

Historical View of Foreign Influences on Queens' and Elite Females' Dress in the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Foreign influences played a pivotal role in changing ancient fashion trends of Sri Lanka from time to time. The influences made huge differences in women's fashions. As a result of foreign influences a new hybrid formation of fashions emerged in women's dress. This research attempts to find out how different foreign influences caused exquisite fashions in queens' and elite female dresses in the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Foreign influences, Hybrid fashions, Queens, Elite females, Kandyan Kingdom

Introduction

Kandy was the last Kingdom of Sri Lankan administration which extended from the 14th century AD to 1815. The Kandyan era is the last and the first era of the early Sri Lankan administration during which both western and eastern foreign influences spread over the Kingdom within a short period of time, namely South Indian, western (Portuguese, Dutch, British) and Siamese. These influences caused a huge impact on Kandyan costumes in every aspect like novel dress items and patterns, silhouette, accessories, headdresses, dress materials, colours and even the methodology of wearing. The importance of this historical era is that for the first time Sri Lankan people were exposed to varied foreign clothing influences.

Queens and Elite females bore the highest status in civil society. Plenty of foreign influences were reflected in the costume of the queens and elite females

because they were the first ladies of the country. Royal females including the Queen, princesses and their relatives of the early 16th Century were converted to Christianity. Most of the early royalties of the Kandyan Kingdom from their childhood grew up under Portuguese protection. When Karalliyadde Bandara (1552-82) (Father of Queen Dona Catherine), was expelled to Mannar by King Mayadunne of Sitawaka (1521-81), Karalliyadde Bandara and his two children accepted the Catholic faith expecting political protection from the Portuguese (Lankananda 1996, verses 73,76), they acquired considerable Portuguese cultural influences. The first Dutch admiral Jori Van Spilbergen who visited Kandy in 1602 AD reported that the Queen and her children all were dressed in the Christian manner (Paranavithana 1997:32). During the colonial occupation Queen Dona Catherine was a direct victim of Portuguese political pressures. The Portuguese kept her under their command as she was the rightful heir to the Kandyan throne. Queyros (Perera 1930, 483) expresses how she was cared for and isolated purposely from her own people. It is said that "the general places Portuguese to guard the princess and not allowing the Chingalaz to speak to her" (Perera 1930, 483). Nevertheless, Francisco de Silva, who had brought the princess to the hill noticing her loneliness supplied a Portuguese lady (Catherina de Abreu) and four religious at the order of St. Francis and one from the Society of Jesus for her company (Perera 1930,482). The education imparted to princes and princesses' knowledge of the manners and customs of royalty in the West was given to her. When she married King Vimala Dharma Suriya I and became Queen of the Kandy she had enormous power, wealth

and connections and much awareness of following Western dress etiquettes.

During the 16th Century the existing Sinhalese Buddhist tradition blended thoroughly with South Indian Culture. The elementary reason was, King Narendra Simha, the last Sinhalese king by blood had several matrimonial alliances with South Indian princesses (Dewaraja 1988.38-45). The Nayakkar Kings' era marks an important historical phase in South Indian dress inspirations. As a result of King Narendrasingha's marriage the Nayakkar supremacy started. King Narendrasingha's wife was a princess of 'Madura', he subsequently married two other sisters, died without children and nominated the brother of the queens to succeed him. This began the Malabar dynasty (Dewaraja 1988)

The series of royal marriages with South Indian families had created quite a colony in Kandy of Nayakkar relatives of the king, towards the middle of the eighteenth century (Dewaraja 1988,43). Hence Raghavan M D expresses that from 1739 to 1815 Kandy had 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 during the same reign. Language, their customs and manners, beliefs and practices as dress and the way of life closely resembled those of South Indian families (Sastri 1955:302,303,304) .

Siamese textiles gradually became popular among Kandyans. During the Dutch occupational era, the Dutch especially brought Siamese textiles. Brocade could be seen only in the elite and royal family. This was also an imported textile material from Batavia (Indonesia). This textile type was widely known as 'Sangket' in Indonesia. Somana, brocade (gold threaded fabric), silk and muslin were luxurious textiles used only by royalty and high nobles. Indonesian textiles like somana, silk, and brocade were broadly imported by the Dutch East India Company during the 17th Century. Therefore during that time a common sartorial sense appeared among Sri Lankans. The Dutch maintained well a textile monopoly within the country. They strategically made the environment so as to make the population depend only on their textiles. First of all they achieved the autocratic power

for all maritime lands around Sri Lanka. The political expansion of 1665 AD and the increase in the lands and subjects of the Dutch in Ceylon influenced deeply their trade policy (Arsarathnam 1956, 159). They could now supply all these people with their clothing (Arsarathnam 1956,158). Then they strictly restricted other private trading activities carried out by Hindus and Muslims and increased discriminatory duties. Therefore Sri Lankans had to be satisfied with the textiles that were brought by the Dutch. The Dutch identified the interests of natives and largely supplied those textiles (Arsarathnam 1956, 161). Brocade was widely used in making the Kandyan Queens' and elite females' jackets.

Native consorts who belonged to elite families of the Kandyan Kingdom belonged to high cast families (*radala*) and they were the next fashion conscious group of the Kandyan society. The elites consisted of high ranking officers in the King's service. Higher administrative officers were drawn from a few families of *radala* rank. They were descendants of the Gampola Kingdom. They were a powerful civil group from its origin and commonly known as 'Bandaravaliya'. They had constant contests between each other for the throne (Lankananda 1996, Verse 428). Dewaraja (1988, 55) suggests that the title of *Bandara* was borrowed from the Tamil *pandaram*, priest of the *vellala* cast who officiated in Siva Temples in South India and immigrated to Sri Lanka and then they were absorbed into the high cast called *govikula*. Dewaraja (1988, 60) suggests that the *radala* preserved its status by frequent intermarriages within its own ranks. Robert Knox (Knox 1966, 106) says that thus by each rank marrying constantly within itself, the descent and dignity thereof was preserved forever. Dewaraja (1988, 66) suggests that birth, office, wealth and military authority combined with a specific style of living and conspicuous status symbols made the *radala* a socially privileged group. They were stuck in the group and hardly escaped from it.

Mante (collar) jacket and lower garment, Shawl (*Lansoluwa*) with long lower garment, canopy or kerchief (*mottakkiliya*) and *ohoriya* (a dress) were the main components of the queens' and noble womens' attire. These clothing styles resembled Portuguese and South Indian dress features. The full attire of a woman

was completed with the lower garment, upper garment, necklace, earrings, armlets, anklets, belts, and headgear.

Materials and Method

The present analysis is explored through an observational study of actual descriptions made by observational - participants, historical records, murals of the period and reviewing ancient literature and research papers relevant to the subject. Memoing, coding and concept mapping helped to discover patterns of the Kandyan tradition. Reliability of the data incorporated for the research has been ensured. The pictorial data were cross checked from different literary sources such as temple murals, cross checked with particular literature and interviews. Many original sources were used. Temple murals were compared with contemporary sketches which were produced by foreigners (true observations). Interviews with academic scholars, artists, inheritances of Kandyan aristocrats enabled to build a strong logical analysis.

Western Dress

Direct Portuguese influences on Queen Dona Catherine (1602-1613 AD) were manifested in her dress habits. She wore a long robe like a draped dress which had a front opening. This may be the original shape of Portuguese elite women's dresses. These kinds of garments were known as 'roppilios' which indicates a large loose garment in Portuguese (Ferguson 1927, 396). Loose sleeves had been gathered at the elbow. The skirt part was voluminous and 'hand made lace bands' would have been attached all over making a horizontal design. Lace works was an exquisite Portuguese influenced item of Sinhalese ladies dress during the 16th century. Perera S.G (1922:45,60) gives some Portuguese words in connection with lace making. *Biralu* (bobbin), *Bikkuva* (in dress-making the Sinhalese use *Bikkuva* for a pattern cut to a point. Lace makers apply it to points in lace. A belt was worn at the waist. The method of wearing would have been easy and simple. The Queen tied her hair at the top as a knot. She might have arranged her hair in Portuguese fashion.



Figure 1

Queen Dona Catherine – (R.K. de Silva. Beumer W.G.M, Illustrations and views of Dutch Ceylon, Serendip Publications, London, p.16)

***mante* jacket (jacket with a collar part) with long lower garment.**

mante jacket (jacket with a collar part) with a long lower garment is the most depicted dress in wall paintings. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1956:34) in his 'Medieval Sinhalese Art' describes this fashion as, 'The dress of women of high cast consisted of a *hette* with *mante* like that of a man, and a cloth (*helaya*) round the lions arranged in various ways'. The dress is depicted in many temple paintings as at Hanguranketha, Gangarama, Medawala and Degaldoruwa temple paintings. In the popular scenery of attending the Buddha by a retinue of royal ladies and on that occasion all noble females wore a short sleeved *mante* jacket and a long lower garment.

These dress styles belonged to local queens who did not follow western dress styles. The queens who were descended from the Gampola Kingdom and followed the Gampola tradition might not have covered the upper part of the body. Therefore, it is clear that the jacket was introduced in later periods. With the arrival of queen Dona Catherine the rest of the local queens tended to change them. It is quite visible through pictorial evidences that Sinhalese queens did not follow the same dress styles as Dona Catherine, but took some elements like *mante*, jacket, hair pin and lace.

Mante jacket was a newly introduced sartorial item for the local queens' costume as mentioned

earlier. It shows the direct influences of Portuguese fashion. Coomaraswamy (1905,20) also states that the female jacket shows either Portuguese or Dutch influences. Loose waist coat type *mante* jacket, tight, body fitted, high *mandarin* collar jacket, pleated jacket with a tail were different styles of jackets. Short sleeves or long sleeves would have been added according to the wearer's desire as depicted in temple paintings.

The lower garment which was meant to be worn with *mante* jacket was long up, to the ankle. The lower garment consisted of two pieces of cloths; each was arranged into different levels and that arrangement emphasised the body contour. The whole arrangement seemed as a series of fabrics wrapped around the posterior and the calves were made to look like lotus buds just before opening.

The lower garment style shows positive traces of South Indian influences. The lower garment arrangement is similar to 17th century Nayak queens' and noble women's costumes. Indian style of lower garment is called the *sakaccha* style which reaches down to the ankles. The goddesses and queens wore their lower garment in the same pattern. In this garment the front was arranged in a decorative style with fan- shaped ends (Kumari 1995,34).

At first the lowest layer might have been worn by wrapping it around the waist .Then the second one hangs from the back up to the ankle and in the front the lower end rises upward and is tucked at the hip. The shortest one which goes around the back again is also tucked at the hip at the front side. The dress was tightened round the waist by a belt. Finally two falls including deep and short falls were hanging from the front. These falls would have been worn separately at the end of the dressing. In many paintings at a glance it is seen as a pleated fall, obviously the artist must have depicted it with subtle coloured stripes. Finally, the abdominal part of each woman is seen as very bulky as several wads of fabric are gathered at the hip.



Figure 2

A royal lady (Davy J, 1821, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of Its Inhabitants*, London: Longman,p.124-125)

Canopy or Kerchief

Canopy or Kerchief traditionally called *mottakkiliya* was a newly introduced dress item from South Indian dress styles during the Kandyan reign. The whole body was fully covered by *mottakkiliya* according to social laws or religious purposes. *Mottakkiliya* was definitely a queens' dress code because in a wooden panel, where the king and queen are painted, the queen wears a *mottakkiliya*. This might have come directly from South Indian Nayak queens' dress etiquettes. It seems that the dress habits of Nayaks' were limited only to themselves. In the Degaldoruwa murals two categories of queens can be identified by their costumes. Some noble women were depicted with *mottakkiliya* and some with *mante* jacket and long lower garment. However, in those paintings it is clearly evident that the women who wore *mottakkiliya* were respected and treated honorably by the royal family and noble women. Hence it can be suggested that *mottakkiliya* might have been practised as a royal queens' dress for some time. This costume might have been arranged by a long lower cloth, the hood part being arranged by one edge of the lower garment being draped over the head.

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Figure 3

Elite Females with *Mottakkiliya*. Murals of Degaldoruwa



Figure 4

Queen with *Lansoluwa*. Murals of Hindagala

Lansoluwa

Another popular dress style was *Lansoluwa* which was often thrown over the shoulder. *Lansoluwa* was a kind of long shawl worn by Sinhalese women for a long period of time. It was normally worn with a simply wrapped cloth (*redda*) for the lower part. However during the kandyan reign, *lansoluwa* had been used to cover the women's head. It seems as a *mottakkiliya* of South Indian queens. However, the dress is different from the South Indian queen's *mottakkiliya*. South Indian queens are always depicted with well covered bodies. *Lansoluwa* had not been used to cover the upper body properly as always it hardly covered the upper body. This etiquette is similar to early Sinhalese women's dress practice. It would have been worn as a fashionable item as it was always adorned with beautiful traditional designs with multiple colours. These women are always depicted with the king. Therefore these women definitely resemble local queens. The style of covering the head with *lansoluwa* would have been adapted to the local queens' dress styles during the Kandyan reign. Therefore it is possible to assume that local queens might have made an effort to follow the South Indian queen's *mottakkiliya* as foreign queens were considered superior to local queens.

Ohoriya

Ohoriya was introduced, modified and completed during the period with the help of foreign influences. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1956,34) claims that 'ohoriya is no doubt of Tamil origin'. The evolution of the *ohoriya* can be narrated with the support of temple paintings. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1956,34) suggests that *ohoriya* is derived from the long lower garment. This dress code is shown in *Hindagala* and *Malaagammana* temple murals where the oldest form of *ohoriya* is shown. There women were depicted without the jacket. According to these paintings it can be suggested that the *ohori pota* (the long fold which flows over one shoulder) had been used to cover the upper body earlier. Later *ohoriya* was completed with a body fitted jacket. *Ohoriya* with jacket is an amazing blend of Eastern and Western flavor. *Ohoriya* is arranged from one end of the lower garment and that part is thrown over one shoulder.



Figure 5

The methodology of wearing *ohoriya* (Ambrose Kay, 1980, *Classical Dances and Costumes of India*, New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, p.92).

Since the 18th century *Ohoriya* has continued as the basic garment among elite females. It is the national costume of Sinhalese women.



Figure 6

Ladies of Kandy Coomaraswamy A; 1959, *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, National Museum Colombo, II plate.

The last queen of the Kandyan kingdom *Venkata Rangamal* would have worn a more developed version of South Indian dress styles. According to her portrait she seems to have worn a body fitted jacket with sleeves flowing to the elbows. She wore a long lower garment and she covered her shoulders with a shawl. The shawl seems to be made of brocade or satin fabric. A jacket of the queen *Venkata Rangamal* has been conserved by the National Museum of Colombo. Vangeyzel (2008:242) in her careful observation states that the jacket was made of an imported fabric. The fabric is of silk material with a floral pattern of red, dark blue and golden yellow and it was hand woven.



Figure 7

Queen *Venkata Rangamal* Andreas,N.,1916,Portrait of a Kandyan Queen, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (C. B)N. &Q.*,Vol XXIV,part VI,n.i,xcv-c,p,xcv.

Jewellery

Coomaraswamy (1956.211) indicates a range of jewellery worn by Kandyan females like ear-rings, chains, pendants, girdles, bracelets and finger rings. Kandyan women possessed a range of jewellery.

Garlands and large pendants were essentially worn by queens and elite females. Coomaraswamy suggests that in the case of Kandyan chains, they have names of flowers or seeds such as *pol-mal-malaya* (coconut-flower –necklace), *aralu-malaya* (aralu-seed- necklace) which are highly characteristic of Indian art. Coomaraswamy remarks that these names are reminiscent of the garlands of real flowers which play such an important part in Indian festivals. Kumari,N.Y (1995.50) remarks that ‘apart from gold, pearl, diamond and gem neck-ornaments, there are necklaces made of seeds, beads, flowers, cotton and other humble materials like *guriginja* seeds and garlands of *pikili* flowers. It can be suggested that Indian jewellery concepts would have influenced Sinhalese jewellery also.

Western influences are clearly evident in names and designs of Kandyan jewellery. *Alpentiya* (pin), *Arungole* (ear-ring), *Avana* (Fan),*Boralikkama* (medal), *Ganchuva* (hook), *Gesbara* (waist-belt) Such words might have entered the native culture with design elements from the Portuguese. Da Silva Cosme (1990.499) states that the Portuguese *bracelet/ bractal* has left its traces in the Sinhala word *barsal* and also he states that *karabu* for ear-ornament is derived from *cravo* which gives the meaning of small nail and also spice. Coomaraswamy suggests that Jewellery items of combs, brooches and rings show low-country Dutch influences. Coomaraswamy also labels brooches, buttons and ear-rings as Indo-Portuguese jewellerys.



Figure 8

South Indian design influenced jewellery (Coomaraswamy A; 1956, ‘Medieval Sinhalese Art’, National Museum Colombo,plate XXIII.)

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Conclusion

Different clothing habits would have been popular among queens and noble women as different foreign influences were exerted over the social organization of the Kandyan Kingdom. The majority of influences came from South India because many of the queens were fetched from South India. Because they were honorably treated and considered as rightful heirs to the queenship, gradually their fashion became popular among Sinhalese high noble women. The native queens (*yakada doli*) and other elite females always tried different fashions to make a unique native character by observing the superior queens.

It is revealed that the noble women's attires show hybrid formation of western and South Indian and Sinhalese traditional sartorial features. They combined different foreign dress items together and made their own one like the full costume of *ohoriya*. The way of assimilating foreign influences to Sri Lankan elite female dress was special to Sri Lankan culture. All the foreign influences were filtered and converted in accordance with their own culture. Though they were inspired by the current trends they arranged them according to their own fashion consciousness.

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