

SUBJECT OF CLOTH: ITS MANIPULATIONS AND RAMIFICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

'Fashion' has been playing a pivotal role in the human society from time immemorial. Fashion designing, the essential component that plays a vital role in the industry, deserves a careful and comprehensive study. Creating new fashions is the key to the product development in the industry. The objective of the research is incubating new fashion concepts from identified fashion characteristic of the Kandyan era to the future. The selected study setting of the research is Kandyan era (16th Century – 1815) of Sri Lanka. Kandyan era emerged as a new fashion movement with unique characteristics. The most significant draping concepts and methods in fashion were gradually developed during the reign. The study is based on exquisite draperies of dresses of royalty and elites of the Kandyan period. There are plenty of visual records to study the background of this study setting such as sketches and descriptions made by observer – participants of the period, historical murals, carvings and sculptures of the period. The study began with observational study. Reliability of the data which was incorporated in the research is of much concern. Therefore, pictorial data were cross checked with different literary sources. Finally the reinforced concepts were compared with formally established philosophies in order to forward timely necessary concepts. The research extols three draping concepts and methods as emphasizing body silhouette by wrapping, folding and knotting fabrics over the body. Also it enabled to demonstrate dynamic movement of the dress by attaching many suspended folds around the body. The last one was revealing the body by coiling large pieces of fabrics. Therefore Sri Lankan dress characteristic is more than covering; it imparts an anthropomorphic value to the object. The dress is unpredictable until it is arranged. It is dynamic, thus evoke fashion concepts for ever.

Keywords: Drapes, knots, pleats. Folds, gathers

INTRODUCTION

'Fashion' has been playing a pivotal role in the human society from time immemorial. Thus, today fashion makes a massive contribution to world economy. As the industry is largely compromised of ready-made garment productions, fashion designing, the essential component that plays a vital role in the industry, deserves a careful and comprehensive study. Creating new fashions is the key to the product development in the industry. A new creation would not simply incubate unless it conforms to some underlying concepts which are expected to be brought to light through this research. The objective of the research is incubating new fashion concepts from identified fashion characteristic of the Kandyan era to the future.

The selected study setting of the research is Kandyan era of Sri Lanka. Kandyankingdom, the last kingdom of early administration of Sri Lanka, lasted from 16th Century to until 1815. Kandyan era emerged as a new fashion movement with unique characteristics. The most significant draping concepts and methods in fashion were gradually developed during the reign. The study is based on exquisite drapery of dresses of royalty and elites of the Kandyan period. Dress items and patterns, silhouette, dress materials and methodology of wearing are identified in the research.

Studying the above elements provide a good impression on ancient draperies and sartorial taste of the period. These well established and well practiced methods of dresses introduce new trend to the world fashion industry.

METHODOLOGY

Historical details about the Kandyan dress are well documented visually ever than early administrative eras. As well as there are plenty of visual records to study the background of this study setting such as sketches and descriptions made by observer – participants of the period, historical murals, carvings and sculptures of the period. Original written sources and true pictorial evidences were used for the research. Besides, Kandyan tradition has a living culture as well. Therefore, when characteristics of Sri Lankan attire are examined the Kandyan period is remarkably marked with very significant sign with ample visual evidences. The study began with observational study of temple paintings, sculptures, sketchers of the period. Reliability of the data which was incorporated in the research is of much concern. Therefore, pictorial data were cross checked with different literary sources such as temple murals, particular literature and interviews. Finally the reinforced concepts were compared with formally established philosophies in order to forward timely necessary concepts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three main drapery concepts were identified in the research. The first one is emphasizing the extravagant body silhouette by wrapping wad of fabrics at the waist of the elite male. The dress is called *tuppottiya*. Kandyan elites' extensive luxurious costume signifies their dignity, power and high social standard. A British writer of the early nineteenth century Davy (1921, 114) also explains that even the quantity of cloths wrapped round their waist is of extraordinary size, which is considered as an emblem of dignity.

The draping method was associated with folding, pleating, gathering and knotting such construction methods. This draping method of the dress is unique to Asia. The greatest exponent of the traditional philosophy of art Coomaswamy(1913) sates that in Asia a dress is arranged by a large piece of cloth by knotting, pleating or folding over the body rather than tucking pins or sewing. The dress is unknown until it is worn. A *tuppottiya* is white cloth, eight or nine cubits long, made in two pieces neatly joined up the middle: single widths are called *paday*, and measure six or seven cubits in length, and four to six spans in breadth (Coomaraswamy 1956,233p).The dress is started by wrapping a series of *kavani* (waist cloths) are draped on the hip. The first is draped as a basque consisting of semicircular folds over each hip. The top edge of the cloth gathered in a tight wad of pleats at the diaphragm and anchored firmly to the waist. Folding plays a great part in arranging the dress. It is a descriptive activity, intended to smoothly and continually with no evidence of ambiguity or interruption (Bradley Quinn, 2003). Extravagant body silhouette was formed by many knots. Twisting wad of fabrics at the middle and it goes round the waist. The twisted knot is placed at the abdomen forming bulk, firm knot. At the final, three knots has been appeared at the diaphragm and those are known as *mohottigata* (Knots of *mohotti*) (Jayarathna, 2008).



Figure 1: The process of making the knot

Folding was also a main construction technique in elite female dress. The Queens dress was mainly consisted of a long lower cloth which comes down to their ankle. The lower garment seems to be a combination of multifaceted folds, pleats, knots and gathers. All queens wore several cloths as a girdle below, wound very tightly to the hip emphasizing the sinuous rills of the female body. Narrow stripes, wide long pieces, suspending folds were attached to the dress. Many folds are beautifully arranged in different proportions as short, long and deep folds at the front and those might be detachable items. Besides, around the waist many patterned folds hung. Their utility and meaning was magnificent. There is a stress on the decorative value of the suspended items, arabesque (allover spread) or complex linear rhythms to the main body cloth. The most exotic concept of these items was emphasizing the dynamic movement of the dress. Folds were suspended vertically and buttressing over the waist, some loosely draping many fabrics in wide folds. When females were engaged in slow, rush or rapid whirling dancing activities these suspended items became lustrous and anthropomorphic.

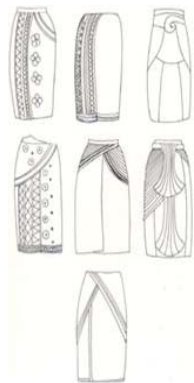


Figure 2: Varied folds of the lower garment Figure 3: A Queen (Wood Carving ,Aludeniya - (ivory figures of museum of Kandy)Temple)

Although it simplistic in form, the fold has many parts, one is a series of overlapping folds in its body cloth. Overlapped folds generate many visual effects. It is transacted both materially and visually and premised on repetition and plurality (Bradley Quinn,2003). In the dress of the King folds of different proportions were rendered at the front. There were three layers of fold were arranged. The short one had neat pleats. The middle one was arranged as a circular shape fold. The longest one hung to the ankle level.

Pleating create a textural surface first of all and gives multiple ideas to the dress. A pleat is also a fold but demonstrates parallel lines in a folded form. Pleating technique became a cynosure in their sartorial etiquettes. At a glance it gave a rosette of lines. Pleats became active when the wearer was engaged in mobile poses. As a result, the line gave delicate flowing, curving, undulating, rippling and dynamic movement to the dress. The lower garment of the royal male consisted of many pleats. The King wore a long lower garment and upon it a grid like array of pleats flowed downwards. It was also intended to increase the apparent height of the surface, with the pleated texture. The rhythmic, complicated line pulsating with the body movement is the ultimate delicacy of the draping method.



Figure 4: *Gadaladeniya temple painting*



Figure 5: *Mottappiliya, Murals of Degaldoruwa*

Twisted, rotated and twirled surfaces were presented in *Ohoriya*, Sari or *mottappiliya* dress as it coiling around the body. This technique gave freedom to clothing from the limitation of the fabric's vertical and horizontal axes, enabling it to spiral around the body.

CONCLUSION

The research extols three draping concepts and methods as emphasizing body silhouette by wrapping, folding and knotting fabrics over the body. Also it enabled to demonstrate dynamic movement of the dress by attaching many suspended folds around the body. The last one was revealing the body by coiling large pieces of fabrics.

The dress acquired ideal valuations from its various uses of folds, pleats, knots and gathers such fabric manipulation methods. Therefore Sri Lankan dress characteristic is more than covering; it imparts an anthropomorphic value to the object. It has a power to give a life to a piece of fabric. The dress is unpredictable until it is arranged. It is an imaginative dress. It is dynamic, thus evoke fashion concepts for ever.

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