

# CHINESE ORIGIN OF THE WORD “PATCH” AND OF THE PATCH-WORK COSTUME OF THE SUFI

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In the make-up of a personality dress plays such an important role that it seems to qualify the wearer. Thus a soldier is recognised by his military dress while the king has his robe of majesty. Arberry<sup>140</sup> observes that a Sufi, “practicing poverty and abstinence” wore coarse wool, when “Sufi became a nickname, derived from the Arabic word, Suf, wool,” briefly as Mr Wool. However, Jesus, who personified saintliness above all, used to be clad in wool. Now during the time of the Sufi Ḥasan Baṣrī there were “certain devotees who wore wool as an imitation of Jesus”. And the elite among the Sufis adopted a costume of patch-work, called *khirqah* in Arabic. Arberry explains that “initiation into the Sufi mysteries was marked by the investiture of a special frock, *khirqah*, symbolizing his acceptance into a tradition of Divine service mounting back, stage by stage, to the prophet Muhammad”.<sup>141</sup> But, instead of *khirqah* being traced, stage-wise, to the Prophet, that he ever wore a costume to be characterised as the robe of saintliness or of Prophethood, can be openly questioned. Now Ibn Sīrīn, a scholar, who died in A.D. 728, was a contemporary of Ḥasan Baṣrī. He used to criticise the latter on his wearing wool. Ibn Sīrīn maintained that, as a Muslim, “he preferred to follow the example of our prophet who clothed himself in cotton,” rather than in wool. Thus it appears that the Prophet did not preferably dress himself in wool and probably had no special cloak as *khirqah*. A woollen cloak can, however, be traced to Jesus, if not even earlier, so that *khirqah* would appear to be a pre-Islamic costume, indirectly supporting that Sufism itself has a longer past.

We now turn to China for the forerunner of the patch-work cloak, the *khirqah*. In a primitive society death-rate among children has always been high and parents were constrained to adopt all means to assure the survival of their issues. One such device in China can be termed “magical dress”. The

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<sup>140</sup> A.J. Arberry, *Sufism* (London, 1950), p. 35.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

mother of the child would go, door to door, begging for a piece of cloth, when each donor would offer one with good wishes for the long life of the child. These pieces of cloth, or patches, to use the correct English word, would contribute to the making of a patch-work costume when the dress, as a whole, symbolises the integration of the good wishes of a number of families. The emphasis is easily shifted to the good wishes which the patch-work incorporates. The Chinese term for such a dress is “Pai-Chia-I,” literally, the hundred family (donated) dress. Thus what incorporates the good wishes for longevity, of so many people, becomes a “magical dress” of immortality. Sufism, being a cult of immortality, the Sufi would naturally prefer a patch-work as his overall cloak.

Redhouse<sup>142</sup> translates the word *khirqah* as rag, tatter and also as dervish's cloak. But Richardson's Dictionary,<sup>143</sup> printed as early as 1777, best renders *khirqah*=patch, for in English patch= piece of cloth, rather than a rag, or a torn strip, as Redhouse has rendered it. Thus *Khirqah* is a cloak of patch-work and signifies a “magical dress” of longevity. It thus becomes the prerogative of an immortal as Sufi to wear such a cloak of immortality. The custom is clearly an import from China. It has been discussed before and aptly illustrated with coloured illustrations of Chinese origin.<sup>144</sup> The etymology of the English word “patch” remains unknown. Dictionary renders it primarily as a “piece of cloth”. When a lay observer sees a patch-work, termed “Pai-Chia-I,” he can easily derive the word “patch” from it for a “piece of cloth”. Patch becomes the unit of a patch-work dress as the real entity. Besides the device of dressing a child in a cloth of patch-work there are others in China by which the longevity of the child is aimed at.

### **SHOULD A MUSLIM PERFORM HAJJ AGAIN AND AGAIN\***

Of these wealthy persons many are greatly fond of spending money on Hajj. They go on Hajj again and again, and sometimes do so leaving their neighbours to starve.

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<sup>142</sup> Sir James W. Redhouse, *Turkish and English Lexicon*, Constantinople, 1890, reprinted Beirut, 1974.

<sup>143</sup> J. Richardson, *Dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1777.

<sup>144</sup> S. Mandihassan, “The Garb of the Sufi and Its Significance,” *Iqbal* (Lahore), Vol. VIII (1960), No. 3, pp. 72-82.

‘Abd Allah b. Mas’ūd has rightly said that during the later ages, the number of those who go on Ḥajj unnecessarily will become very large. Journey will be easy for them, a'd they will have plenty of money. Yet they will return from Ḥajj empty-handed and without any spiritual gain.

While these people will be travelling in deserts and wildernesses, their next door neighbours will have been left in misery, without any help or consolation from them.

Abū Naṣr Tama relates that a person came to Bashar b. al-Ḥārith and said: “I intend to go on Ḥajj. Can I be of any service to you?”

Bashar asked: “How much are you going to spend on this journey?”

“Two thousand dirhams,” said the intending pilgrim. Bashar then asked: “What is your motive for this Ḥajj?—Show of wealth? Love of the Ka'bah?”

“God' pleasure,” was the answer.

“Well,” said Bashar, “what if I tell you a way to win God's pleasure while remaining at home all the time? Are you prepared to do something which will ensure you God's pleasure and will cost the same two thousand dirhams?”

“Certainly,” came the prompt answer.

“All right!” said Bashar, “go and distribute this money among ten persons who may be in debt... Or if you prefer that, give the entire sum to one individual, because to gladden a Muslim's heart, or help a helpless person, to assist someone in his misfortune, or to strengthen the weak, is much better than performing a hundred optional Ḥajjs. Go and do as I tell you, or frankly admit to me whatever is in your heart.”

The man at this confessed: “O Shaikh! to be honest with you, my heart is set upon this journey !”

At this Bashar b. Ḥārith smiled and declared: “When wealth is acquired by dirty or doubtful means, your evil self demands that its desires should be fulfilled with this money, under cover of seemingly virtuous deeds. But God Almighty has taken a pledge that He will accept only virtuous deeds of those who fear Him sincerely.”

•Imām Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, III, 352..