

# How clothing can change person's life and why we care so much about looking prest...

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Why is that? Is the lungi really such a prestige killer? Does not a tank top have similar openness and comfort level as the lungi? Why – this one perplexes me to a great degree – would any sane man or woman consider torn jeans a fashionable item? How are torn jeans more standard than the lungi? Is it so only for the fact that we see celebrities and movie stars donning them? Yes, I would say that really is the sole reason. The media, unsurprisingly, is the single biggest trend setter in the world today. Mostly from television and the internet, we see superstars and we try to emulate them. Others then notice this trend and they jump on the bandwagon as well. In fact, following the latest trend and staying ‘ up to date’ is a constant pressure that today’s generation puts up with. This is a big reason, therefore, as to why the lungi is associated with the lower class even though it does not intrinsically have a worse appearance than other pieces of clothing like torn jeans and tank tops.

Let us talk a bit more about the lungi being a symbol of the poor and unprivileged. Yes, the lungi is cheap, but it is extremely comfortable and easy to move around in (“[o]ne size fits all”). Is it not ignorant, to the point of stupidity, when the lungi is discarded merely for its perceived lower class status? Yes, merely for that, and not for any other reason is the lungi a lower class marker. If someone argues that the lungi looks too ‘ simple’ and has connotations of peasants, then educate them to the fact that the national dress of Scotland is the kilt, which is basically a male skirt. Yet, that is accepted while the lungi is not. To quote Kaiser Haq again, “ how hypocritical!”

As far as sheer numbers go, “ there are more people in lungis than the population of the USA.” “ The poet retorts that there are hundreds of millions of people from East Africa to Indonesia wear the lungi with different names such as sarong (popular ethnic dress in Indonesia), munda (popular among Adivasis both in India and Bangladesh), htamain (used in Myanmar), saaram (ethnic Korean traditional dress), kitenge (ethnic African dress), kanga (a colourful African garment similar to Indonesian sarong and mostly worn by women), etc. day in day out” (Murphy 2017). Thus, no one can say that the lungi is worn by a minority.

Again, it is difficult to find fault with the common interpretation of the poem (criticism of sartorial inequality). For instance, we cannot say that Kaiser Haq’s argument is unrealistic. Of course, “ lounging in a lungi” in office and college is unacceptable, though they should not be. Either way, that is what the reality of the situation is. However, the poet’s gripe is not with this. He is “ not complaining about the jacket and tie required in some places.” Clearly, he is not discouraging us to not wear western clothing. He is only highlighting the fact that we wear clothes of other cultures when we have a wonderfully comfortable dress of our own culture. Just because a dress is not modern does not make it more prestigious.

Nikolai Gogol’s “ The Overcoat” is a critically acclaimed short story centering around a copyist Akaky Akakievich. The man is an enigma, and not for the best of reasons. Hardworking though he is, he lives in a bubble. His only comfort zone is doing his job – copying manuscripts – and this he indulges in throughout the whole day even in his leisure. He is so much in love with his

work that in his job, “ he found a varied and agreeable world of his own. There was a look of enjoyment on his face; certain letters were favorites with him, and when he came to them he was delighted; he chuckled to himself and winked and moved his lips, so that it seemed as though every letter his pen was forming could be read in his face” (Gogol, 2). Here, it is as if the “ certain letters” are living breathing friends of his. He is “ delighted” when he “ came to them.”

However, these letters are only his friends when it comes to copying them down, for he is not a good writer at all. In fact, once when a director wished to reward him for his work ethic by giving him a higher salary work of editing (requiring only the most minimal of efforts), Akaky cannot get the job done. This is intentional by the writer, to get a character so pathetic that it is difficult for readers to feel sorry for him. At the office, Akaky is bullied for his one dimensional character. One cannot really blame Akaky’s colleagues, as he never cares for anything except his work. This includes his wardrobe, which used to get soiled daily on his way to the office. It is mentioned in the story of how “ there were always things sticking to his uniform, either bits of hay or threads.” Another pathetic display is portrayed in this line: “ moreover, he had a special art of passing under a window at the very moment when various rubbish was being flung out into the street, and so was continually carrying off bits of melon rind and similar litter on his hat.” This is obviously a comedic touch to the story in addition to extending Akaky’s pathetic character. The fact the he “ always” got his clothes soiled

by falling litter is of course an exaggeration. Not counting this hyperbole, the writing style is very realistic until Akaky's death, which I will discuss later.

This utterly careless mindset of the protagonist takes a complete 180 when he works hard for a new overcoat (for the first time in his life, he does so for a materialistic item). He is suddenly sensitive in terms of his outlook and tries to take care of his overcoat. When the overcoat is left laying after a party (probably the first time in his life that he goes to one), Akaky is dismayed. Thus, Gogol shows how a piece of clothing can change a person's life. It is for purchasing the overcoat that Akaky puts so much emphasis into something other than his copyist job, and it is also for the overcoat that he starts being protective over his outward appearance. Hence, a dress can not only ascribe social status to a person as we have discussed in "Ode on the Lungi" where dress is a status symbol), it can even give him a new perspective in life (and make him do many first-times).

There is another life lesson to be learnt from the story. Akaky turns over a new leaf after getting hold of the namesake of the story's title. Speaking of namesake, there is a novel called "The Namesake" written by Jhumpa Lahiri where the main character is named after Nikolai Gogol because his father loved Gogol's work. The protagonist Gogol has some insecurities – not excluding his name, which he formally changes – and tries to hide them. However, his ugly sides rear their heads anyway and are exposed throughout the novel. There is a saying in the novel which is "we all come from Gogol's overcoat." This means that however much we try to hide our flaws and push them away in an attempt to escape, they will eventually come to the surface.

Therefore, what we should do is try to tackle our challenges and work on them.

In "The Overcoat," Akaky tries to shirk away from his insecurity of going out of his comfort zone and doing anything except his job. However, he is forced to work hard for a different goal in mind than his passion for copying: buying a new overcoat. This he does because his old overcoat is ruined due to his lack of taking care of his wardrobe. This irresponsibility is another of his characteristic problems which he overcomes when he gets the new overcoat. Thus, we can say that his old damaged overcoat was a wall behind which his dormant potential (to work hard for other things but his job) lay dormant. After he "comes out of Gogol's overcoat," he learns to be responsible as he has experienced first-hand the difficulty in getting an overcoat made. Therefore, both overcoats are significant here: the decay of the first one opens his eyes, while the second one gets his utmost care.