shree is distinctly different to these shops. The former sells western-style clothes to a European market, while Shree's Indian flavour is essential to its success.

There are also a number of Indian-owned shops in Dublin which sell Indian and Western goods to the European market. An example of this is *Asha* (Fig 3), on the top floor of the Stephen's Green Shopping Centre. Its market is quite obvious at a glance; the apparent contradiction of selling Indian clothes alongside western goods is justified by the trend of the eighties and early nineties among young people for Indian clothes. *Asha*, with arguably a more 'seedy' image than Shree, sells alongside its embroidered cheesecloth shirts and crochet skirts, tie-dyed T-shirts, leather jackets and PVC trousers. The decline in 'hippy' trends and the popularity of Indian clothes to the young market, since the late eighties, has meant that *Asha* now stocks very few typically Indian goods. On a recent visit to the shop, for the purpose of researching this thesis, I didn't see any long, gathered skirts, which were originally the only reason I went into *Asha*.

Chapter IV

Section I - Shree - A Case Study

Shree, Dublin's first Indian boutique, was opened in 1970 on Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (fig 7)[1]. It was the first 'Indian boutique', in that it was the first shop in Dublin to sell distinctly Indian clothes; other Indian owned shops were selling western style Indian-produced clothes. By the mid eighties, the Molesworth Street branch had closed and Shree had three other stores around Dublin; two in the city centre, South Anne Street and Grafton Street (fig 6), and one in Dun Laoghaire Shopping Centre. Decline in the demand for Indian clothing around the early nineties, meant that, one by one, these stores were closed down. Finally, in 1994 the Grafton Street branch shut down and moved to its present location in the Ilac centre.

As the first shop of its kind in Dublin, in a sense it created its own market - people couldn't buy Indian goods prior to this as there were no Indian shops. Shree's proprietor, Mrs Asha Chawla admits to setting up without having done any proper market research. There were similar shops in London and other parts of the UK, and Shree in Dublin would have no direct competition. Mr Chawla arrived in Dublin in 1969 to assess the possibility of opening a retail outlet in Dublin, and his wife Asha followed him here six months later. On discovering the possible niche in the market for a shop such as Shree, they opened up in Molesworth Street.

Shree was successful almost immediately. The fact that it was the early seventies no doubt contributed to the store's success. It was the middle of the 'hippy' era and a lot of Shree's goods were conducive to the 'flower power' image. The fact that the clothes were exotic; non-western and therefore non-capitalist, also made them popular to this group. Indian goods in particular were popular - possibly due to the fact that the Beatles had returned from India in the late sixties, and were seen wearing Indian clothes and even adopting Indian music. For example, George Harrison's use of the sitar on 'Within you, without you' 1967.

Shree, along with similar, more recently opened, 'exotic goods' shops in Dublin and other parts of Europe, order directly from the manufacturers. They specify quantities, designs and colours. Such manufacturers are in existence purely to feed

1. The following information, relating directly to Shree, was sourced from interviews with Mrs Asha Chawla in December 1998 and January 1999.

the export market, and so they are in constant contact with the European retailers. In much the same way as the manufacturers supply only the export market, the retailers, such as Shree, sell almost exclusively to Europeans - almost no Indians shop in Shree. It is interesting to note that there is almost the same range of hand-produced and hand-embroidered textiles available from Shree as there was thirty years ago.

Although primarily an Indian shop, Shree also sells Chinese dresses, Russian dolls and Japanese fans. Most of the goods on sale are produced in India, but how 'traditional' they are is questionable; there wasn't a single sari in the shop. Products range from a hand woven Ikat rug, the dip-dyed warp yarns of which create the pattern, to the considerably more 'tacky' black sequinned belts with gold buckles. From an embroidery point of view the shop is far more interesting. Almost all of the garments are embroidered to some extent, even if it's only a cross-stitch detail on the cuffs. The basic techniques seem quite far removed from traditional techniques, but links between the two are still evident - counted thread work has evolved into satin stitch and the patterns are similar. The use of the elephant and peacock motifs are still very prominent. This, and the use of colour, leaves us in no doubt about the origin of these goods.

My initial assumptions on Shree's market, had divided it into two segments - Indian and non-Indian. The shop seemed to me, to have the air of an Indian cultural centre, much along the same lines as the Afro-Caribbean shops (figs 9 & 10) very recently opened on the outskirts of Dublin's inner city. I have counted four such shops, all of which have opened in the last eighteen months. Such shops sell goods from exotic foods to hair extensions, to Dublin's Afro-Caribbean population, which seems to have grown proportionately to these shops, within the last two years. Shree appears to sell the Indian 'counterparts' (fig 13) of the goods sold in those Afro-Caribbean shops; incense, henna tattooing paste, henna hair dye, sandalwood soap, carved wooden ornaments and rugs. On speaking with Mrs Chawla however, I was assured that this is not the case; she seemed confident in informing me that *no* Indian people shop in Shree. The shop was opened specifically to sell Indian goods to the European market.

Shree, therefore, may not be as 'authentically Indian' as it first seems (to the western eye). While the materials (cotton, muslin), dying techniques and patterns are distinctly Indian, their translation into western style garments, and the use of cheaper production methods, seem to have lost the textiles some of their potency. Blouses and skirts are sold in place of the traditional sari, cheaper and quicker dying methods have meant less vibrant colours, and hand embroidery is a lot looser than in Indian embroidery produced for Indian consumption.

Shree's market is not nearly as obvious today as it was five or six years ago when, walking down Grafton Street, it was hardly possible to ignore the groups of young people dressed in long tie-dyed or crochet skirts and Doc Marten boots. A number of factors may have contributed to this immense popularity of Indian-produced clothing among adolescents in the eighties and early nineties in Dublin.

The most obvious of these is probably music. Bands such as The Cure and The Sisters of Mercy rose to fame in the eighties, thereby promoting their gothic image among their fans (fig 31). Long black and purple fringed and tasselled skirts were appropriate to this look, and although they didn't have a particularly 'Indian' look, oversized, tie-dyed, tailed shirts sold by outlets such as *Shree, Asha* and *Kai* were de riguer among young male 'Cure Heads'. This market segment, although of cult proportions, was not as reliable as it looked. The music industry is almost as fickle as that of fashion, and as the focus shifted from gothic bands to a more 'trendy' genre of music (Indie and Britpop), the popularity of Shree among young people declined. This allowed stores such as *Hairy Legs, Flip* and *The Big Whiskey* to take over, selling new and second hand seventies style T-shirts and flared jeans at around the same price level as Shree.

Another reason for Shree's popularity among the young Dublin market, was its price range. Probably due to the use of cheap labour, Shree has always managed to have very low prices. Although pricing alone won't sustain a market, it is unusually relevant when discussing Shree. Granted, the fact that the clothes were very much in fashion among a certain group of young people at the time was reason enough to buy, but that most of these fourteen to eighteen year olds would have had little or no income, is also of great significance.

Either as a result of this decline in the market, or one of the causes of it, Shree has modified its range of garments somewhat. The colours aren't as strong, there's less surface decoration, the embroidery is more subtle, the use of mirror-work almost non-existent. It would seem that Shree, for whatever reason, is aiming for a, slightly more conservative market. It seems today that Shree's market is an older group, which was probably always there, but wasn't as noticeable amid the huge numbers of younger people who frequented the shop in its Grafton Street days. This older group, although not as large, is perhaps a more reliable market - trends among younger people are far more transient.

Apart from clothing, a major part of Shree's trade is in the non-clothing Indian goods which are sold to the 'white' European market, usually as 'giftware' (fig 14). This is perhaps a comment on the customer's perception of the goods - they're attractive,

pretty, but for someone else. Phrases such as 'Do you think she'd like that' and 'She's into weird stuff isn't she?' can be heard from customers. It seems no-one thinks of buying a wood carving of a Hindu god for themselves.

Section II - Examination of Shree's goods in comparison to Indian goods produced for consumption in India.

In discussing Shree's textiles and crafted goods, one of the most important things to note is that Shree's goods have been produced in India, *specifically* for export. This is significant for two main reasons: a) The manufacturers and designers must make the product sufficiently Indian-looking, so that it appeals to the export (European) market as an 'exotic' commodity. This is achieved chiefly by the adaptation of traditional techniques, and the use of Indian symbolism and Indian fabrics. b) The goods (particularly clothing) must also be tailored to suit the Western market. Whilst some eastern reference is necessary for the clothes' exotic look, authentic Indian dress, such as a sari, would not only be impractical for Irish weather, it may be considered 'too Indian' to be worn in Western society.

A - The use and adaptation of traditional Indian techniques, symbols and fabrics in the production of textiles for Western consumption

Most Europeans have not been in contact with an authentic, hand-embroidered Indian sari. I feel I can safely assume that, if they had witnessed such wonderful craftsmanship and quality of textiles, they would be less inclined to accept Shree's textiles as authentically 'Indian'. The manufacturers of these goods rely on the fact that most Europeans have not had first hand experiences with 'the real McCoy'. They produce goods which coincide with Europeans' perceptions of India; brightly-coloured embroidered and printed textiles, excessive (compared with Western trends) use of surface decoration, and the use of such fabrics such as cheesecloth and silk. Silk, however, is mainly seen in smaller items such as neckscarves. In larger items, fabrics such as viscose are used to imitate silk.

This elephant duffel bag (fig 15), which is for sale in Shree at £3.99, appears fantastically Indian and great value, especially considering the fact that the entire front of the bag has been hand embroidered. Four or five years ago, when the 'hippy' look I have discussed, was far more popular, such bags were sold in Shree for £7.00 - nearly twice the price. The bag is instantly Indian - making use of one of the symbols most synonymous with India - the elephant. Initial perceptions are that the motifs are very worked, however, when compared with the intricately-worked chainstitched and sequinned elephants on this hand-embroidered silk sari (fig 16), the duffel bag elephants

appear less intricate and more quickly worked. Closer examination of the duffel bag however, shows use of appliqué and couched edging stitch, two distinctly Indian techniques. They are loosely worked, in quite a large scale, thus speeding up the production process.

Such adaptation of traditional techniques is also seen in the large scale satin stitch on the red bag (fig 17). This satin stitch is derived from the traditional 'counted thread' embroidery technique. Counted thread work involves intricately worked satin stitch, where uniformity of stitch is achieved by counting the threads (of the base fabric) between each stitch (fig 18). It is usually worked on the reverse side of the cloth. On this red bag, the counted thread technique is not used but a similar effect is achieved. There is some degree of uniformity achieved, just by eye judgement. This bag also shows some use of mirror-work (*shisha*), an embroidery technique whereby small mirrors or metal discs are stitched to the cloth (fig 32). The invention of this technique is credited to the favourite wife of India's fifth Mughul emperor Shah Jahan, for whom the Taj Mahal in Agra was built in the 17th century (Morrell, 1994).

Hand worked satin stitch, similar to that seen on the red bag, is seen around the collar of this white shirt (figs 19 & 20), where the abstract floral/cross motifs are separated by diagonal lines of herringbone stitch. A variation of this herringbone stitch is also used to frame this embroidered panel. There is a more loosely rendered floral pattern and tassels along the end of the shirt. This glossy, unspun viscose thread imitates the silk threads continually used in the production of saris, and stitches such as the herringbone and satin stitches, although used in European embroidery since the seventeenth century, are also traditional Indian techniques.

A further example of the Indian manufacturers' use of traditional embroidery techniques to sell goods to the Western market as 'Indian', is the extensive use of chain stitch on these garments. In the case of Shree, almost all chain stitch is machine sewn, but although this is the case, the large stitch size and thick threads give the looseness, an almost primitive feel. This 'primitive' look is contradictory to India's technologically advanced textiles industry, but it appeals to the Western market as it is consistent with our definition of a third world country. It is also ironic that such loose chain stitch should be sold as typically Indian, as hand chain stitch in traditional Indian embroidery, can be as intricately worked as on these saris.

These examples (elephant duffel bag, satin stitch duffel bag and machine chain stitch), have shown how embroidery techniques (both hand - and machine-sewn) must be modified, in order to speed up the production processes, thus ensuring financial viability. For similar reasons, in the case of the collar of the lilac silk blouse (fig 21), it is

used only in isolated small areas. One case of an embroidered garment in Shree, where the appearance of the garment has not been adversely affected by attempts to speed up production processes, is on the collar of this lilac silk blouse. The tiny running stitch on this ~~sari~~ blouse is hand sewn, and when compared with the running stitch on this sari (fig 22), it is every bit as delicate and well executed. The small amount of embroidery on the blouse, compared with the multi-coloured, fully embroidered sari, is most definitely an attempt, on the part of the manufacturer, to cut costs. However, the point here is that the *quality* (as opposed to quantity) of the stitch has not been compromised. As beautiful as the work on this blouse is, it should be noted that the tiny stitching is more likely to be the work of a young child. (Discussion of this subject, however, is beyond the scope of this paper).

Traditional weaving, unlike most of Shree's embroidery, manages to keep most of its characteristics and intricate qualities in translation to highly automated looms. Hence, the examples of decorative weaving in Shree, such as these purses (figs 23 & 24), are closer to the traditional work than most of the embroidered goods. In traditional work, such decorative work is usually only seen at the edges of garments, as on this sari (figs 25 & 26), where the edges have a thin woven band, and the end of the sari (normally draped over the shoulder allowing the edge to almost reach the floor) has two wider, more decorative bands.

Shree's printed fabrics, like the woven goods, have also managed to retain a lot of their distinctly Indian qualities, despite the use of faster, cheaper production methods. The fabric for these printed silk scarves (fig 27) was most likely printed in lengths, before being cut and hand rolled at the edges. In the case of the black and yellow scarf, it would have simply been a case of screen-printing the black pattern onto a pre-dyed yellow silk. The red and blue one, although with a less intricate pattern, would have taken longer to print, using two or three screens. The white areas could have been batiqued (where wax is painted onto the cloth before dying, thus resisting the dye in those areas selected), or they could have been left white during the silk screen printing process. Whichever is the case, the aim was most likely to achieve the batiqued effect. With this white decoration's irregularity in size and brush-stroked appearance, the attempts at achieving a batiqued look were very successful.

With printing, unlike embroidery, the manufacturer can afford to have very intricate designs, as the most time-consuming part of the labour is in the making of the screen. Once the image has been placed on the screen, it can be reproduced any number of times, and as quickly as a simpler pattern. Similar principles apply to the production of this printed cotton throw (fig 28). The pattern can afford to be quite ornate

as it can be reproduced quickly and easily. In the case of this throw, however, we can see how the quality of the printing was sacrificed for the sake of speed; the red and blue prints are slightly 'off' their black outlines. This is characteristic of a lot of Indian printed goods, at least those normally found in Dublin. Perhaps achieving a hand-painted look is the objective, however in the case of this sari (fig 29) where the black outline is screen-printed, and the red and green areas painted, the registration is far more accurate.

B- Tailoring goods to suit the Western market.

These Indian saris, when compared with Shree's clothing, are undoubtedly more beautiful, show higher levels of craftsmanship, greater attention to detail and the use of more expensive fabrics (100% silk, rather than 100% viscose). Their colours, patterns and fabrics make them unmistakably eastern, and yet nothing so authentically 'Indian' is sold in Dublin's first, and most prominent Indian shop.

A possible reason for this may be that saris are impractical for Irish weather; Shree's proprietor Mrs Chawla says that she wears them less frequently for this reason. They are also too Indian to be worn comfortably by European women in European society. Such obviously national costumes are rarely seen outside their native countries, unless worn by immigrants of that country.

Another reason there may not be an Irish market for such genuinely Indian goods as saris, is that few Irish (or indeed Europeans) are so committed to the pursuit of Indian goods that they would spend substantial amounts of money on such garments. As I have just discussed, to the European eye, an embroidered cheesecloth blouse, or the elephant duffel bag has the effect of looking 'just Indian enough'. Unless one is truly dedicated to the acquisition of Indian goods, they won't need a fully embroidered and sequinned sari.

For these reasons, had Shree opened up, selling only genuine Indian goods, made for the Indian market, it's quite possible that it would not have survived. Indian manufacturers for the European market obviously recognised this, and began modifying designs to suit the European market. An example of this modification of designs and styles to suit the European market, is seen in Shree's long, gathered skirts (fig 12). The wide band around the end of this skirt is a direct reference to the decorative band at the end of a sari. Such gathered skirts are more suited to European trends. The 'hippy' look of the eighties and early nineties teamed such skirts with Doc Marten boots and a suede jacket (usually second-hand).

Shree's embroidered blouses, usually produced in cheesecloth or velvet with embroidery on the front, although distinctly eastern to our eyes, were designed and produced with only the Western market in mind. Their loose fit and empire line cut gives them an exotic look, however such styles would rarely be seen in India. Even today, when clothes other than saris are worn by Indian women, decoration such as machine chainstitch is rarely seen. Decoration is seen as futile unless it is as beautiful and intricate as that on these hand decorated saris.

Conclusion

In examining goods sold in Shree, and particularly in the comparison of these to Mrs Chawla's own saris, questions and issues regarding the production processes and methods have arisen increasingly. Even in the case of hand-embroidered goods, the end products seem far removed from those textiles which have inspired them. It may seem strange that the manufacturers would use for example, thicker threads and larger-scale stitching in embroidery, when they produce an effect inconsistent with that of the more traditional work. In the most obvious examples of this, however - the elephant duffel bag and large-scale satin stitch - the manufacturers' motives are clearly evident; to speed up the production process, thereby reducing labour costs and increasing the profit margin.

Further consideration of the processes used in the machine chain stitch leads us to some important findings: that thinner threads are no less expensive and that, although they would necessitate a smaller stitch, as it is machine-rendered, it would be no more labour-intensive or time-consuming. Consequently, we must consider the possibility that there is another motive for this departure from the detailed, intricate work seen in these saris.

International Textiles' article *India Comes of Age*, draws attention to the sheer size of India's textile industry. India's cotton industry accounts for one fifth of the country's industrial production. One of the main reasons for the success and growth of this industry, is the introduction of modern machinery and equipment. India's textile production industry is among the most technologically advanced in the world. It seems, however that when we look for 'Indian' goods, we would rather embrace crudely printed items which show the use of simple, speedy embroidery techniques. Perhaps the western world feels more secure in its superiority, when it can look condescendingly on such countries as India. We might feel less 'wonderful' if we had to admire the skill of these workers, rather than the spirit of the goods' primitive manufacture.

The answer perhaps lies in Carol Hendrickson's observations which I have discussed in Chapter I - that exotic goods, when sold to the Western, Capitalist market, appear more exotic if they look 'hand-crafted', 'primitive' - produced in countries unaffected by technological advances. India may not be the most primitive of countries, particularly not in the area of textile production, but its extreme poverty still affords it the term 'Third World'. It seems that our perception of India as a Third World, 'backward' country, is exploited in the production and marketing of these goods.

Perhaps the word 'exploited' is too loaded a term. Why shouldn't this poorest-of-poor country, where families must send even their children out to work, use what means they can to get money from the First World?

A. A. Gill, in his article (*A Short Walk in the Hindu Crush*, The Sunday Times, Jan 10th 1999), condemns the attitude of western tourists to India, who will sympathise with the poor, meanwhile congratulating themselves on haggling a street seller down to half price. In the practice of producing exotic goods for sale in the West, the goods are made appear 'primitive', 'hand-crafted', 'authentic' for one reason - to sell them.

Figure 1: The Nile, St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre, Dublin 2.
Figure 2: Egyptian Scarab bracelet, £1.99 from The Nile.

Figure 3:'Asha', St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre, Dublin 2.

Figures 4(above) and 5(below): Shree at its present location in the Ilac centre, Dublin 1.

Figure 6: Shree's Grafton Street premises, now occupied by Thornton's.

Figure 7: The original Molesworth Street premises has been replaced by the Irish office of the European Parliament.

Figure 8: 'Catch' - One of Dublin's many Indian-owned retail outlets,Liffey Street, Dublin1.

Figures 9(above) and 10(below): Afro/Caribbean shops in Dublin.

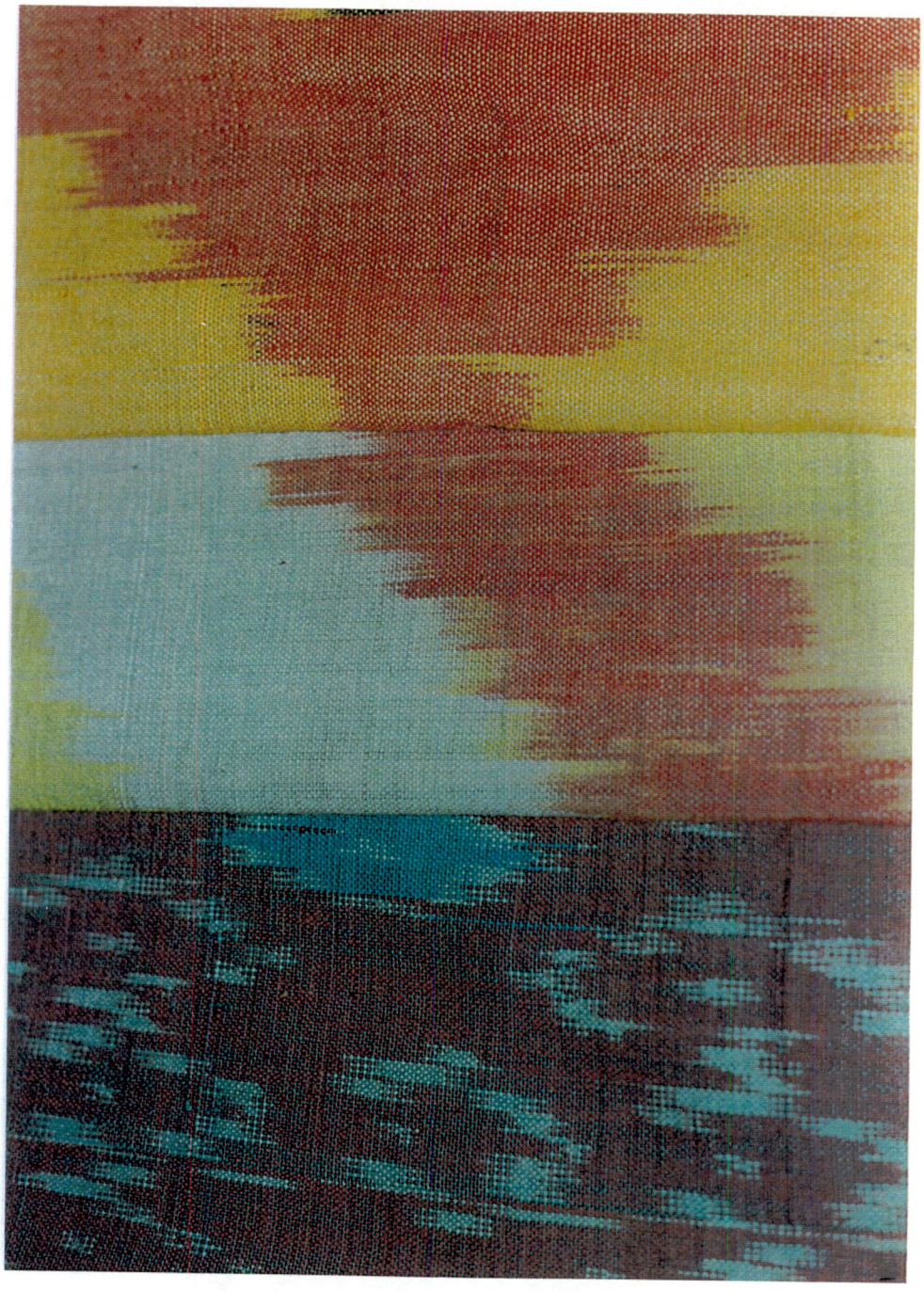

Figure11: Ikat throws, £8.99, Shree, January '99.

Figure 12: crushed velvet gathered skirt, Shree, £9.99, Jan '99.

Figure 13 (left): Incense, Sandalwood soap and other Indian 'accessories', Shree, Jan.1999.

Figure 14 (below): 'Giftware', Shree, Jan 1999.

Figure 15 Duffel bags, £3.99, Shree, Feb '99.

Figure 16 Hand embroidered and sequind elephants; detail from sari.

Figurel 7: Satin-stitched duffel bag, £3.99, Shree Feb '99.

Figurel 8: Late 19th or early 20th century sample of Indian counted -thread work.

Figure19: Hand satin-stitched blouse, £5.99, Shree, Jan '99.

Figure20: Detail of figure 19.

Figure 21:Detail of hand running stitch on the collar of a lilac silk blouse, Shree, Jan '99.

Figure22: Detail of hand running stitch on a tussore-silk sari.

Figures 23 (left) and 24 (below): A selection of woven purses, Shree, Jan '99.

Figure 25 Blue and gold woven sari.
Figure 26 Detail of figure 25.

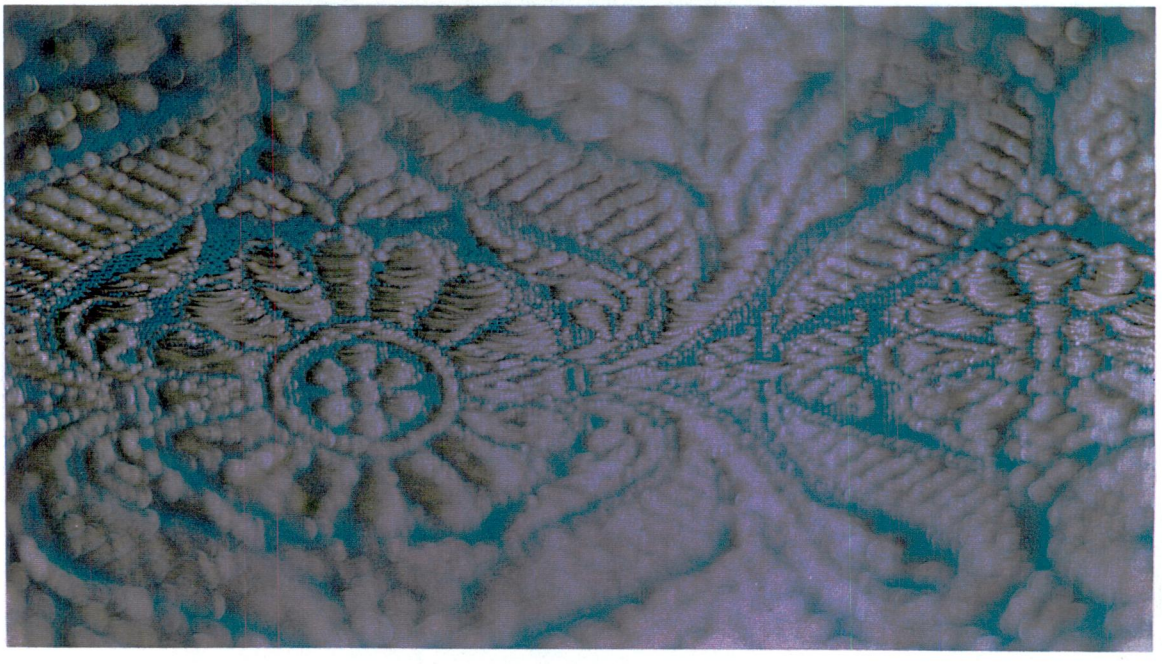

Figure 27:Screen-printed silk scarves, £4.99, Shree, Jan '99.

Figure 28 Detail of a screen-printed cotton throw, £9.99, Shree, Jan '99.

Figure 29 Detail of a screen-printed and hand-painted sari.

Figure 30: Orlagh(right) wears green viscose blouse with chain-stitched spiral pattern - 1994.

Figure 31: Fruzina wears crushed-velvet, tie-dyed trousers from Asha(fig 3).

Figure 32: Early 20th century mirror-work.

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