



Expressing Identity: Function of Fashion

Priyanka Virajini Medagedara Karunaratne

Senior Lecturer,
Fashion Design & Product Development,
Department of Textile & Clothing Technology,
Faculty of Engineering,
University of Moratuwa

Abstract

'Identity' is one of the seminal concepts for describing the function of fashion. Fashion allegedly contributes to the formation of identity. Besides identity includes the way of an individual perceives, interprets and presents individual and others in various contexts of everyday life. An expression of identity is extremely subtle and symbolically communicates personal values, interests, tastes and affiliations to one another. Through the process of self-identification, individuals place and express their own identities. However, people cannot hold on particular identities by themselves. As noted by Kaiser, identities tend to be constructed, revised and reconstructed in social transactions. The processes of developing identities are based on ascribed and achieved identities. The objective of the study is to explore how the royalty anticipated what identities they would like to have in the social situation and how they presented themselves accordingly to others, thus generating basic theoretical concepts to the field of fashion.

Keywords: Identity, Fashion, Religion, Portuguese, Behavior

Introduction

Fashion clothes are linked to the way people view and evaluate others. It has become a malleable form of self-expression. Individuals use fashion in clothing to communicate desired aspects of self to others. The self-indication is a social construction. According to the interaction perspective in sociology self-indication is a social arrangement and a transaction and also the influences of social factors on a developed sense of self.

Self-conceptions are not static, people move into new contexts and life situations, requiring new clothes and including reconsiderations about the meaning of their appearance. In history the sixty-four royal ornaments and the draped long lower body dress indicates the sense of self of the King.

The pictorial references given below show that the King of Kotte, indicated in the ivory casket at present in Germany dressed differently according to the day and the place where he represented himself.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to explore how the royalty anticipated what identities they would like to have in the social situation and how the presented themselves accordingly to others, thus generating basic theoretical concepts to the field of fashion. Also it is identifying the identity is those attributes, behavioral patterns, lifestyles, social structures and norms that distinguish a people from other peoples. These are passed on laterally or inherited from one



generation to another (cultural heritage), or horizontally passed on from one society to another through such agent as globalization.

Material and Methods

Relief carvings in two special ivory carved boxes presently at the Munich Treasury in Germany of King Buwanekabahu VII (1521-1555AD), his grandson prince Dharmapala (1551-1597AD) of Kotte, pictorial image of King Wimaladharmasooriya 1(1591-1604AD) and his nephew King Rajasimha11(1635-1687AD), Kirthi Sri Rajsimha (1747-1782AD) and King Sri Wickrama Rajasimha’s (1798-1815AD) full relief sculpture of dressed bodies were identified and analyzed according to their dresses as trouser (pantaloons) coat (*cabaya*), jacket (*hettaya*) short jacket with collar (*manthe hettaya*) and articles of clothing (items) such as attached collar(*tippet*).

The conceptual framework of the study is based on the qualitative research method. A sequence of in-depth observational studies was carried out. The literature review employed original documents, manuscripts, chronicles and records of foreign travellers. By triangulating data the validity was confirmed.

Results and Discussion



Figure 1. The King Buwanekabahu VII of Kotte at the royal platform.

Casket inv.no.1241 ivory- right end of the gable, Munich Treasury in Germany.

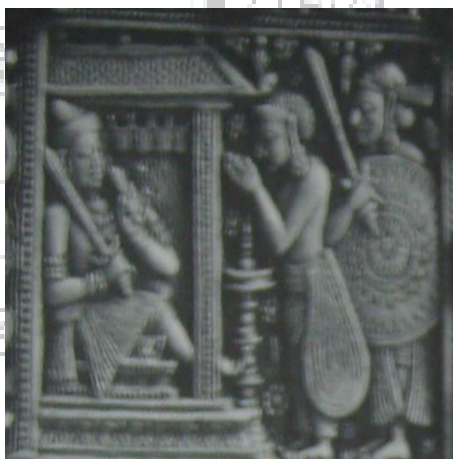


Figure 2. The is King receiving a visitor in the King’s audience hall.



Casket inv.no.1241 ivory- right end of the gable, Munich Treasury in Germany.

Ivory Casket inv.no1241, rear view bottom right, At Munich treasury, Germany.



Figure 3. The King is participating in a ritual.

Ivory Casket inv.no1241, rear view bottom right, At Munich treasury, Germany



Figure5. Prince Dharmapala was crowned as a Portuguese King. Ivory Casket inv.no1241, rear view bottom right, At Munich treasury, Germany



Figure 4. Prince Dharmapala at the coronation ceremony.

Analysis Fashion function in the society: the dress fashion brought interesting dress compositions

The King Buwanekabahu V11 (1521-1555AD) of Fig.1 indicates the royal platform *Chitakuta Mandape* at the palace of Kotte. He wore sixty four royal ornaments, a long wrap cloth and is wearing the multi tiered crown, holding a lotus flower, one of the five emblems of the Lord Buddha. The King is receiving a visitor in his audience hall by wearing a head-dress instead of a crown with limited upper body jewelry shows in the fig. 2. The King is participating



in a ritual ceremony depicted in fig. 3 in front of the god Shiva. The King wore a different type of dress.

The process of appearance: a new dress fashion brought interesting dress compositions and elaborated the taste of fashion.

According to Gregory Stone (1965) appearance is defined as a phase of a social transaction where it identifies people interacting initially when it is established. Further he identified two concepts that are relevant to the process of appearance. Programs involve responses made about the wearer by the wearer. Reviews mean that on the other hand, responses are made about the wearer by others. Prince Dharmapala shown in fig. 4 indicates that he wears a long coat over a long piece of cloth after he was coronated in Lisbon and is shown as a Portuguese King. His (long coat+ long wrap cloth) is a new dress and resembles and obeys the Portuguese Crown. The Franciscan historian Civezza has made a following statement about the King of Ceylon and his attributes. He stated 'that the king showed himself sincerely inclined to embrace Catholicism, and in the meantime he permitted a cousin of his to receive baptism. This cousin went to Portugal and returning thence died at Goa and was buried in the church of the Franciscan convent. Afterwards Perera Pandar himself wished to be instructed and baptized. He was baptized and always showed himself a true model of a Christian king.

Religion and education

It is noticed that most of the early Kings of the Kandyan era were educated under the Portuguese Franciscans and baptized. King Wimaladharmasooriya I (1591-1604) Fig.5 was known as *Konappu Bandara* who was grown and educated under Franciscans by

the name of Dom Joao de Austria Mudaliyar. He embraced Buddhism and became the King of the Kandyan Kingdom, as it was an important qualification for the kingship. During Spilbergen's visit to Ceylon an eye witness gives his observations as "the King arranged lodging for Spilbergen not in the Sinhala but the Portuguese fashion (Paranavithana, 1997). Further he stated (1997) that the King's great hall decorated with beautiful tapestry and occupied with many Spanish chairs and tables was arranged in a Christian manner. The royal family always dressed in Portuguese fashion. However, when they went in front of their people, followed Sinhala dress fashions.

King Rajasinghe II's (1635-1687) dress habits also show how he changed his mind with the impact of the environment in which he had grown up. Knox (1966) says, 'he was not wont to keep to one fashion, but changes as his fancy leads him'. Furthermore he stated that 'his apparel is very strange and wonderful, not after his own country fashion, or any other, being made after his own invention'. A foreign traveller Christopher Schweitzer (1999) said that (1676AD) his shirt and waistcoat is made of the finest cotton, with gold and he wears a garment of coloured silk. The King was the culminating point of the pyramid in society and represented the state and the center of political life. The concept of King is distinguished by the term *Maharaja* (Great king) or *Rajadhiraja* (Ruler of the King) *Mahipathi* (Lord of the earth) and *Deva* (god). The title corresponds to 'Our Majesty'. Culture built certain stereotypes for the King as a living god that affected the cognition of people in society. The representation of the god in sculpture or in

paintings therefore could be hypothesized as the representation of a King. Because the artists of the period had no imagination of



how such a god should be represented, they saw the live model of the King who was considered the Lord of the earth. The King used 64 royal ornaments which signified royalty had to wear at his consecration and at important state occasions. He used fine white silk cloth for the lower dress and shawls for head covering. It was because of the culturally built social code regarding silk and fine cotton that people identified royalty or luxurious sophistication. Colour became the signified purity according to tradition. The pictorial references given below show that the King dressed differently according to the day and the place where he represented himself. It is noticed that most of the early Kings of the Kandyan era were educated under Portuguese Franciscans and baptized by them. King Wimaladharmasooriya I (1591-1604) was known as Konappu Bandara who was grown and educated under Franciscans by the name of Dom Joao de Austria Mudaliyar. He embraced Buddhism and became the King of the Kandyan Kingdom, as it was an important qualification for the kingship. The son of King Senarath (1604-1635) King Rajasinghe 11's (1635-1687) dress habits also show how he changed his mind with the impact of the environment he had grown up. Knox says, 'he was not wont to keep to one fashion, but changes as his fancy leads him'. King Wimaladharmasooriya I introduced the *Kameesa hettaya* or *Juan hettaya* with a tippet (collar) while Prince Dharmapala first introduced the *cabaya*. King Wimaladharmasooriya I wore the *thuppotti* for the lower dress. King Rajasinghe 11 wore a long-sleeved jacket with long breeches. The Kings dressed differently and represented from the Anuradhapura period, middle and later periods of Kotte and the early and latter part of the Kandy period. Historical evidences show that these stereotypes of King's images were built by the culture to which they belonged. Kaiser (1998) states that 'moreover fashion and

social change as well as the sender's creativity in appearance management lead to a variety of appearances for which perceivers may not have already formulated a cognitive structure'. Cognitive structures need to be used flexibly to meet the demands of everyday appearances and occurrences. It is apparent that pre-established cognitive structures of the receivers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have changed due to the conversion of Sinhala Buddhist Kings to Christianity and so embraced western dress fashions. (Except Kirithi Sri Rajsimha and Sri Wickrama Rajasimha, who were Tamil by birth and converted to Buddhism, but followed fashions of their predecessors). After that the dress and dress signs changed mainly in the dresses of the Kings. Furthermore an unexpected appearance is likely to be stimulating and cause perceivers to contemplate an issue at hand and therefore, possibly to change their attitude about that issue. Further he stated that the new dress forms introduced novel appearance stimuli that are basic to fashion change.

Conclusion

The study revealed that through the course of social interactions individuals may reevaluate their own appearances and retain that information for future appearance management. That is for the development of new programs. As individuals interact with one another they define to themselves the identities of themselves as well as the others with whom they are interacting.

Thus, appearances of individuals cannot be separated from social contexts and even with fashion change and changes in personal situations, the programs people initiate are likely, to take into account past reviews of their own and others clothes. Identities tend to be constructed, revised and reconstructed



in social transactions. The basis for these identities however may be linked to one of two processes. Identities may be ascribed as it was assigned by society. Achieved identities create their own. These theories introduce and enhance basic theoretical approaches in the present academia of fashion studies.

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