

## **RELIGION AND FASHION: FACTORS AFFECTING FOREIGN INFLUENCES IN RELATION TO COSTUMES OF THE ROYALTY OF THE KANDYAN ERA OF SRI LANKA**

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**Abstract :** Fashion can be considered as an active process which earns its survival by influencing others. People are influenced by various fashions. There should be some theories behind in this influencing process. If these theories could be identified in a broad spectrum they could effectively applied in the field of fashion in the context of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to find out how religion affects on influence in fashion of the royalty of the Kandyan Kingdom. Christian religious practices which introduced during 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD and Theravada Buddhism which was re-established with the help of Siam during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century AD were selected for the study in the Kandyan Kingdom study setting. The study began with observational study of temple paintings, sculptures, sketchers of the period. Historical details about the Kandyan dress are well documented visually ever than early administrative eras. Original written sources and true pictorial evidences were used for the research. Besides, Kandyan tradition has a living culture as well. 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. Religion played an important role of influencing foreign dress habits among locals. Religion not only introduced the faith but also the culture that bond with that. Royal patronage allowed foreign influences to spread within the Kandyan Kingdom to some extends. Most of influences were modified according to Buddhist culture. Colour was one of the main elements that promoted by foreign influences. Each religious philosophy encouraged people to wear certain colours as a mean of communication.

Key Words: Christianity, Buddhism, Fashion, Kandyan Royalty

### **Introduction-Historical Background**

Sri Lanka is centrally located in the Indian Ocean below the southern tip of the Indian peninsula and has a long history in relation to foreign contacts because of being an Island. The country geographically located centrally in the international trade route bringing influences on the culture. Costume being a sentimental component of culture has exhibited many changes and innovations.

Kandy was the last Kingdom of ancient Sri Lankan administration which extended from 14<sup>th</sup> century AD to 1815 (Silva 2005, 134,301). Kandyan era is the last and the first era of the early administration during both Western and Eastern foreign influences spread over the Kingdom within a short period of time, namely South Indian, western (Portuguese, Dutch, British), Siamese. These influences has caused huge impact on Sri Lankan dress in every aspect like novel dress items and patterns, silhouette, accessories, headdress, dress materials, colours and even methodology of wearing had been differentiated. The importance of this historical era is that for the first time Sri Lankan people were exposed to various foreign clothing influences.

The first European nation of Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1506 AD when the maritime region was ruled by Kotte dynasty. Portuguese direct influences were affected to the Royalties of Kotte and were baptized and fast assimilated the western etiquettes including dress patterns (Karunaratne, P. V. M. 2014). .Majority of royalties shows with Portuguese dress styles in ivory caskets of Kotte Kingdom (Schoreder U.V, 1990p468-471).Consecutively, the Dutch and the British established their headquarters in Colombo considering easy trade and navel activities. In the mean time Europeans continued in invading the Kandyan Kingdom which was located in the central hills.They struggled to invade and then sent messengers to build good relationship between two parties, sent military forces when Kandyan royalty requested military support, also provided ships for cultural activities, appears as political supporters, religious advisers, house hold officers and even trustworthy personal mentors of Kandyan royalties gradually became to the most important at the Kandyan royalty.

Kandyan Kingdom became sole surviving link in the age long connection between Sinhalese power and the Buddhist religion. It was the heir to the traditional relationship between state and religion (Silva 2005,265). Therefore, the foreign attainments which had close connection with the state religion and the King, succeeded. The religion caused significant foreign influences in Kandyans dress. Silhouettes, colour, material and dress forms were influenced by each religious philosophy. Kings patronage to religion was a vital factor in influencing foreign costumes to Sri Lankans.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study began with observational study of temple paintings, sculptures, sketchers of the period. Historical details about the Kandyan dress are well documented visually ever than early administrative eras. 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. 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.

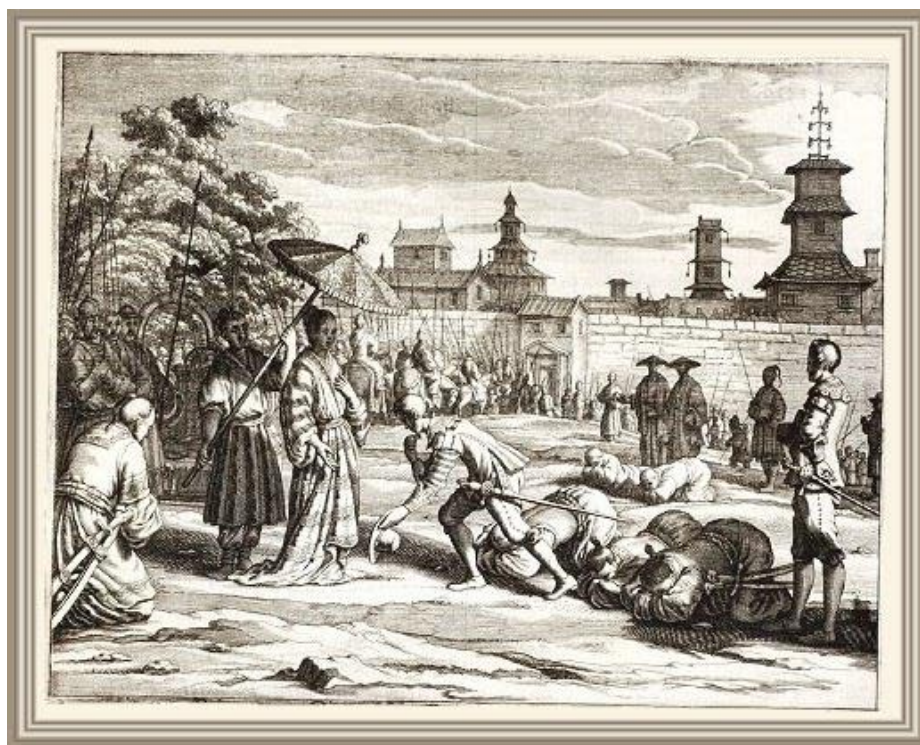
## **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

### **a. Christian Influences**

During 15<sup>th</sup> Century Sri Lanka was divided into two main administrative units in the west and Centre (Kotte, Kandy) and one subordinate unit of north (Jaffna). The Kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy had often internal conflicts. Historian Abeyasinghe (1973,p.11-21) describes that “as for the first four decades Kandy had to resist the superior power of Kotte which was trying to re- establish its authority over the central highlands”. The Portuguese were armed with the best artillery that Europe could produce and had the technical skills of ship-building and navigation at their disposal. Dewaraja explains (1985/86 p.121) that it is in 1592 that the real saga of the Kandyan Kingdom begins. The absorption of the Kingdoms of Kotte and Sitavaka by the Portuguese as a part of their dominions made Kandy the sole repository and respective of Sinhala power. Kandy had no military power compared to the Portuguese. Politically too she was weak (Dewaraja 1985/86 p.125). Therefore, they had to follow survival strategies. The King Vira Vikrama, alias Jayavira ( AD1546) subsequently added other concessions he would give his daughter in marriage to whom so ever the Portuguese wished, and would embrace the Christianity faith with the hair and the members of the royal household. Gaspar Correa ( -1583) recorded that Antonio Moniz was sent with a hundred men on behalf of the King of Kandy (Ferguson,2010,p.72). Vira Vikrama, alias Jayavira baptized 9<sup>th</sup> March 1546 under name of Dom Manuel. At the occasion, the King was presented a small band, put him into higher spirits and given him greater courage, as an alternative he requested symbolic payment in the form of a Portuguese style coat and a cap (Silva 1967 p.31/45/48).

The people who were brought up by the Portuguese were instrumental in bringing about western fashions. King Karalliyadde Bandara (1552-82), 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. The daughter of King Karalliyadde Bandara, Queen Dona Catherine converted to Christianity at her childhood (Lankananda 1996, verses 73,76). They acquired considerable Portuguese cultural influences. King Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1591-1604) (baptismal name D. Joao) became the first King of the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka. Kusumasana Devi (baptismal name Dona Catherine) and Yamasinha Bandara (Dom Philip) were educated, instructed and brought up and instructed by the Portuguese. The royalties and elites who grew up under Portuguese protection ascended the Kandyan Throne. During the young age of Dom Joao (Vimala Dharma Suriya I) was sent to Goa under the commissary of the Franciscan fathers of Colombo. He remained in the Collage of the Magi for fifteen years. It was recorded that “he learnt

not only Catechism and good customs but also to read and write Latin” . The instructors presumably drew inspiration from the literature of the middle ages and they produced them for the specific purpose of instructing princes, some works of which genre had been composed by the Franciscans themselves. The education imparted to princes and princesses’ consisted of knowledge of the manners and customs of royalty in the West. According to the records of the observant participant, the Dutch Admiral Joris Van Spilbergen had an opportunity to meet and observe royal princesses during his stay in Kandy in 1602. It was recorded that ‘the General was brought into the chamber of the Queen where she sat with her children. The prince and princess were all dressed in the Christian manner’(Paranavitana, 1997. 32p). Queen Dona Catherine had the service of Franciscan friars for her children’s education. Francisco Negroa was in Kandy for nine years and was tutor to King Senarat’s children.



*Figure 1: Queen Dona Catherine of the Kndyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka (1602-1613 AD). (Silva R.K de, Beumer W.G.M, Illustrations and views of Dutch Ceylon, Serendip Publications, London, p.16)*

The King Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1591-1604) dressed more into Western sartorial etiquettes. 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, (Paranavithana 1997) The King wore a sewn jacket and a long lower garment. It is possible that King Vimala Dharma Suriya I introduced the jacket as an upper garment for Kings as jacket with long sleeves and a collar which might have been adapted from Portuguese. According to the image of the King the costume is consisted of an extravagant long lower cloth and a jacket for the upper body. Coomaraswamy (1959) states that items

of the jacket are similar to the Western jacket with a collar, cuffs, buttons and silver button chains. It is possible that King Vimala Dharma Suriya I introduced the jacket as an upper garment for Kings as jacket with long sleeves and a collar which might have been adapted from Portuguese (Ranathunga, G.M,2018). King of Portugal (1495-1521), Dom Manuel the Fortunate and Portuguese Captains-General, Jeronimo de Azavedo as evident in the sketch of Ferguson's description (Ferguson, D.1907. p284) and Portuguese Captains-General, Pedro Lopes de Sousa who is depicted in the sketch of Silva and Beumer (Silva, De R.K. and Beumer, W.G.M.1988. p.16) were depicted with collared jacket. There is some basis for this hypothesis because the name of the jacket as stated by Codrington (1910,19) *juwan* jacket, derived its name from Vimala Dharma Suriya I's baptismal name of Don Joao d' Austria. Consequently King Senarath (1604-35), King Vijayapala (1634-1654), King Rajasimha II (1635-87) to King Narendrasimha (1707-39) wore jackets like Portuguese.

According to the King Vimala Dharma Suriya I's own words he wanted Kandy to become a Netherlands. The king expresses his feelings as, "candy is now Flanders" (Ferguson 1927, 384). He used his education, awareness of the Western culture to impress the Dutch admiral. As the royalties gradually learnt Western language, embraced religion, and followed social etiquettes that made a suitable ambience and encouragement to those who valued the Western way of life. Christianity brought with it not only a religious faith but also a culture, mainly Christian religious culture (Peter 1983, 158).

King Vijayapala, District of Matale of Central hills of the county was completely converted into the Western way of life (Pieris, 1927). The dress of the King Vijayapala is well described in the collection of letters belong to him (Pieris, 1927). On his Baptism, he dressed as a Portuguese.

*"He was dressed in high black shoes. Lined with white satin, white stockings, and a short cloak lined with white with rich buttons of gold, a round bonnet of Black velvet, with buckles of the finest diamonds, and at the base of the aigrette a jewel of great value encircled by a large number of the costliest pearls, with gold lace over a vest of white tissue. Round his neck he wore an eagle set in a scallop shell, adorned and made entirely of rubies" (Pieris, 1927, 44-45).*

A set of letters written by himself to the King of Portugal is in the Museum of Lisbon. Most of letters reveal his personal desires, attitudes and expectations. Once he wrote as "I seek your friendship because you are a people of good faith, generous nature, great intelligence, and high reputation, such no other nation process (Pieris 1927 27p). King Vijayapala says that "though I am a Sri Lankan by blood I am a Portuguese in my ways and my affections" (Pieris 1927,10) He was purely influenced by Western culture not only he admired the Western, but also he considered the Western as the best (Pieris 1927,27). He often wrote to the King of Portugal requesting political protection. Each letter he carefully composed about his self-development that he

gained as a Christian. The prince Vijayapala continuously reported to the Portuguese King about his gradual development and increased the attempt when the internal enmities increased. The prince Vijayapala wrote as, “I learnt very good customs and etiquettes and some special habits which royal persons employ” (Pieris 1927, 31).

King Rajasimha II (1635-1687) totally followed western dress styles. He grew up in a strong western environment. The mother, queen Dona Catherine’s influences over her children was strong. Therefore, according to her supervision appreciation of western elements would have been increased at the palace. Full figure sketch of the King Rajasimha II is depicted in Robert Knox’s An Historical Relation of Ceylon. King Rajasimha II devoted more attention to his apparel. He had his own ideas about fashion. According to Robert Knox’s description his costume is described as follows,

*“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 Jesuits three tear 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 a shape, ...the body of one, and the sleeves of another colour, he wears long breeches to his ankles, shoes and stockings” (Knox 1966,62).*

In fact, his costume differs from early king’s costumes. He richly clads as a European gentleman. Unlike other kings he wore shoes, stockings and trouser. The trouser drapes straight from the waist up to ankle. The trouser seems to be a loose garment. The lower ends of the trouser are tight and fastened with buttons. As Robert Knox claims the headdress indeed is not a crown but a cap.

Roman Catholicism and Protestant Christianity were supported by the kings of Kandyan Kingdom. King Vikrama Bahu of Kandy (1542-1551) permitted to erect two important churches in the centre of his capital. And on Vikrama Bahu’s order one of the principle temple in the city was given to be converted into a church and it was probably the one which came to be called by the Portuguese ‘the church of our lady of conception (da Silva 1967,37,39). In 1547 two friars entered the Kingdom of Kandy, without any opposition and built a church on a piece land donated by King Jayavira Bandara (Peter 1983,143). It is said that king Senerath “was a king who had always been a friend of the Christians and the Franciscans friars” (Peter 1983, 144). The Franciscan friars were the first Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka and other orders arrived-the Jesuits in 1602 and the Dominicans and Augustinians in 1606. (Peter 1983,p.147,149).

Christianity was not only tolerated but also was respected in the Kandyan kingdom. King Vimala Dharma Suriya II never harmed Christians and they lived peacefully under his patronage. He encouraged a friar to build a church in Kandy territory and allowed him to practice his religious activities (De Silva and Dissanayaka 1994,36).

The King Vimala Dharma Suriya II supported Protestant Christianity activities and friars (De Silva N and Dissanayaka M, 1994, p.36).

Some Portuguese friars were well acquainted with the language, the customs and the culture of the Sinhalese people (De Silva and Dissanayaka 1994, 144). They understood that conversion to Catholicism by force has no value. Dutch were rather more tolerant of the indigenous religions than Portuguese. But VOC government Buddhist and Hindu worship was prohibited in towns and encouraged the people over whom they ruled to adapt Calvinism (Silva 2005,258). Moreover, they preceded a plane which applied a questionable method to resort this matter which was disabilities and oppressive measures imposed on non-Christians on the one hand, and favours and privileges granted to converts on the other, led many to accept Catholicism without a genuine conversion (Silva de K.M, 1981, p.151). In his new edition in 2005 in chapter 15, foot note no.15 says that there was a measure of forces used to see that baptized Christians though not others conformed to and practiced their faith regularly (Silva de K.M, 2005 p. 722).

Robert, Raheem and Colin (1989,3) observe the relationship between religious conversions of Portuguese and the Westernization of dress form. They remark that male convert had to ensure that they adapted the '*carapuca*' (a kind of cap) on baptism. This cap said to have been prevalent in the Island. The converts were commonly called '*topi-walas*' because of the practice of wearing the hat on every occasion. Even though the authors discuss the Christianity and its status during 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Sri Lanka, it provides an important hint that how much dress and Christian faith was bond together.

### **b. Siamese Influences**

By 16<sup>th</sup> Century pure *theravadian* Buddhism was stagnating in the Kingdom of Kandy. In order to rewind valid ordinations and other religious activities in Buddhism, Sri Lankan messengers were sent to Siam peninsula under Kandyan Kings patronage (Mudiyanse 1971-1974,26). Two embassies sent to Arkan by King Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687-1707 AD) for the purpose of bringing over competent monks to Ceylon to review the higher- ordination (*Upasampada*) for Buddhist monks (Mudiyanse N. 1971-1974, p.26). During the Sri Vijaya Rajasigha's region embassies were sent to Arkan (1689 AD) (Pieris P.E, 1945p.102). Regarding the re-establish the '*Upasampadava*' with a letter three messengers are sent-1750 AD (Codrington 1944-1945 99p).

Siamese influences mainly affected on priests (De Silva, N and Ranathunga, G.M. 2010). Kandyan priests conveyed what the deputation of Siam was introduced. New robe, accessories and also new royal attire which was worn by the novice at the higher-ordination occasion were introduced. According to Siam ordination a gold colour satin

shawl was worn over the right shoulder by priests. These practices might have been easy and accessible because Kandyan priests were gifted Siam materials frequently from that government. According to early records one of the Sri Lankan mission was gifted twenty cloths of gold, twenty silk cloths (Pieris 1945, 103), three cloths made with gold threads, set with gems (Codrington 1944/45,99) by Siam King. Brocade bags, robes of brocade fabric, arm bowls made out of Siamese porcelain, gem studded fans and other precious utensils which were gifted to Venerable *Sanghrajā of Valivita* are still displayed at Malwatta temple museum of Kandy. The fan was a simple utensil to get the air. But with the renewal of Buddhism it was awarded to represent the higher-ordination status of a monk.

From Siam 'full costume of high status' was introduced. This costume was to be worn by novice at the higher-ordination occasion. This had both upper and lower dresses including accessories such as shoes, hat, gold head plate, belt, various rings, seven necklaces of different proportions, and ear rings. The full costume represented the Siam King's attire which was known as '*mulanduma*, by native Sri Lankan. Sri Lankan Kings gradually got accustomed to embroidered cloths with gold threads, dazzling gems in Siamese tradition. Gold textiles, gem studded crown, ring sets, *cabaya* (coat) of gold tissue were also described in King Kirthi Sri's clothing habits. According to Pybus's embassy to Kandy in 1762, he carefully describes the king's costume as follows,

*The upper garment seemed an open robe of gold tissue, with a close vest underneath, and a broad belt richly embroidered with gold round his waist. several rings on his fingers, a short dagger in his left hand, the hilt of which was gold set with precious stones, (Reven-Hart 1956,57).*





**Figure 1-** King Kirithi Sri Rajsimha  
a King at  
(Temple of Dambulla)  
Museum of



**Figure 2-** The apprentice is worn as  
the higher- ordination ceremony-  
*MalwathuViharaya.*

The description tallies very well with the statue of Kirithi Sri in Dambulla temple. More details can be identified from the statue. His regalia consist of a number of chains. These chains are arranged in different proportions. The central one has a large pendant hanging from a row of chains winding down from the hip. The longest chain comes to knee level. This royal regalia shows positive trace of Siamese regalia style. For the custom of higher- ordination a new royal dress was introduced by Siam. At the higher- ordination *tuppotti* with white pantaloon and many accessories are worn by the apprentice. This royal attire has been continued by Sinhalese nobles as their standard costume up to date.

The colour was important and special in each religion. Yellow was worn only by Buddhists monks and Tamil Brahmins. Every Brahmin represented with yellow colour lower garment which has black spotted design all over the cloth seemed to be made out of animal skin. During the Portuguese occupational period Franciscan friars wore grey robes (Peter 1983,160). According to wall paintings the yellow colour was never worn by local Buddhist. White was recognized as the respected colour to participate at every important occasion as wedding and funeral for Buddhist. Simplicity and

equality were signified through white by Buddhist. Black dresses were worn by Catholics at the Mass and funerals.

## CONCLUSION

Religion played an important role of influencing foreign dress habits among locals. Religion not only introduced the faith but also the culture that bond with that. Most of the time religion was the main barrier which reduced free flow of foreign influences. Royal patronage allowed foreign influences to spread within the Kandyan Kingdom. Most of influences were modified according to Buddhist culture. Colour was one of the main elements that promoted by foreign influences. Each religious philosophy encouraged people to wear certain colours as a mean of communication. Christianity and Buddhism introduced different cultural habits to the traditional practice. Spectrum of dainty colour, novel perception of dressing, accessories, handling of variety of fabrics are the cultural heritage which have been handed down to the current Sri Lankan society through religious practices.

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