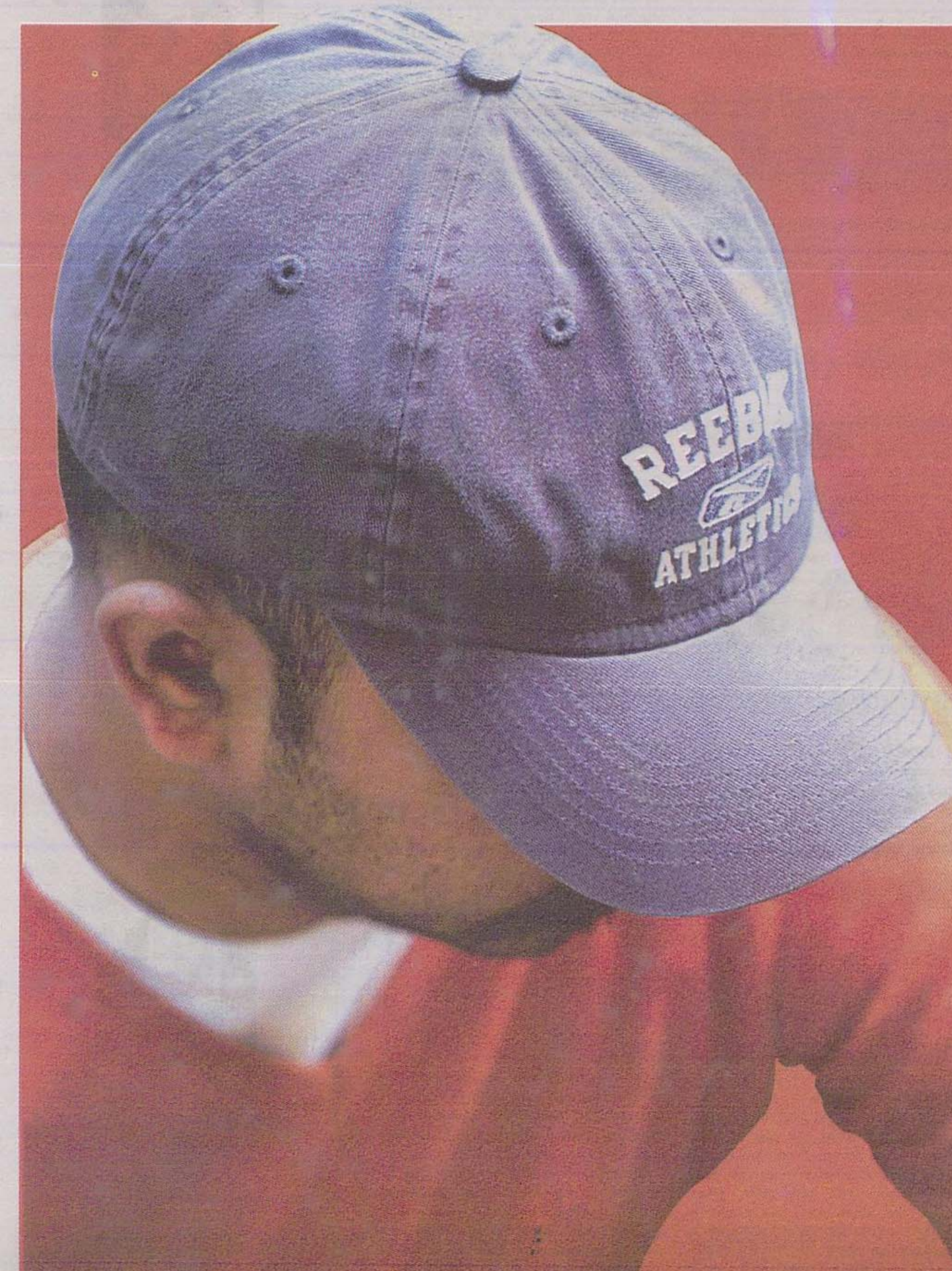


hats off to the hat



EVER wonder how hats came into existence? Ancient man saw lightning strike some dry leaves and discovered fire. His inquisitiveness led him too close to the fire that ended up setting his mangy hair ablaze. That's when he realized that the head needs serious protection. Thus caps were invented. Or maybe not.

The fact remains though the hats, caps and all other skull coverings were made mainly for protection purposes. Hats provided refuge against the rain, sun, wind and biting cold. Slowly it evolved into a small form of status symbol.

Symbol of prestige

As far back as the 14th century, men used hats both for fashion as well as a display of power and status. Prominence was placed on the latter. Women on the other hand used hats for the sole purpose of outdoing other women in terms of style. Ancient Greeks and Romans wore their hats to show rank among the nobility. In the Asian subcontinent a major portion of the head covering consisted of veils. In many cultures it was part of the religion as well that was adopted by both men and women.

The Turks on the other hand wore elaborate and colourful turbans. In 1600-1700 AD the rich and the famous (or infamous for that matter) would deck their turbans with all kinds of jewels. The women highlighted their hats with rare feathers. Persian women and princesses wore intricately designed headgear. In India during the Mughal era nobility wore bejeweled crowns and turbans.

During the 1600's hats were all the rage in Europe. Different styles of hats identified the profession and culture of the man wearing it. As a result men's hats took quite a stylish turn. The multitude of styles included tricorne, bicorne, top hat, copatain, sugar loaf, coke hat, panama, felt hat, western, straw hat etc. These were made of satin, velvet, silk and leather.

The Marlboro man

There is only one hat that has a tag line attached to it that goes "It is the last thing you take off and the first thing that is noticed". This is the cowboy hat that is a well known icon all around the world. It came into existence during 1845 at the hands of John B. Stetson. During a hunting trip he was showing his friends how to make a stitchless outfit. To complement the outfit he also created a hat that amazed everyone because it too had no stitches. Of course, initially it was bit of a laughing stock looking a bit like a joker's hat with its tall stance and wide brim. Gradually the design changed a little and it was seen that the wide brim helped the wearer against the elements. John Stetson decided to use it all the time and an icon was born. Although at present there are many different styles and shapes the basic design and principle remains close to Stetson's creation. Without a cowboy hat the red shirted Marlboro Man would not be such an icon.

Civilised countenance

During the 19th and 20th century especially in Europe wearing a hat was a sign of civility. During the reign of King Edward everyone including children was required to wear hats regardless of wealth. The only ones exempted from this were the beggars. Following the First World War the focus on hats gradually started to die down. Soon hats were worn mainly during formal receptions.

Princess Diana formed the epitome of elegance and grace. In the 80's she revived the ladies hat wearing culture.

Popularly known as Princess Di she was a massive hit among the fashionistas. Every different occasion warranted its particular outfit complemented by a stylish hat.

The political connection

In our Asian subcontinent the act of covering the head has existed for a long time. The difference is that it is not like the European hats. In fact, this is more of a cap used mainly for religious convictions as well as political norms. Sometimes political figures gave rise to the importance of particular caps. Persian poet Rumi, Galib as well as figures such as Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah etc have had their names associated with particular styles of caps which have become icons in their own right. In our country we had the "Bhashani" cap. In 1947 during the separation of the country "Gandhi" and "Jinnah" caps were favoured as brand caps for different political parties and their supporters.

Another favorite of that era was the Rumi cap. It was a very furry affair worn by Muslim nobility. Another similar head attire was the Mirja Galib cap.

During the 60's a very popular style was that emulating political leader Moulana Bhasani. His cap made out of plant fibres is still favoured by those who are very much into religion. Cap traders can be seen in front of Baitul Mukarram Mosque to display a range of Bhasani caps.

Similarly Mahatir Muhammad of Malaysia has his particular style that is quite widely followed. It's a black velvet cap with golden needlework. It has become a bit of a brand because of the power of his personality. Mahatir is known to be the man who has rebuilt Malaysia.

Wearing your brand

Recent trends in headwear show a growing inclination toward caps rather than hats. Although fashion shows in Paris and Milan focus more on hats. A lot of our local fashion outlets are seen displaying hats/caps alongside the clothing material. The youth prefer caps with an endless selection of logos. This is especially true in case of cricket lovers who like to display the team logo or their favourite country flag on their cap.

About 40 percent of the population wears caps. These exist under many different names such as haji tupi, kisti, shahi, kashmiri, farzai, Saudi, napali, Burma and of course the highly controversial Taliban tupi.

Bangladeshi made caps are quite widely exported. The middle east is a big market for us. Various designs are created using cotton, silk, velvet etc upon which intricate embroidery is applied. In areas like Lalbagh, Nababganj, Kamrangir Char factories have been established. In Bongobazaar, New Market, in front of Dhaka College caps of all colours, shapes and sizes can be found alongside men's clothing.

Sticking out from the herd

Whether it is based on religious convictions, political or sports affiliation or simply for fashion, hats and caps have become quite a large part of what we wear. It sets us apart from the herd. There is an old saying that if you want to get ahead and get noticed then get a hat.

By Sultana Yasmin

Translated by Ehsanur Raza Ronny

Photo: Munem Wasif/ Amirul Rajiv

Model: Khaled Mahmud/ Kabir

