

## BEYOND THE PALE

*Imke Klee explores the Power and Simplicity of White*









SELVEDGE 60





**Just as white light** can be split up into a spectrum of many colours, the wearing of white cloth in India conveys a host of meanings. In its purest, unadorned form it is a colour of mourning for men and women. In the north of the country widows wear plain white saris; but it is not a universally sombre shade. Though white is rarely seen at celebrations – marigold orange, fuchsia pink and crimson usually take centre stage – it also represents purity and high status.

Combined with coloured decoration such as woven borders or dense embroidery, white does make an occasional appearance at joyful occasions. In the Indian state of Kerala brides typically wear a pale cream or white sari edged with gold.

For Hindu priests and Svetambara sect followers of Jainism, an Indian religion of over four million people, white fabric is an expression of simplicity and humility. There are two main sects of Jains: the Digambaras (sky clad or naked) who reject all forms of clothing and the Svetambaras (white clad). The latter's clothing may be entirely unassuming but the Jain community are responsible for some of the oldest, most elaborate and ornate architecture in India including the white marble temples at Mount Abu. Technically, pure white may be the absence of colour but in practice it always creates contrast. ●●● **Beth Smith**  
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