

Fashion Configuration: Reading Dress Tradition towards Modernity

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Abstract

Fashion plays with time. The relative disposition or arrangement of the parts or elements of a dress signified the essence and relationship between fashion, tradition and modernity. Dress fashion also represents the traditions which society followed. Traditions of a society reveal how things have changed. This paper studies fashion configurations described in poetry and visualized in pictorial formats during the 16th Century Kotte period with a view to identifying salient dress features that have been assimilated by tradition and also seeks to investigate in the way it moved towards modernity with hybridization of several dress details and components. The study reveals that the Kotte period marked the culmination of an emerging novel fashion tradition towards modernity. In addition to a deliberate attempt at design, the form and the structures of dresses were changed and organized by internal explicit design units such as pleating, knotting, folding, frilling, and tucking which made up a rich set of possible combinations. Data for this research was gathered from many original historical literary records, texts, and pictorial records from the two ivory caskets at present in the Munich Treasury, Germany, and wood carvings from Rambawa Aludeniya temple, Gampola and two cloth paintings presently at the National Museum, Colombo. The qualitative research method was adopted for the study and a systematic sequence of observational studies was carried out to gather, sort and analyze data in a systematic manner.

Key Words: Fashion, Dress, Tradition, Modernity, Configuration, Hybridization

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