

CULTURE AND DRESS: FOREIGN INFLUENCED DRESS OF THE KING IN THE KANDYAN KINGDOM OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT: Culture has been playing a pivotal role in dress from time immemorial. The objective of the research is to analyse the interrelationship between cultural and dress. The selected study setting is the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka. Kandyan reign of Sri Lanka from 14th Century to 1815 is a well-known historical era for the strong effects of foreign influences on the society. Clothing attitudes of the selective Kings of the era were studied in this research. Plenty of resources such as living evidences, documented information and murals are available in this setting. As a result of different cultural influences the Kandyan dress showed hybrid formation of western and South Indian and Sinhalese traditional sartorial features. The dress became an amazing blend of Eastern and Western dress items. They combined different foreign dress items together and made their own one. Culture and dress have strong interconnection. When contents of culture change, trends of dress are gradually changed.

Keywords: Foreign influences, Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, Culture, Hybrid dress

1. INTRODUCTION

The pattern of culture is similar wherever. 'Culture' is, in the words of Tylor, anthropologist, (Tylor 1913) "culture taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Furthermore, he remarks that the condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. Therefore, culture can be assumed as a continuous chain which is nourished by human thoughts and experiences from time to time. According to Boulton (Puri and Tyler 1998) culture stands upon its values and norms. Boulton refers to values as collective beliefs about what is right, good and desirable that has developed within a particular social group. They are conceived at a relatively abstract level and provide guiding principles for living. Norms refer to expected ways of behaving in specific situations, which reflect the values of the group. According to social psychologist Kaiser (1997) the characteristics of culture is (1) transmitted (2) learned (3) shared and (4) transformed. Boulton (Puri and Tyler 1998) states that the society is the culture. He explains that 'because people live together in social groups, they tend to share common experiences and come to develop common ways of thinking and acting. The broad set of assumptions or world view of a social group is its culture.

The Kandyan Kingdom lasted from the 15th century to 1815 until the British captured the capital. The Kandyan Kingdom had been a resident seat for twelve Kings; this period can be divided into two phases - the period of Sinhalese Kings and Nayakkar Kings. The first phase began with Senasammatha Wickramabahu (1469-1511) known as the founder of the Kandyan Kingdom. The next were Jayavira (1511-52), Karalliyadde Bandara (1552-82) Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1591-1604) Senarath (1604-35), Rajasimha II (1635-87), Vimala Dharma Suriya II (1687-1707) to Narendra Simha (1707-39) who was known as the last Sinhalese king of the Kingdom. This second phase had four Nayakkar kings beginning with Sri Vijaya Rajasimha (1739-47) followed by Kirithi Sri Rajasimha (1747-82), Rajadhirajasingha (1782-98) and Sri Vikrama Rajasingha (1798-1815); the last king of the Kandyan Kingdom until the British took hold of the capital in 1815 (Silva 2005).

Compared to other ancient administrative eras the whole period of the Kandyan Kingdom faced different cultural forces. At its beginning, South Indian features gradually descended from the Gampola Kingdom. The Portuguese colonial occupation exerted an influence of almost of 130 years. Then next the Dutch lasted for 163 years and the British for 33 years. South Indian dominant cultural features were quickly and strongly assimilated into the community because of the 76 years of resident Nayakkar influences.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research is a qualitative approach. The study is based on dresses of the King of the Kandyan period. Dress items and patterns, silhouette are identified in the research. 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 and particular literature, enabled to build a strong logical analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Kandyan Society and Foreign Influences*

The Kandyan culture stands upon mutual interrelation of state and religion. Dewaraja (1988) states that the relationship between the King and the priests had always been one of mutual interdependence. The King defended the faith and the faith legitimized the King. In Kandyan society the King was the head of the civil institution. ‘Sovereignty’ was considered as divine. Therefore, foreign influence was first received by the royalty readily then it trickled down to aristocrats and then to commoners. The King and the royal family occupied the highest status. Therefore, the royalty had the power of exerting influences. Traditional values and norms about the upper crust of society were never changed from its ideology. At the beginning of the Kandyan kingdom, from Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1592-1604) King Rajasimha II (1635-87) king Narendrasimha (1707 -1739) designs, patterns, fabrics, accessories of royal attires were more related to Western sartorial standards. Among Kandyan people the King and the royal clan were the only category which dressed in full Western outfits.

It is obvious that westerners who were richly clad in exquisite dresses were definitely subjected to thorough observation by the King. At the beginning of the Kandyan kingdom many high rank foreign officers used to visit the king to make good relationship between two parties. It was recorded that fifty four Dutch ambassadors visited Kandy between 1701- 1750 AD (Abeyasinghe 1985/86). Western influences brought novel dress experiences to natives.

3.2. *Portuguese Dress Items*

According to literary descriptions and rare sketches Portuguese dress items can be identified as caps, coat, *kastane* sword (ceremonial sword), *kamesa* (shirt) and breeches which were the mostly influenced dress items. Two important Portuguese dress items are described da Silva (1967) as *cabaya* and *barrete*. *Cabaya* means a long coat worn by men. *Barrete* is a cap of European style. da Silva (1990) in his ‘Fidalgos in the Kingdom of Kotte’ has identified five kinds of Portuguese caps as

Chapeo ,Sun- hat – The author suggested that this may be the cap with a wide brim called the *sombreiro*, *Barrete*, *Carapuco* and *Night cap*.

According to de Silva S. Jayasuriya and Wijetunge R's (1998) Sinhala term of *kalisa(ma)*/trouser was derived from the Portuguese word of '*Calcao*'. Da Silva (1990) also describes some other accessories of Portuguese males such as doublet or coat (*giboa*), stockings (*meias*), shoes (*sapatos*), boots (*botas*) ,slippers (*chinelas*) and a long cloak. The Kandyan King's costume was heavily influenced by these dress items. He suggests that Portuguese Captain-generals would have worn hats with plumes. Robert Knox (1966) remarks that King Rajasimha II used to wear a cap with plums (feathers). It is obvious that the Portuguese doublet and breeches would have been very much in vogue.



Figure 1

King of Portugal (1495-1521), Portuguese Captains-General ,Dom Manuel the Fortunateⁱ. Pedro Lopes de Sousa (1594 AD)ⁱⁱ

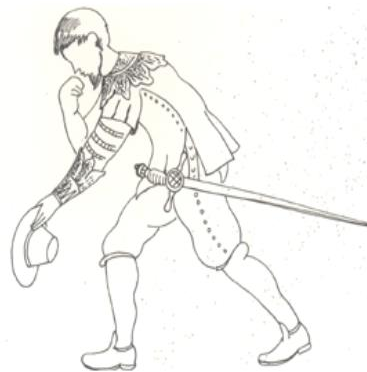


Figure 2

3.3. *Dress of the Kandyan King*

a. Western Influences

The earliest western influenced kings' attire is belong to King Vimala Dharma Suriya I. He was formally known as Konnappu Bandara and his baptismal name was D. Joao and he had later taken the name of Vimala Dharma Suriya I (Don Peter 1983) He was educated, instructed and enforced by Portuguese. The King who was brought up by the Portuguese was instrumental in bringing about a real change. Therefore, Vimala Dharma Suriya I showed more western oriented dress styles than the ancestors of the Kandyan Kingdom.

According to Coomaraswamy's description the king's attire is a hybrid formation of western and traditional Sinhalese dress. The Sinhalese king wears a jeweled crown surmounted by a trident, and having a Buddha figure in the front; a jacket and 'mante' and a patterned tuppotiya, probably of muslin with gold or silver thread. He carries a sword hanging by a bandolier over the right shoulder. A lotus flower is in the left hand. The jewellery worn includes earrings, two necklaces with jeweled pendants, armlets and anklets (Coomaraswamy 1956). This description is based on re-production of original sketched done during the First Dutch visit to Kandy. The earliest known portrait of a Sinhalese king is that of Vimala Dharma Suriya I, in A.D 1602, given in Spilbergen's *Historiael Journal*. 1605, and reproduced in '*Indische Batikunst*', by Rouffaer and Jouynboll, Vol. III (Coomaraswamy 1956, p.33, XXII plate). Orientalist Nell (Vol. III, No. 49) suggested that as Spilbergen and other Dutch visitors were accompanied by artists to get first-hand information of the country

and so the illustration in the *Indiae Orientalis* be a good likeness of Vimala Dharma Suriya and his attire.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

The King Vimala Dharma Suriya I The King Bhuvanekabahu IV The King Rajasimha II

It is for instance completely different from the traditional royal dress code of King Bhuvanekabahu IV (1341-1351) who ruled at Gampola. The king of Gamopla wore a lower garment of well adorned long piece of cloth arranged with frills on the front and bare upper body (Schroeder 1990). It is possible that King Vimala Dharma Suriya I introduced the jacket as an upper garment for Kings as *hette* or jacket (with long sleeves) which may have been adapted from the Portuguese. There is some basis for this hypothesis because the name of the jacket as stated by Codrington *juwanhette*, derived its name from Vimala Dharma Suriya I's baptismal name of Don Joao/Juan Wimala Dharma Suriya I (Codrington 1910). Since the jacket was also known as, *kameesahette*, *mantehette*, Sinhalese oriented names, it shows clearly that it is derived from the Portuguese. In murals of Gangaramaya, Degaldoruwa, Hindagalathe king is always depicted with many embellishments. Often Jackets were depicted with a front opening which was fastened by gold buttons. There are two mante jackets of brocade fabric with kasau works (All over embroidery work with gold thread), exhibited at the Kandyan Museum. King Rajasimha II devoted much attention to his apparel (Knox 1966). He had his own ideas about fashion. According to Robert Knox's description he king's desire for Western dresses is well proven,

His apparel is very strange and wonderful, not after his own country fashion, or any other, being made after his own invention. On his head, he wears a cap with four corners like a Jesuit three tiers high, and a feather standing upright before. Like that in a head of a four – horse in a team, a long band hanging down his back after the Portuguese fashion, his doublet after so strong ashape, the body of one, and the sleeves of another colour, he wears long breeches to his ankles, shoes and stockings (Knox 1966).

He richly clads as a European gentleman. Unlike other kings he wore shoes, stockings and trouser. The trousers drape straight from the waist up to the ankles. The trousers seem to be a loose garment. The lower ends of the trouser are tight and fastened with buttons.

b. Siamese and South Indian Influences

During the 18th Century a new dress was introduced to the King by Siamese deputation. A new cultural impact influenced the dress of Sinhalese kings at this time together with the higher- ordination introduced from Siam. Because of the frequent visits and contacts with

Siam Sri Lankan Kings were gifted many luxurious textiles and other accessories. Through Vimala Dharma Suriya II's envoys to Siam twenty cloths embroidered with gold, twenty silk cloths, and various other articles were sent to the Sri Lankan King (Pieris 1945). Sri Lankan Kings gradually got accustomed to embroidered cloths with gold threads and dazzling gems in Siamese tradition. According to the description of those envoys 'Siamese king wore on his head a crown of three tiers blazing with gems of all colours. Rings set with large and flashing diamonds were worn on his hand. His coat (*Kabaya*) was of cloth embroidered with gold and was secured with diamonds buttons' (Pieris 1945).

During the 16th Century the existing Sinhalese Buddhist tradition blended thoroughly with South Indian Culture. The elementary reason was, King Narendrasimha the last Sinhalese king by blood had several matrimonial alliances with South Indian princesses (Dewaraja, 1988). The Nayakkar kings' era marks an important historical phase in South Indian dress inspirations. The series of royal marriages with South Indian families had created quite a colony in Kandy of Nayakkar relatives towards the middle of the eighteenth century (Dewaraja, 1988). Hence Raghavan M D expresses that from 1739 to 1815 Kandy has had its own impact on the socio-cultural landscape of the political alliances with South India. This situation opened the door to Tamil social and cultural influences. They brought their own cultural habits from the same reign. Their language, their customs and manners, beliefs and practices as dress and the way of life closely resembled those of South Indian families (Sastri, 1955). The Nayakkar Kings' dress is a hybrid formation of Nayakkar, Siamese and western sartorial styles. All the kings wore jacket for the upper body and long trousers for the lower body. They used to wear pantaloons as the main foundation lower garment that was a characteristic royal style. King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha was influenced by Siamese higher-ordination etiquettes. For higher- ordination custom a new royal dress was introduced by Siam. According to original pictorial evidences which are available in the temple of Malwatta of Kandy at the higher-ordination ceremony *tuppoti* with white pantaloons and many accessories are worn by the apprentice. In the statue of King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha in the Dambulla Temple Siamese influenced royal attire is well depicted. The Kings' royal regalia was inspired by the Siamese style. His regalia consisted of a number of chains. The central one had a large pendant hanging from a row of chains winding down from the hip. The ornaments that are shown are of different proportions. The longest chain comes to knee level.

King Sri VikramaRajasimha's royal style of dress was a result of the continuous tradition of the former Kings' dress as he was depicted in the Joan Davy's Diary (Davy 1821) The lower garment consisted of loose white pantaloons with wide legs gathered at the ankle. He also carried a beautifully carved staff with studded gemstones like the Portuguese captain generals of the 16th Century. According to the portrait of the Last King which is displayed at the Museum of Kandy he wore a long sleeved fine muslin shirt as *yatahette* or *relikamise*. A well decorated sleeveless jacket with a three layered *mante* was worn over it. Unlike other Kings, King Sri VikramaRajasimha carries a handkerchief and wears a pair of sandals that are unique to his fashion. This etiquette might have adapted from the Dutch.

The Nayakkar Kings' religion, social organization, court etiquettes were similar to those of the South Indian Nayakkar region. King Sri VikramaRajasimha's had a *thilaka* mark on his forehead which signifies his Tamil origin. All the Kings had long hair combed back and parted it at the centre as Sastri expresses the Madura Kings' etiquettes (Sastri 1955). Sometimes the Kandyan Nayakkar Kings' tied their hair in a loose knot as the last King of Kandy is shown in the picture. The beard seems to be neatly waxed by all Kings. A thin moustache lay over the upper lip and its ends are curved upward like spikes with fashion conscious King Rajasimha II. It is obvious that Sri Lankan Nayakkar Kings followed the Kandyan tradition. They needed social acceptance. Therefore, they might have adopted even the name Rajasimha to their name to signify the great warrior king Rajasimha II.



Figure 6
King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha
Temple of Dambulla



Figure 7
The apprentice at
Higher- ordination ceremony

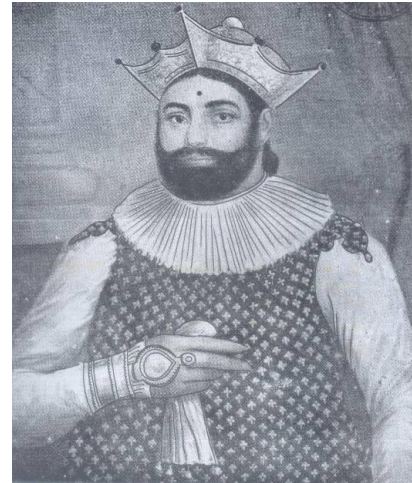


Figure 8ⁱⁱⁱ
theKing Sri VikramaRajasimha
Temple of Malwatta, Kandy

3.4. Headgears and Crowns of the Kandyan Kings

One interesting aspect of the headgears and crowns of kandyan kings is that they were all different from each other. Each item was a silent indication of their personal traits and traditional inheritance. Those are a combination of Hindu and Buddhist and western traditions. King Vimala Dharma Suriya I wore a headdress which had a trident and Buddha figure in the front (Coomaraswamy 1956). The headdress of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I, seems to have been made of fabric because clear woven patterns can be seen and it is more like a cap. According to early records caps were an essential sartorial item of Portuguese dress. It is said that in 1498 Vasco da Gama presented fifty scarlet barret caps to the king of Calicut (Cordrington 1910). In 1506 Dom Lourenco, da Almeida gave six scarlet barret caps to one of the state officers of Ceylon (Ferguson 1907). Therefore, Cordrington (1910) suggests that “early kandyan hat is not unlike the barret caps of the early Portuguese period”. Therefore, it can be suggested that the king would have worn a headdress which was arranged like the Portuguese caps. Moreover, according to early records the king had many headgears instead of the crown. Even though King Senerath in murals of AraththanaVihara was depicted with a cap, he possessed three crowns of Gold, Silver and Bronze (Goonaratne 1995). Those were royal insignias of KumarasimhaMahastane, VijayapalaMahastane and Rajasimha II. It can be believed that as the heirloom of the Kandyan Kingdom Rajasimha II would have been given the gold crown. Robert Knox states too that King Rajasimha II wore a gold crown at court ceremonies. Lawrie states (1898) that King Rajasimha II’s golden crown was now a possession of DodanwelaMahaDewale. Moreover, Lawrie (1898) explains that the crown was of thin plain gold. However, Robert Knox (Knox 1966) further says that the King always preferred to wear a cap except his crown. Davy (1821) expresses that ordinary dress of King Sri VikramaRajasimha was consisted of a high four- cornered cap of a particular form and ornamented with tassels. Moreover, Davy (1821) explains that the golden crown was seldom worn “but a cap, for superstitious motives, was generally substituted for it”. Coordrington (1910) states that a small square hat of Kirthi Sri Rajasimha is still preserved in the DaladaMaligava. Therefore, it is evident that instead of the crown all Kings wore multi fashioned caps.

3.5. CONCLUSION

Kandyansociety was the fruition of its cultural acquiescence, religious values, its occupational pattern, political stability and historically inherited values and practices. The Kandyan era has proved that foreign elements never stayed in their original forms. When time elapsed, it was adapted to native tradition. Hence, Kandyan costumes neither bears nor

resembles its foreign origin and it is not of Sri Lankan origin either. It was a hybrid formation. Over time people got used to it, became accustomed to it and subsequently it became their own.

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