



Chest Piece of King Kirti Sri Rajasimhe (1747-1782 AD) of Sri Lanka: A Discussion Paper to Ascertain the Task of the Dress

Gayathri Madubhani Ranathunga

Senior Lecturer,
Fashion Design and Product Development,
Department of Textile and Clothing Technology,
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.
Email. gayathrir@uom.lk

Abstract

Significance and meaning of dress have been attracted with the wide variety of disciplines such as socio-culture, anthropology, economics, history, philosophy. In this article I concentrate on the actual task of the chest piece of King Kirti Sri Rajasimhe (1747-1782 AD) of the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, by analyzing its usage in a wider socio-cultural context. Strategic effects required in the material properties of dress and their expressive ability were examined. The objective of the study is to discuss the actual task of the dress by analyzing its usage in a wider socio-cultural context. The research is a qualitative data analysis primary and secondary data were gathered and analyzed. It can be suggested from this research that even though the factors affect theories may change time to time the theory or the concept will remain the same. It was found that the dress, adornments, accessories all, equally contribute to maintain social class, wealth, power of the wearer.

Keywords: The Chest Piece of King Kirti Sri Rajasimhe, task, Social class, wealth, power

Introduction

The dress is a powerful signifier of the cultural identity of a country. It has been developed, modified and evolved throughout history. Sri Lanka is situated at the Centre of a naval route bringing foreign influences to the country since time immemorial. By the 16th century onwards the Kandyan Kingdom was heavily influenced by colonial occupation, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British consecutively. Kandyan royalty who were brought up and protected by the Portuguese during their political crisis embraced Christianity had Western cultural acquaintance bringing Western sartorial etiquettes to the royal dress. 'mante' or collar was an essential dress item of the royalties and elite male and female which was introduced by the Portuguese by the 16th century. It is seen that the utilization of *mante* is excessive in the

Kandyan socio-cultural context, denoting many meanings. It was observed that these interpretations were influenced by the concurrent political, economic, cultural and religious factors that affect dress.

The selected dress to study is a chest piece of King Kirti Sri Rajasimhe (1747-1782 AD) is on display at the Museum of Kandy. The chest piece is semi-circular formed and made out of an imported coloured fabric of floral design and detachable. A small brown colour circular formed secondary collar has been attached at the neckline. There is a lenient cut at the center front which is fastened by two blue ribbons. The pattern has neatly cut and hand stitched. Ten tussles have been attached around the main piece; a brown code has been attached neatly. The chest piece may have worn over the shirt of white muslin. It is long till the chest



level of almost the shirt may be covered by the chest piece.

Objective

The objective of the study is to discuss the actual task of the dress by analyzing its usage in a wider socio-cultural context.

Methodology

Information of the chest piece was gathered through observant participation. Information was observed according to Materials, pattern, colour, accessory and the orientation of the design and the methodology of wearing, then recorded as photographs and sketches in detail. The research objective was studied by observing temple murals, sketches of foreign diplomats, sculptures, museum archives and compared relatively to the so-called traditional practice of today, literature relevant to the subject.

The chest piece of the King was observed, studied and analyzed relatively by the queen, elite male and female's *mante* as well. Information was gathered and analyzed in a way that different meanings given to the *mante* are identified. Reliability of the data which were incorporated in the research was of much concern. Data of archival remaining were cross-checked with pictorial data, literary sources, and the current practice of the dress enabled in generating a logical suggestion to the task of the chest piece worn by the King of the Kandyan Kingdom.

Literature Survey

Humans not only cover their bodies but also display them to attract others (Kaiser 1997:15). The Emergence of Fashion. Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992: 1) defined that “dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other

categories of items added to the body as supplements”. Blumer (1969:275) claims that “fashion exclusively or primarily with the area of costume and adornment, its presence is very obvious in the area of entertainment and amusement”. Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992: 4) say the “Body modifications and supplements, which constitute dress, function as alternants of body processes or as media for communication”.

Scholars argue of dress and context in a wider aspect in nature of fashion and its mechanism of its operation. Schneider (1987:441) pointed out that “the role of cloth in the consolidation of social relations and assessed its capacity to communicate social identities and values. She (Schneider 1987) put more weight on culture and dress and comments that “culture as an idea or theory in clothing has been thoroughly scrutinized over years”. Jirousek (2000:201) said that “fashion is typically discussed in terms of aesthetics and visual appearance or perhaps as a social/psychological phenomenon in which dress is the visual expression of cultural norms in a particular time or place.

This idea of fashion has been derived from the practical aspect of dress. He (Jirousek (2000:203) further provided more supportive factors that” fashion is a major and visible object of consumption and as such can be a useful means of discovering the mechanism of demand and supply in the context of economy and social history”. Joanne (2000: 62) pointed out the significance of different ways of wearing and wrapping garments considering this could be the meaning communicated of dress practices.

Fashion plays a more conspicuous role in modern times. The selected dress item belonged to the 18th century of the traditional society. Fashion in dress in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century Europe with its particular class structure. There is a direct correlation between Fashion evolution and the elite class. Hann and Jackson (1987:3) cites Sproles that “a fashion as being a



communicative product that incorporates inherent symbolic social messages. Hence, through its visual properties, a particular fashion product may encourage stereotyping of the adopter in terms of such factors as social status, wealth and affiliation with a certain social group". Simmel (1957:545) claims that the upper class is important in fashion communications. "The elite initiates a fashion and, when the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandons it for a newer mode- a person that quickens with the increase of wealth". Occupation, education, income and power (political, economic, military) are generally considered to be of special relevance to determining the social class (Hann and Jackson 1987:13). Blumer (1969:277) said that "classes adopt these insignia as a means of satisfying their striving to identify with a superior status". Easey (2009:21) explores that Fashion is now available to the masses is that there are several levels at which fashion clothing functions which leads from street fashion or mass market (bottom line) to designer wear to *Houte Couture* (high fashion). Price, style, high quality such factors affect each market level as in traditional society the high fashion is for the upper class. Blumer (1969:278) said that "nature of fashion and the mechanism of its operation. Fashion was thought to arise in the form of styles which demarcate an elite group. These styles automatically acquire prestige in the eyes of those who wish to emulate the elite group and are copied by them, thus forcing the elite group to devise new distinctive marks of their superior status". Simmel (1957:558) expressed that "Fashion is based on adoption by a social set, which demands mutual imitation from its members and thereby releases the individual of all responsibility, ethics and aesthetics. The idea supported by Joanne (2000: 62) cites Spair's statement as "Fashion is custom in the guise of departure from custom" Blumer's (1969:281) scheme elevates the prestige of the elite to the position of major importance in the operation of fashion-styles come into fashion because of the

stamp of distinction conferred on them by the elite. "It is not the prestige of the elite which makes the design fashionable but, instead, it is the suitability or potential fashionableness of the design which allows the prestige of the elite to be attached to it. The design has to correspond to the direction of incipient taste of the fashion consuming public". Hann and Jackson (1987:3) claims that "it should be recognized that fashion products also have a psychological value in the minds of consumers". It is observed that even though the factors affected on dress are changed from time to time, the theory is the same in fashion adoption.

Results and Discussion

The term *mante* has been derived from a Latin word of '*Mantao*' which gives the meaning of collar was attached to the jacket of the upper body. In sketches of the King of Portugal (1495-1521), Dom Manuel the Fortunate and the Portuguese Captains General, Jeronimo de Azavedo depicted with collars as depicted in figure I and 2. Temple paintings of the Kandyan Kingdom depict the King with three-layered *mante*, elite with one layer, queens and elite female with one layered *mante*. According to Heyt, King Narendrasimha is depicted in a dark collar decorated with precious stones (Codrington, 1910, 22p). King Sri Wikrama Rajasimhe is depicted with white pleated *mante* in the portrait. King Sri Wikrama Rajasimhe is depicted with three-layered *mante* in John Davy's sketch (Davy, 1921, 107p). The King has depicted in the sculpture of Dambulla temple wore a similar kind of *mante*.



Figure 1: King of Portugal (1495-1521), Dom Manuel the Fortunate (Ferguson, D.1907. The Discovery of Ceylon by the Portuguese in 1506, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (C. B)*, Vol.XIX, No.59, p284)



Figure 3: King Sri Wikrama Rajasimha, (Museum of Kandy)



Figure 2: Portuguese Captains-General, Jeronimo de Azavedo. (Roberts, M.2004. *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period (1590-1815)*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications. plate 7)



Figure 4: King Sri Wikrama Rajasimhe (Davy, J. 1821. *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of Its Inhabitants*, London: Longman, p.107)



Figure 5: King Kirti Sri Rjasimhe (1747-1782 AD) (Dambulla Temple)

Two *mante* belong to elite female are on display at the Museum of Kandy. The gold colour *mante* was made of Brocade fabric, decorated by gold threaded yarns on the surface. The other was made out of white calico. White colour *mante* was significantly long and wide and the body was almost covered by the wad of pleats attached to the neckline. At Gangarama, Degaldoruwa, Madawala, Hanguranketha temple murals depict a retinue of royal ladies who wore *mante* jacket, line up to worship the Buddha. All *mante* were depicted in pleated white cotton attached to the neck. In Madawala temple murals, Molligoda Adigar and Unambuwe temple murals of Gampola Monaravila Keppetipola Disava were depicted with one layered *mante*. However, archival remaining at the Museum of Colombo of the elite male costume of the Kandyan Kingdom, do not have *mante* part in the Jacket. Lay custodian of the Temple of the Tooth Relic, Kandy wears the jacket devoid of *mante*. It was observed that *mante* of the elite male was only depicted in temple murals. Today simple white colour

pleated *mante* is still practiced by young Buddhist Sinhalese girls in their costume called '*lama sariya*' which gives the meaning of modesty according to accepted cultural customs and values.



Figure 6 :Female *mante* Jacket : Murals of Degaldoruwa



Figure 7 : Female *mante* Jacket : Murals of Gangaramaya



Figure 8: A decorated *mante* jackets of an Elite female, Museum of Kandy



Figure 10: Elite Female of Gangarama Temple Murals



Figure 9: *Mante* jackets of a Elite female, Museum of Kandy



Figure 11: Lay custodian



Figure 12: Buddhist Girls with 'lama sariya'

Many Sri Lankan historical records give different meanings to the *mante*. Some records describe that *mante* was worn to keep the jacket clean. Codrington (1910, 17) also observed that all the Kandyan chiefs wore a white pleated collar on which their hair rests. He (Codrington 1910, 17) observes that "the hair of the chieftains tied in a loose knot and resting on the pleated *mante* which has a border, the object of this article of attire was clearly to keep the oiled hair from the jacket beneath". Oiling and bathing are an important event in the New Year customs of Sri Lanka. Ralph Pieris (1956, 15 p) explains that during the Kandyan reign the offices of *haluwadana nilame* or *diyawadana nilame* performed the duties of the King's bathing and dressing. Either of these officers combed the King's hair after his bath, and anointed him with *bet-tel* prepared for the purpose at the *betge*. Therefore, *mante* would have been worn to avoid anointing oil on the jacket.

Besides, *mante* was developed into a dress item which showed dignity and honor. The collar was awarded by Kings to pay honor many times. It was developed into a custom during the Kotte reign (Silva 1990, 491). Codrington states that the Adigar was allowed to wear a *mante* of white pleated muslin with gold edging. Disava wore a *mante* without gold edging. Therefore, it is clear that *mante* signified the status of each rank. During the Kandyan era, it was strictly prohibited to imitate royal dress etiquettes by other civilians. Usage of gold, wearing Jackets, hats, swords were only for royalties but those privileges had been given to elites with some limits (Coomaraswamy 1959, 34).

The elites were suggested to wear silver jewelry but only the greats had the privilege of wearing ornaments of Gold (Coomaraswamy 1959, 34). Satin, silk kinds of fabrics were strictly prohibited for common people during the reigning time. Robert Knox (1966, 170) remarks that even though some highest nobles were allowed to wear gold but "none may were any silk". D'Oyly (1975, 6) states that "the *adhikaramas* also had a right to certain exclusive items of dress, which they jealously guarded against infringement". During the Kandyan era, it was strictly prohibited to imitate royal dress etiquettes by other civilians. Usage of gold, wearing Jackets, hats, swords were only for royalties but those privileges had been given to elites with some limits (Coomaraswamy 1959, 34). The elites were suggested to wear silver jewellery but only the greats had the privilege of wearing ornaments of Gold (Coomaraswamy 1959, 34).



Figure 13: Portrait of Monaravila Keppetipola Disava Unambuwe Viharaya, Gampola

Chest piece of King Kirti Sri is made out of imported textile. Luxurious materials and trims might have been imported from Europe or received from foreign delegates. Abeyasimhe T.B.H (1985/86, 34, 35) in his thorough observation on diplomatic missions of the Dutch gives a list of gifts which was usually sent to the King of Kandy as a 'yearly practice'. According to a number of articles collected from various quarters by Governor Thomas Van Rhee (1692 -1697), a list of gifts referred to King Vimala Dharma Suriya II almost of gifts consist of imported textile varieties. Besides, a Dutch officer, Ras Macquet brought a gift of a coach for the new king of Kandyan Kingdom in 1740 AD. Most of the gifts were different kinds of imported textiles.

Kings spent a considerable amount of money on costumes. Peris (1956, 282) explores that during the Nayakkar dynasty; 'Hetti vidiya'

was separated for Indian textile traders who brought Indian textiles specially for king usage. That was an extravagant effort for effective communication through dress. An officer of the Dutch East India Company, Van Golle took a great effort to find out some particular silk from India and some lace for neck chiefs to Lewke Adigar as the Adigar particularly wished to have them (Dewaraja 1988,102).



Figure 14: The Chest Piece of King Kirti Sri Rajasimhe (1747-1782 AD)-Museum of Kandy



Figure15: Imported Fabric of floral design:
The Chest Piece of King Kirti Sri Rajasimhe
(1747-1782 AD)

The dress performing occasions seem to be regular events at the royal palace. The superior status of the King was expressed at his courtly presence and ceremonial occasions. Ferguson (1927,380-381) made an interesting recovery about the first Dutch visit to Kandy. The procession and exquisite dresses of both local and foreign participants were well described and Natives gathered around and examined the occasion. Robert Knox (1966, 156) describes several ceremonial occasions held by the King Rajasimha 11 (1635-87) in the company of foreigners during late 16th Century AD. Knox explains that the King is always thoroughly concerned to get prepared with his best

apparels when he visits ambassadors. 'To see them brought before him in fine apparel, their swords by their sides with great state and honor and that the ambassadors may see and take notice of the greatness of his majesty'. Therefore, ceremonial events were the most elegant and richest events where all met with their exquisite outfits. The above description is well justified by a vivid colorful painting of the conference between the Dutch governor and the Kandyan ambassadors in 1772 as shown in figure 16.



Figure 16: The conference between the Dutch governor and the Kandyan ambassadors in 1772, now at Amsterdam.(Silva, De R.K., and Beumer, W.G.M.,1988, Illustrations and views of Dutch Ceylon. London :Serendip Publications.)



Conclusion

The dress was a means of communication, the social standing and status of a person. This communication may include the necessity of an individual to reflect his culture, wealth, his desires, ambitions and the power he had and to give some special messages to another group of people or an individual. Communication of a social message occurs through costumes is very specific and brings the importance of costume into a high position of communication. Because it is evident that the royalty concerned about their costume and gave priority to social exposition. The importance of costume as an item of communication can be assessed by the amount of money spent on costumes in the world today and similarly in the past.

Objects summarize complex meanings of parts of the social system of thought into a single expression that is conveyed to the society. Symbols, objects can easily transmit ideas and values as they are simple and therefore understood by the majority. The unifying factor was that exclusive dress always has high value, Kandyan royalty *mante*, suitable for courtly presence. Several commodities serve as the symbols of imperial sovereignty that conveyed the idea and values that were part of the Sinhala ideology, so their extensive use implemented a very direct and formalized means of control.

References

Abeyasinghe T.B.H.,(1985/86), Embassies as Instruments of Diplomacy from Sri Lanka in the first half of the 18th Century, JRAS (C.B),New series, Vol.XXX.

Blumer, H. (1969). Fashion: From class differentiation to collective selection. *The sociological quarterly*, 10(3), 275-291. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1969.tb01292.x>

Codrington H.W, (1910), *Notes on Some of the Principal Kandyan Chiefs and Headmen and Their Dresses*, Ceylon: H.C Cottle, Government Printer.

Coomaraswamy, A. (1959)*Meadival Sinhalese Art*. Published by the National Museum. Sri Lanka.

d'Oyly J, (1975), (sec.edit.),*'A sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom*,ed.L.J.B

Turner, Published as the CHJ, Vol.24, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka, Tisara Publishers,

da Silva, Cosme. O.M.(1990). *Fidalgos in the Kingdom of Kotte 1505-1656*. Colombo:Harwoods.

Davy, J. (1821). *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of Its Inhabitants*, London: Longman.

Dewaraja, L. S. (1988) Sec. ed. *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707-1782*. Pannipitiya: Stamford Lake (Pvt) Ltd.

Easey, M. (Ed.). (2009). *Fashion marketing*. John Wiley & Sons.

Ferguson, D. (1927). The Earliest Dutch Visit to Ceylon, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (C. B)*. Vol.XXX, No.80.

Jirousek, C. (2000). The transition to mass fashion system dress in the later Ottoman Empire. *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922: An Introduction*, 76-77.

Joanne B. Eicher (2000) The Anthropology of Dress, *Dress*, 27:1, 59-70, DOI: 10.1179/036121100803656954



Knox R, (1966), An Historical Relations of Ceylon', Dehiwala, Colobmo: Tisara Prakasakayo

Pieris, R, (1956). *Sinhalese social Organization*, The Ceylon University press board.

Roach-Higgins, M. E., & Eicher, J. B. (1992). Dress and identity. *Clothing and textiles research journal*, 10(4), 1-8.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X9201000401>

Schneider, J. (1987). The anthropology of cloth. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 16(1), 409-448.
doi:10.1146/annurev.an.16.100187.002205

Simmel, G. (1957). Fashion. *American journal of sociology*, 62(6), 541-558.
doi/abs/10.1086/222102