

HEAD DRESSES AND HAIR DECORATION: A UNIQUE HISTORICAL PROCESS OF SOUTH INDIAN ASSIMILATION INTO PATTERNS OF HEAD DECORATION DURING 16th CENTURY SRI LANKA.

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ABSTRACT

In ancient Sri Lanka, 16th Century marked limelight in the fields of Literature and Fine Arts. The pursuit of art of dance has become a regular and important feature in the Kings court with influence of the South Indian culture. This paper is based on the study of Kotte period fashions of the dance head dresses with consideration of identifying and categorizing of assimilated salient features of the South Indian culture. Further this study expounded by analyzing the influential patterns of penetrating South Indian culture to the ancient Sri Lankan Kotte era. The main argument put forward in this study is that the adaptation of South Indian elements to dance head dresses are a static entity, as most seen in structuring and designing, however a dynamic process that keeps evolving with the Sinhala tradition emerging in the context. In addition to deliberate designing, the structures could be changed and organized by the internal agents associated with the tradition. In view of that this paper reformulated the already known story of the assimilation of South Indian inspiration to Kotte kingdom as a historic process, intending to explain emerging design elements in dance coiffures as an influential phenomenon.

Keywords: Adorning of hair, South Indian assimilation, Hair decoration, 16th Century

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka and Indian continent; geographical and cultural relation

The Island of Sri Lanka, situated at the tip of the Indian subcontinent, separated from the main land by a narrow maritime corridor of twenty two miles. By the geographical situation the island has been exposed to the impact of political developments in South India. The recorded history of Sri Lanka found in the chronicles its people start with the Aryan colonization marked by the advent of Vijaya and his 700 followers from North India (6th Century B.C). Introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd BC brought by Rev Mahinda, son of great Emperor Asoka of India created the strong link for Aryan influence on Sri Lankan people. Lifestyle began to more formalize to a systematic way by the bringing of the sacred Bo Sapling by the Rev Sangamitta the daughter of Emperor Asoka with sixteen artisan groups of painters, craftsmen, musicians etc. The geographical context of Sri Lanka came into close contact with her neighbors in the mainland of the far south.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was adopted for the research. Sequence of observational studies with temple paintings, wood, ivory carvings, and sculptures along with the continuous literature review with use of documented manuscripts, records, published research and inscriptions were used to gather and sort data. Validation was confirmed with cross checking with literary sources and random interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kotte: proximity link with South India

The South Indian influence was very prominent in Polonnaruwa period onwards it was deeper rooted in every aspect of the Kotte kingdom than ever before. It was directly operated at the kings' court The Kings' court was entirely conducted by the Tamil language. (Mendis, J. 1963; 73) Upper crust of Sinhalese society was fast becoming Hindu in outlook. (De Silva, K, M. 1981; 93) Because of very much appreciation of the many South Indian influences by the king and the elites of the kingdom ultimately filtered to the service staff of the royal court. This was much vibrantly visible in the head dresses of court dancers in Kotte period.

Understanding the concept of influence

The concept of influence is inextricably linked with acceptance and rejection. Further it defies simple formulation as direct and indirect. The patterns of influences vitally connected with notions as rationality, memory, history and ideology. The process of influence allows constructing a narration of the past, the present and future on the basis of a certain existed hair adorning. This concept is very often regarded as a transcendental phenomenon is seen to be endowed with certain timeless qualities. Direct influences were operated at the king's court, by matrimonial links with the South Indian families, King and the family members and subordinates, court officers from South India, religion and literature. Indirect influences were, influences by the previous kingdom (Gampola). South Indian exacted well established families whose strong affiliation with the king had built matrimonial links. Alagakkonaras who traced their descent from merchants of Vancipura in Malabar had matrimonial links with the royal family of Gampola (previous period of Kotte. The word Alaka is derived from Tamil Alaka through Sanskrit Alaka abode of Kubera the god of wealth. Tamil Konar means Chief. This is the same as Sanskrit Alakeshwara. Though their Kerala origins were not forgotten, for all intents and purposes the Alakeshwaras had virtually become Sinhalese.

The king Parakramabahu VI (1412- 1467 AD) had two adopted sons Sapumal, and prince Ambulugala were sons of Pannikal of princely offspring of a warrior from Malabar and married a Sinhala princess of Kotte and serving the kings court. Prince Sapumal known by the Sempaka Perumal was a Tamil or Telugu name popular during the time. He was succeeded to the throne of Kotte in 1467 AD under the name of Buwanakabahu VI (1469-77 AD) and prince Ambulugala succeeded to the throne of Kotte in under the name of (1484-1508 AD) Vira parakramabahu VIII. In the religion of Parakramabahu VI the position of the chaplain was held by two Telugu Brahmins called Pota Ojhalum and his nephew Auhala Ojhalum. (Pathmanathan 1986/87 vol: V & VI, 85) They belonged to the Sangiliya Gotra. Some ideas of epithets revealed kinship of South Indian kings as assimilated into the royal court of Kotte through Brahmins and many other ways. The art, literature and cultural ideology characteristics adequately reflected with South Indian transformation is apparently visible in literature work of Kotte period. This inevitable consequence of deep rooted transitions is changes in religion and cultural activity as well as in the nature of artistic production. (Bandaranayke, S, 1986; 15). The assimilation of ideas and traditions derived from Hindu culture and society resulted in the introduction of noteworthy changes in the form, style of the poetry of the period. During this period the concept of the four guardian deities of Lanka was articulated in a developed form. Worship and honor occurring them in the shrines dedicated to them. These deities' attained considerable importance in the Buddhist tradition. (Pathmanathan, S,. 1986/87 vol: V & VI, 82) As a result the Hindu cultural institutions were roused during this period. Hindu shrines for Siva, Vishnu, Kali, Skanda, and Pattini can be found in the Kotte period. Ibn Battuta an Arabian traveler who visited the place in 1344 AD states that a thousand Brahmins were attached to the services and five hundreds notch girls were sang and danced when religious services performed.

Hair adornments

A crown or “Makuta” was a common head ornament of the Kings and the gods from the earliest time. Artist endows their images with beautiful hair adornments with head dresses and hair styles. Dancers in the ivory caskets emphasized significance of court performers with compare to the other dancers (temple dancers)found on the stone door jamb at Galapatha (fig1) temple at Benthara and the temple at Ambulugala, Mawanella (fig 2)which also belonged to the Kotte period(fig 3)Furthermore head dress marked as an object of dynamic movement which comprises of dance costumes. The beauty or the magnificence of head dress depended on the occasion.



Figure 1. Galapatha



Figure 2. Ambulugala



Figure 3. Kotte ivory casket

Impressive head dresses harmonize to the wholeness of the sculptural form of the body. The head dress was shaped in such a way as to be in rhythmic balance with the proportions of the face and the beauty of the countenance. Dancing damsels adorned their hair tresses in various ways to complement their beauty. There were six types of head dresses and, three types of women’s hair styles, depicted in the ivory carvings. The secular poetry of the Selalihini poem gives an interesting glimpse of the aesthetics of head dresses. (Wijesooriya, S, .2004; verse 73, 128) This secular poem gives indication of court dancers and their adornments. According to Selalihini Sandesha verse 73 is clear that temple dancers also used fragrant full blown flowers to decorate hair. Furthermore it described flowers has been used in between braided hair. They used gold plates as ear studs and made up their eyes by applying collyrium.(Ragawan, M,. vol: 28, 1958; 2) Compared to the Galapatha temple at Benthara and, Ambulugala head dresses the Kotte ivory carvings exhibited clever forms and a of a range of structures.

There were six types of head dresses and three types of hair styles depicted in both caskets. Type 1 A crown of madalam flower with hanging decorated strings. Type 2 A crown of madalam flower with looping pearl strings decorate hair. Type 3 A crown of layered flower buds used in between braided hair. Type 4 A crown of conical structure with strings to control it Type 5 A crown of conical structure without strings & control it Type 6 A Three layered crown.

Type 2 head gear consisted of strings of pearls tied around the head firmly with the coiffure at the fore head and at the fringe of the hair line. There are some pearls or beads were inserted into the tresses and it tips of hair ends inserted flowers and a bud suspended on either sides of the ear lobe. The arrangement of head dress in this type is very similar to the head dress depicted in Dakshinamurthi (Tamil God) Strings of pearls and ornamental ribbons also are shown here at the corner of the ears. This circular head gear is called Jatamandalam. (Stahapathi, G,. 2002; 130) The swaying tresses shown here is more similar to those shown in Virisadai style (ibid, 138) which is normally shown in the Nataraja dancing form. There is some textured ornamental garland suspended from either shoulder. A bunch of pearl strands freely sway suggesting rhythmic movement is portrayed.

Head dress No 3 is well formed structure with two layered flower rows and stems. Head band consists of one pearl string. Comparative to the 1st head dress dimension this is much smaller. However the design is fully integrated with the pose and the whole outfit. Highly decorative elevated side bun covered with stylized tresses. The shape of the head gear is also well balanced and proportionate to bellowing skirt. The ear ornaments too adorn the beauty of the headgear. Salabanjika from Malwa 10th Century represents very similar hair style to the above head dress style with a chaplet of trailing flower buds. The stresses of hair style No 7 are neatly arranged and tied in to a vertical bun above the nape. Vertical bun decorated with pearls. Hair has been divided by the band into two parts and worn a forehead band called Neripattam. The hair can be identified as Simantha Sima head ornament is very simple. It is very remarkable South Indian inspired hair style is associated with this dancer. Female arrangement of hair bun is known as Koppu. (ibid, 44) This Koppu style also an inspired most popular hair style during Vijayanagar period. Temple paintings and sculptures were evident with remarkable features.

CONCLUSION

This paper is reformulated the already known story of the assimilation of South Indian inspiration to Kotte kingdom as a historic process, intending to explain emerging design elements in dance head dresses as an influential phenomenon. In order to conceptualize the process, the tradition of Kotte period has been studied relating to the contributions of socio- cultural and political agents acting within the traditional context of the Kotte period. The inspirations, influences observed in illustrations of South Indian forms and Kotte forms clearly indicate that it has been in a continuous process of assimilation. The brief indication of dance head dresses that experiences today are representing a mere historical setting that accumulated some physical elements over time. According to the study revealed that each element and its configuration in shape and structure has a story behind and what witness today in dance head dresses had configured over a centuries with static forms.

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