

Clothes minded

APPRECIATION FOR ATTIRE OF GLOBAL CULTURES A GATEWAY TO ACCEPTANCE

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Sean Kilpatrick / CANADIAN PRESS FILES

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and wife Sophie Gregoire Trudeau, and children, Xavier, 10, Ella-Grace, 9, and Hadrien, 3, visit Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple in Ahmedabad, India.

When Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, visited Pakistan in October 2019, she stepped forward with more than great style.

Stunning photographs of her in Pakistani fashions, which she wore from start to finish during the royal visit, dominated media around the world. Catherine's wardrobe was also a step forward in building acceptance for diversity. Her choices amounted to a gesture of respect for Pakistani culture.

It is unfortunate that when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau repeatedly wore South Asian attire during his February 2018 trip to India, his choice of dress was questioned upon his return. Perhaps his clothing was a surprise to the Western eye. His efforts should have been appreciated, not mocked; he and his family members, who also frequently wore Indian clothing during the trip,

showed respect and appreciation for the people they were among.

Locally, Coun. Janice Lukes often sports South Asian clothing, describing it as comfortable and fun to wear; she says she feels honoured to wear such beautiful items.

She notes South Asian community members appreciate that she celebrates the culture and wears the clothing.

Lukes looks forward to wearing a sari — a traditional draped garment made of 4.5 to eight metres of fabric — calling the dress "so royal and elegant." Lukes has worn Indian fashions, such as the salwar kameez (tunic-and-pant outfit with scarf), to community events, and she often accessorizes her everyday wardrobe with Indian jewelry and scarves, the latter of which is her favourite piece of South Asian clothing.



RUTH BONNEVILLE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS
Coun. Janice Lukes often wears South Asian-inspired accessories.

Too often individuals are marginalized based on their style of dress and appearances. Just as food is diverse among cultures, our ways of dress and

appearances are equally diverse. This diversity offers us opportunities to move beyond a culture of fear and move towards a culture of acceptance.

Lukes has visited India, Nepal, Vietnam, Thailand, and Central and South America. Her past travels and current role as city councillor for the culturally diverse Waverley West ward fit well together.

Lukes regularly attends cultural celebrations and festivals, and engages with community members in the spirit of expanding the conversation about diversity.

"I am daily working with people, talking with people from these places that I have been to, and I can relate and understand," she says.

Experiencing the clothing of any culture is more than a fashion moment. It is a way to become educated about the customs,



B.K. Bangash / The Associated Press
Throughout the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's visit to Pakistan, Catherine wore Pakistani garments as a sign of respect.

heritage and history of a culture, a way to begin understanding who people actually are, rather than who you assume them to be.

Despite our different experiences, we share things that can connect us.

For instance, Lukes says she has found a connection between elaborate and elegant South Asian clothing and her previous work. The councillor, who owned a flower shop for 15 years and worked in the floral industry for 25 years, says "(When) you work with colours, textures, shapes, designs, you have an appreciation for the fabrics, the designs, for the work that goes into it and for the intricacies of clothing."

We need to understand that our individual identities make our community, city and country a rich tapestry, weaving together disparate strands that make us better and stronger together.

Lukes acknowledges there can be the perception of cultural appropriation when an individual wears the clothing of a culture that's not their own. She says whenever she has asked community members if it is OK to wear their cultural garments, the response has always been welcoming — and she is thrilled to celebrate these beautiful pieces of clothing. In approaching cultural clothing respectfully, we can move closer to an acceptance of diversity.

"Food, clothing and celebrations break down barriers and open minds and are so very important," Lukes says.

Neither Catherine, Trudeau nor Lukes wear South Asian clothing in their everyday lives. But they have all made a concerted effort to show they are interested in experiencing a different style of dress and understanding a different culture.

They have acknowledged and appreciated those are different from themselves. As the late Maya Angelou, a poet, author and civil rights activist, said, "At the end of the day, people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel." When our actions convey to others, "I see you," we have moved closer to embracing diversity and moved away from exclusion.

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