

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

1. INTRODUCTION:

SRI LANKA AND INDIAN CONTINENT; GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL RELATION

The Island of Sri Lanka, situated at the tip of the Indian subcontinent, is separated from the main land by a narrow maritime corridor of twenty two miles. Its geographical situation exposed it to the impact of political developments in South India. The history of Sri Lanka recorded in the chronicles begins with the Aryan colonization marked by the advent of Vijaya and his 700 followers from North India (sixth century BC). The introduction of Buddhism into Sri Lanka in the third century BC by Mahinda Thera, son of the Emperor Asoka of India created a strong link with the subcontinent. Lifestyles began to be more structured after the sacred Bo Sapling was brought by Sangamitta Theri the daughter of Emperor Asoka accompanied by sixteen artisans, groups of painters, craftsmen, musicians etc. The principal architects of Island's ancient civilization nurtured by Buddhism were the Sinhalese who originally migrated from different parts of North India to settle in the island. Their language, literature, art, architecture and most of the other components of culture are revealed by a range of literary and archaeological evidence spread over the centuries, pointing to North Indian and South Indian affinities. In the course of time, however, Sri Lanka came into close

contact with her neighbors in the mainland of the far South. While there is a substantial body of evidence on commercial and cultural relations between Sri Lanka and South India, a more prominent aspect in the historical records of the Island is the political relations with the Cholas and the Pandyas along the east coast of South India. These developments reached a climax with the South Indian cultural influences in the Kotte kingdom for almost more than one and a half centuries (1400 - 1597AD).

2. 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.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

KOTTE: PROXIMITY LINK WITH SOUTH INDIA.

The Kotte kingdom was subject to foreign influences from 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 extremely subtle. It is inextricably linked with acceptance and rejection. Further it defies a simple formulation of direct and indirect; this also extends to features in dress. The patterns of influences are vitally connected with notions of reason, memory, history and ideology. The process of influence allows for the construction of a narrative of the past, the present and future on the basis of certain dress artifacts. The concept of influence is normally regarded as a normative that seeks to enforce certain values and assumptions and modes of behavior patterns of people in a society. This concept is very often regarded as a transcendental phenomenon and is seen to be endowed with certain timeless qualities. However this study purports to identify salient South Indian features demonstrated within the context of tradition. Direct influences were operative in the King's court. The direct influences were: matrimonial links with the South Indian families, the king, family members and subordinates; court officers from South India; religion; and literature and the indirect influence was the influence of the Gampola kingdom (1341 -1374).

DIRECT INFLUENCES: MATRIMONIAL ALLIANCES

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, 83) They belonged to the Sangiliya caste. 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. 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, 83) 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.

THE TAMIL ORIGINS OF THE KING'S ADOPTED SONS

The king Parakramabahu VI (1412- 1467) had two adopted sons Sapumal, and prince Ambulugala were sons of *Pannikal* princely offspring of a warrior from Malabar who married a Sinhala princess of Kotte and served at the kings court. Prince Sapumal known as *Sempaka Perumal* was a Tamil or Telugu name popular during the time. He was succeeded to the throne of Kotte in 1467 by a prince under the name of Bhuvanekabahu VI (1469-77) and prince Ambulugala succeeded to the throne of Kotte under the name of Vira Parakramabahu VIII (1484 – 1508).

SACERDOTAL DIGNITARY OF SOUTH INDIAN ORIGIN; A FUNCTIONARY OF THE ROYAL COURT

The Brahmin high priest was an important functionary at the royal court. In the religion of Parakramabahu VI the position of the high priest was held by two Telugu Brahmins called Pota Ojhalum and his nephew Auhala Ojhalum.

(Pathmanathan 1986/87,102) They belonged to the Sangiliya caste. They were rewarded with villages as a land grant. Epithets revealed the kinship of South Indian kings who were assimilated into the royal court of Kotte through Brahmins and in many other ways. Sinhala kings claimed lineal descent from Manu, who was identified as Mahasammataha of the Hindu tradition. The traditional poetry called Sandesa poetry refers to Parakramabahu VI as “this king who comes down from Manu’s unbroken line”. (Wijesooriya 2004,84)

ROYAL AUTHORITY ACCORDING TO SOUTH INDIAN HINDU CUSTOM

Royal authority and concepts of dynastic and royal power derived from Hindu sources were incorporated into the court ideology. Professor E.R Sarathchandra stated that the court of the Sinhalese kings was the same as the court of that in India. As,

“...would be natural to expect, the culture of the Sinhalese court has been entirely Indian in the early period, but it is interesting to note that it seems to have continued to be so right through the centuries, the difference being that, in later times, the influences came more from South India than from the north. The king was installed as a ruler according to the Hindu custom of Abhiseka and in respect of his paraphernalia such as the White Parasol, the State Elephant, the State Carriage, the State Horse, dancing girls, and harem he was similar to an Indian King.” (Sarathchandra 1953,14)

The more prestigious title *Maharaja*, which was commonly used in most medieval Hindu kingdoms, was also applied to some of the Sinhalese rulers of the Kotte period and was applied to Parakramabahu VI too. It had become a eulogistic expression without any special significance. The assimilation of ideas and traditions derived from Hindu culture and society changed the form, style and even the contents of some of the inscriptions of the Kotte period. The court officials who drafted the texts of native inscriptions confirm South Indian traditions of epigraphy. Kotte inscriptions are reminiscent of South Indian influences. It is evident, that court officials adhered to Pandya practice with respect to the manner of recording the regnal years. Brahmins were also consulted on matters relating to astrology and their help was sought by the rulers for the study, translation, and preparation of manuals on astrology. A Brahmin called Tenuvaraipperumal, one of the famous Brahmins, served at the court of king Vijayabahu VI (seventh king of Kotte) (Pathmanathan, 1986/87,102).

INFLUENCE OF INDIAN LITERATURE

The art, literature and cultural ideology adequately reflected characteristics of South Indian transformation and is more apparent in literary work of the Kotte period. This inevitable consequence of such deep rooted transitions is changes in religion and cultural activity as well as in the nature of artistic production (Bandaranayake 1986,15).The assimilation of ideas and traditions derived from Hindu culture and society resulted in the introduction of noteworthy changes in the form and style of the poetry of the period. This opportunity led to increasing Sanskritisation of the Sinhala language through assimilation of Sanskrit words¹

(Pathmanathan, 1986/87,105). Several secular poems (*sandesa*) composed during this period were called *Salalihini*, *Gira*, *Parevi*, and *Hamsa*. Eulogistic epics were also written during this period. The eulogistic epic called *Parakumba Siritha* marked the high peak of secular writing. These secular poems were useful source of information on social and political conditions in the country.

INFLUENCE OF THE HINDU RELIGION: HINDU SHRINES

Buddhism developed as a synthetic religious tradition incorporating within its fold elements of the ideology of both the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. During this period the concept of the four guardian deities of Lanka was articulated in a developed form. Shrines dedicated to them were worshipped and honored. These deities were of considerable importance in the Buddhist tradition (Pathmanathan 1986/87, 82) As a result Hindu cultural institutions surfaced during this period. Hindu shrines for Siva, Vishnu, Kali, Skanda, and Pattini were found in the Kotte period. So was music and dancing performed by men and women in the Hindu temple tradition associated with Hindu shrines (Wijesooriya 2004, 128). It inspired the development of court music and as well as their forms of dress. Saivism flourished in the coastal areas to a limited extent in the dynastic capitals. Many temples dedicated to Siva and other deities were set up. Many of the descriptions survived in epigraphic and literary notices however their physical remains disappeared because of Portuguese activities in the Sixteenth century.

There was a temple of *Eshvara* in the city of Kotte during the reign of Parakramabahu VI. The *Salalihini sandesa kavya* described regular activities of the shrine. (Wijesooriya 2004, 122) Devotional Tamil hymns were recited regularly and musical instruments of Tamil origin were played at religious rituals. The *Munnesvaran* shrine at Chilaw was dedicated to Siva. It is a very ancient shrine and its origin was obscure. There were no reliable literary or epigraphic notices on this shrine before the Kotte period. It became very famous during the reign of Parakramabahu VI. The Vishnu shrine at Devinuwara in the Southern coast of the island was also famous during the Kotte period. The *Munnesvaran* shrine enjoyed royal patronage for a long time, until the sixteenth century. Ibn Battuta an Arabian traveler who visited the place in 1344 states that a thousand Brahmins were attached to the services and five hundred nautch girls sang and danced when religious services were performed. Large communities of Brahmins, smiths, artisans and merchants supported its establishment. There was a temple of the Goddess Kali and an Upulvan shrine during the Kotte period (Wijesooriya 2004,59). A group of dancing girls was attached to the shrine and their charms are described in an elegant verse in the *Paravi sandesa kavya* (Wijesooriya 2004, 71). References in the *Kokila sandesa kavya* to temples of Ganesha are much more numerous than to those dedicated to other Hindu Gods. (Wijesooriya 2004, 91)The temple of Skanda received the patronage of the king Parakramabahu VI.

Direct influence made a strong impact on the prevailing tradition of the country. Also it made a direct impact on the king's court and its various activities too. South Indian influences increased because of the patronage. On the other hand the king had direct contacts with foreign diplomats. Anthropologist Bruce

Kapferer points out “That people do not proselytize their culture, but do proselytize ideology” (Kapferer 1983,19). This means that in spite of the presence of a new culture the Sinhalese did not abandon the old; they openly followed the new and also adhered to the old.

INFLUX OF GROUPS OF SOUTH INDIAN PEOPLE

South Indian immigrants to the Gampola kingdom known as *Bandara* or *Pandarans* merged with the elites of the city. From the end of the fourteenth century, inscriptions and literary records used the word *Bandara*⁶ (Dewaraja. 1988, 55) Portuguese writers refer to King Don Juan Dhramapala the last king of Kotte (1582- 93) as Don Juan Pereira Pandaran. A group of *pantarans* came from Kerala in the reign of Bhuvanekabahu VI (1470-78) of Kotte and received land from the king.

A study of the indirect influence of the Gampola period kingdom on the Kotte kingdom reveals a strong drive to establish and continue the South Indian traditions in every aspect of the lives of the people of Kotte. Traditions which had taken root in the Gampola kingdom and were transferred to the Kotte kingdom.

Headdress: A crown or “*Makuta*” was a common head ornament of kings and gods from early times. Artists endowed their images with beautiful headdresses and hair styles. Dancers carved in the ivory caskets emphasized the importance of court performers whereas other dancers (temple dancers) were sculptured on the stone door jamb at Galapatha (Fig.1) temple at Benthara and the temple at Ambulugala, Mawanella (Fig.2) both of which also belonged to the Kotte period (Figure.3). Furthermore a headdress is considered to be a dynamic part of the dance costume. The beauty or the magnificence of a head dress depended on the occasion.

The shape of the head gear was in keeping with the dance costume. Impressive headdresses harmonize with the sculptural form of the whole body. The headdress 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 compliment their beauty. There were six types of headdresses and, three types of women’s hair styles, depicted in the ivory carvings. The secular poetry of the *Salalihini* poem gives an interesting glimpse of the aesthetics of headdresses. (Wijesooriya 2004,128) This secular poem gives an indication of court dancers and their adornments. *Salalihini Sandesha verse 73*

Behold the girls dancing on the stage

Hair adorned with full-blown fragrant flowers

Ears decked with shining plates of gold

Flashing blue eyes bright with collyrium

It is clear that temple dancers also used fragrant full-blown flowers to decorate hair. Furthermore it described the flowers as being used in between braided hair. They used gold plates as ear studs and made up their eyes by applying collyrium.(Ragawan 1958,2) compared to the headdresses of Galapatha temple at Benthara and, the temple at Ambulugala those of the Kotte ivory carvings exhibited ingenious forms and a range of structures. There were six types of headdresses and three types of hair styles depicted in both caskets.

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 headdress 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. Dancer



Figure 2. Dancer



Figure 3. Dancer

(Galapatha temple,Benthara) (Ambulugala temple,Mawanella) (Kotte ivory casket ,Munich)

Impressive headdresses 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 headdresses and, three types of women’s hair styles, depicted in the ivory carvings.



Figure 4 (headdress)



Figure 5 (headdress)



Figure 6 (headdress)

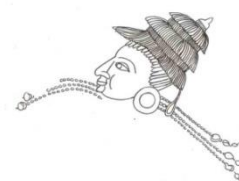


Figure 7 (headdress)



Figure 8 (headdress) Figure 9 (headdress) Figure 10 Koppu Figure 11 Figure 12
(hair style) (hair style) (hair styles)

The secular poetry of the Selalihini poem gives an interesting glimpse of the aesthetics of head dresses. 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 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. Fig. 4 a crown of madalam flower with hanging decorated strings. Fig. 5 a crown of madalam flower with looping pearl strings decorate hair. Fig. 6 a crown of layered flower buds used in between braided hair. Fig. 7 a crown of conical structure with strings to control, Fig. 8 a crown of conical structure without strings & control it and Fig. 9 a three layered crown.

Figure 5 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).

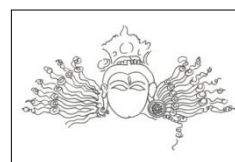


Figure 13 (God Dakshinamurthi) Figure 14 God Nataraja (Virisadai style)

Strings of pearls and ornamental ribbons also are shown here at the corner of the ears. This circular head gear is called Jatamandalam. (Stahapathi, 2002, 138) 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 fig.4 is well formed structure with two layered flower rows and stems. Head band consists of one pearl string. Comparative to the fig.4 headdress 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 billowing 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 fig.10 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. The 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. Figure 15 from the Lepakshi temple in south India shows vertical Koppu. Figures 16-18 show multiple designs of mango- shaped chignon hair from Harsiddhi temple, Malwa which were in vogue since the 10th Century.(Kranrisch 1960,11,13,17,45)

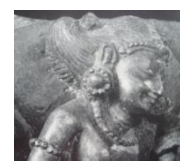


Figure 15 Koppu style Figure 16 chignon style Figure 17 chignon style Figure 18 chignon style

(Lepakshi temple)

(Harsiddhi temple, Malwa)

4. 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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