

## **A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO ANALYSE THE CONCEPT OF ‘HAUTE COUTURE’ FASHION OF ELITE MALE OF THE KANDYAN ERA OF SRI LANKA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Couture is simply the French word for fine, custom dress design, made to measure for a particular customer (Frings, 2002, 174p). Haute Couture (the most exclusive couture) is reserved for the best design and highest quality of fabric and workmanship. Couture is considered as the flagship of fashion marketing in the world. Consumers of such couture are from the wealthy elite class of society. Therefore couture is regarded as offering the opportunity for the purest form of creativity in Fashion providing the research and development for fashion industry (Frings, 2002,174,175 p). Apparel industry of Sri Lanka makes a massive contribution to her economy. As the industry is largely compromised of ready-made garment productions, Haute Couture, the essential component deserves a careful and comprehensive study in the context of Sri Lanka. Derived philosophies could be wielded in modern perspective.

**KEYWORDS:** Costume as an Emblem of Dignity, Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, Costume of the Elite Male, Haute Couture, Hybrid Formation of Foreign Influences

### **INTRODUCTION**

The objective of this research paper is to analyse the concept of couture fashion of elite male of the Kandyan era of Sri Lanka. The selected study setting of the research is the Kandyan era of Sri Lanka (16<sup>th</sup> Century AD to 1815) where a large number of aristocratic hierarchies were established. Elites were influenced by Western and Eastern foreign dress influences during the reign. Foreign influences were subjected to create an exquisite costume of elite. The Kandyan era was a transitional era of the traditional dress which conveyed new meaning through dress, due to many foreign influences spread over the Kingdom. Traditional values and norms of the dress and beauty transferred in order to. The dress was developed with a specific meaning. The costume conveyed to the society the message of the dignity of states. Ultimately the message became pivotal; task orientation has been emerged. Therefore Kandyan elites costume has been worn by Sri Lankan people as a ceremonial dress since then. Kandyan elite dress is remarkably noteworthy with very significant signs of elite fashion in order to identify the couture fashion behaviour in the context of Sri Lanka. The Study is a guide to current designers specially with reference to Haute Couture as fashion scholar Breward (2003, 25p) remarks that designers expertise lies in the masterly juxtaposing of existing elements and the ability to flatter and anticipate the taste of their elite client.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Historical details about the Kandyan dress are well documented visually more than in earlier administrative eras. As well as, there are plenty of visual records to study the background of the costume of the elite in 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.

The focus of the research is to analyse the concept of fashion attitudes of elites of the Kandya era of Sri Lanka. Therefore the methodology of the research should be articulated towards development of concepts. “Grounded theory methodology” well accomplishes the target goal and was selected to the research. It is a systematic data analyzing process. It consists of memoing, coding, concept mapping to discover patterns of concepts. Grounded theory study begins with observational study of original agent of influence on the costume of elites. Then direct and indirect reasons for adopting particular fashion were identified with reference to scholars’ analysis of the subject. Influences forces and influences patterns were studied. Reliability of the data which was incorporated for the research was of much concerned. The pictorial data such as temple paintings was cross checked with different literary sources and the particular literature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- **The Inheritance**

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. At the beginning South Indian features were gradually descended from Gampola Kingdom. Portuguese colonial occupation was inspired almost of 130 years. Then next the Dutch lasted for 163 years and British for 33 years. South Indian dominant cultural feature were fast and strongly assimilated into the community because of the 76 years of residence Nayakkar influences. As a result of colonial occupational inspiration by 16<sup>th</sup> century onward the native culture fast embraced Western cultural values. These influences has caused huge impact on dress of the royalty and elite in every aspect like novel dress items and patterns, silhouette, accessories, headdress, dress materials, colours and even methodology of wearing had been differentiated.

Kandyan elites’ were powerful distinguish group who were drawn from a few families of high caste at the Kings service and who possessed wealth and wielded power (Dewaraja 1988). Their extensive luxurious costume signified their dignity, power and high social standard. The elite male costume was known as the costume of high status. The costume was worn at the royal court and ceremonial occasions such as New Year festival, annual procession, annual show at the King’s court where the high status was displayed. During the Kandyan era it was strictly prohibited to imitate royal and elite etiquettes by other civilians. Usage of gold, wearing Jackets, hats, swords were only for royalties but those privileges had given to elites with some limits (Coomaraswamy 1959, 34). Scholar Lorna Dewaraja who studied the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka explains that on examining their family history it is seen that many of them were aristocratic birth whose family had severed Kandyan royalty for a long period (Dewaraja, 1988, 74p). Kandyan elites had direct correlation with the royal line. The secondary wives of the King were always selected from this nobility. A connection with royalty would certainly have added to the prestige of any noble family. Dewaraja states (1988,61p) that Keeravalle family of the four divisions supplied spouses to the royal family of Kandy. Such children of secondary wives were known as Bandaravaliya were given lands and titles eventually they became more powerful during the reign (Dewaraja 1988, 38p). Lawries (1898, vol 1,199p) who was the district judge of Kandy in 1873 states that Ehelepola family was one of the greatest of the Kandyan aristocracy. According to Lawrie’s voluminous compilations some elite families were Dunuvila, Mampitiya, Aluvihare, Monaravila who were appointed in the Kings service. Dewaraja gives a list of titles about their nature of duty. Their titles were an Adigar (1<sup>st</sup> rank officer), three Disava(2<sup>nd</sup> rank officers) and five higher officers (3<sup>rd</sup> rank

officers) of the palace including a personal attendant of the King involved in it (Dewaraja 1988, 78p). The list of officers of the top had considerable support to the administration of the reign. Mosca (1939, 53p) states that the elites in the society are an 'organized minority', which tends to dominate the 'unorganized masses in terms of an array of practices. Bottomore (1993,102p) suggests that These could be attributed to their superior intellectual and physical qualities possessed by nature, to inherited or acquired power, essentially in economic and political spheres.



**Figure 1: A Kandyan Chief with Tuppoti Dressa (Coomaraswamy, A. 1959. Meadival Sinhalese Art. Published by the National Museum. Sri Lanka.p.196)**

The elites were intellectual according to services they were attached to. Ehelepola was known as a stalwart supporter of the King and a veteran who had served three successive rulers (Dewaraja 1988, 78p). Mampitiya of very noble birth remained loyal to the King Narendrasimhe. Judging from the report on the Dutch embassy of 1732, Dewaraja states (1988, 79p) that he was considered as a tactful chief of considerable influence at that time. Many of them were exponents in diplomatic matters. Hulangamuve elite had gone to Madura to negotiate a matrimonial alliance in 1707 on behalf of the King. He was also sent to meet the Dutch ambassador cornelis Takel in 1721 (Dewaraja 1988, 78p). Madanvela was mentioned in connecting with the Dutch embassies of 1721 and 1731. Elites were also well educated. Dewarja (1988, 95p) states that elite Lewke was an ex- Buddhist monk, well-educated and intellectual elite. It is said that novice Saranamkara learnt Pali from Lewke, who was one of the few people in Kandy who knew the language (Dewaraja 1988, 95p). According to the formalities observed, the elite of high office of the four divisions or his nominees meet the ambassadors at every stage of their annual journeys to Kandy (Dewaraja 1988, 95p). Except the letter which the governor wrote annually to the King, almost all other correspondence between the Dutch and the court passed exclusively through the hands of the high office elite and of the three and four divisions. Therefore it can be suggested that the elites were indeed exponent on problem solving and decision making in critical situations.

- **Development of the Costume of the Elite**

The evolution of the costume had not taken place in a specific time. The costume was developed, formed during the reign. Characteristics of the costume are the costume emphasized an extravagant body form, hybrid formation of Western and Eastern cultural dress features, task orientation, mixing together sewing techniques and unsewn dress arranging methods. The early form of the costume is evident even in King Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1592-1604) royal costume. At the beginning of the Kandyan Kingdom from Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1592-1604) to King Narendrasimha (1707 -1739) designs, patterns, fabrics, accessories of royal attire were more related to Western sartorial standards.

Kandyan elite's official and ceremonial dress was known as *tuppotti* dress where many cultural influences are evident. The costume is consisted of an extravagant long lower cloth and a jacket for the upper body. Standard jacket of the upper body was made by mixing together different cultural influences. 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. King of Portugal (1495-1521), Dom Manuel the Fortunate and Portuguese Captains-General, Jeronimo de Azavedo as evident in the sketch of Fergusons 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 juwan jacket, derived its name from Vimala Dharma Suriya I's baptismal name of Don Juan Wimala Dharma Suriya I (Codrington 1910,19). Consequently Senarath (1604-35), Vijayapala (1634-1654), Rajasimha II (1635-87) to Narendra Simha (1707-39) wore jackets like Portuguese. It is different from the traditional royal dress code of King Bhuvanekabahu IV (1341-1351) who ruled at Gampola. The King of Gamopla wore a lower garment of well adorned and arranged by a long piece of cloth and bare upper body (Schroeder 1990,438). Elite wore rudimentary form of Kings costume. During the Kandyan era it was strictly prohibited to imitate royal dress by other civilians. Usage of Gold, wearing jacket, hats, sword were only for royalties but those privileges had given to elites with some limits (Coomaraswamy 1959 34p). When the King is depicted with his attendance in murals, the Kings' jacket is shown with three pieces collar and elites with two pieces collar. The royalty is depicted with long sleeved jackets while elites are with short sleeved jackets. Therefore it can be suggested that personalities of superior status influenced the Sinhalese elite.

State hat was an important accessory which essentially worn with the state dress. Many types of hats were worn with the dress. Those were known as red tunic hat, white round hat, hat named *jagalath*, four cornered hat and eight cornered hat. Designs, silhouette, fabric, colour and even names of the hats would have been exerted considerable foreign influences. According to Robert Knox sketch a noble man of king Rajasimha II's reign wore a conical shaped hat which might have been the red tunic cap as Knox mentioned (Knox 1966,129p). Knox (1966,129) says that this is a country cap which two flaps tied up over the top of the crown. Coomaraswamy (1959,239) suggests that this could be the *ispayya* hat as mentioned by Robert Knox. He (Coomaraswamy 1959, 333) describes that *Ispayya* hat is an embroidered cap, with quilted flaps, worked with coloured silk. Codrington (1910,34) also agrees with Coomaraswamy and further he includes that *ispaiya* means 'head-bag'. The name and the shape of the hat resemble foreign influences. Codrington (1910,26) claims that early Kandyan hat is not unlike the *barret* caps of the early Portuguese period. Conical hats were continued until the reign of King Narendrasimha. Heyt states that officers of King Narendrasimha's reign wore red conical caps, with the bottom turned up all round (Codrington,1910,17). Coomaraswamy (1959,34) claims that these caps were no longer worn, and they were already out of fashion in the eighteenth century. In the time of King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha's reign a new form of hat could be seen in state officers' dress. The hat was known as white round hat by Codrington (1910,17). In Madawala temple murals Molligoda elite is depicted with such hat. Codrington (1910,17) cites that 'tradition says that this round white hat was introduced in this reign. The most popular state hat was square, red in colour, embroidered and surmounted by a flowery tree. Coomaraswamy remarks that chieftains and palace officers wore a four cornered hat with a tussle instead of flowery tree. He states that flowery tree was reserved to royalty, however nowadays the etiquette is not strictly observed, and Kandyan chiefs generally wear the flowery tree and other parts of the royal costume. Codrington

(1910,22) confirms the idea stating that flowery tree which stands upright on the hat appears to have come into use suddenly after 1833. Hat named *Jgalath* is another variety of state hat; a well conserved hat is displayed at the Museum of Kandy. Codrington (1910, 26) suggests that the hat was possibly introduced to Kandyan chiefs during the reign of Vijaya Raja Sinha, the first monarch of the Tamil dynasty. Codrington (1910, 34) states that the word of *jagalath* is derived from a Tamil term of *sakalattu* which gives the meaning of 'thick bright-red cloth'.

Tuppotti dress has an extravagant body silhouette. Tuppotti dress was introduced to the Kandyan kingdom with the religious association happened between the Kandyan Kingdom and Siam (Pieris 2003, 114p). The dress was introduced with the customs of the higher- ordination renewals. The main dress form was inspired by Javanese royal court dress since the higher- ordination (Uppasampada) tradition had been renewed under Siam patronage during the Kandyan Kingdom (Mudiyanse (1971-1974) p.26.) For higher- ordination customs a new royal dress was introduced. In order to Siamese tradition, royal regalia and tuppotti with white loose trouser are worn by the apprentice as depicted in the sketches and photographs of the museum of Malwaththa temple, Kandy. The method of wearing of elite costume is also gradually developed through the Kandyan period. The method of wearing has resulted an extravagant body form which derived a meaning of high status. The tuppotti is consisted of three clothes. Each is long 12 cubits. Occasionally tuppotti is made by attaching two 6 cubits pieces together. During the Dutch occupational era, they especially brought fine textiles to Kandyan elites and for the royal family from Surat and Bengol (Dewaraja 1988,102) A variety of tuppotti cloths were associated with elite costume. It was recorded that elite of Sabaragamuwa division has given variety of tuppotti cloths to the Kandyan government as annual tribute pay and many of them were worn on ceremonial occasions (Pieris 1956,131-132). A British writer of the early nineteenth century Davy (1921, 114) also explains that even the quantity of cloths wrapped round their waist is of extraordinary size, which is considered as an emblem of dignity. A young German mercenary, Christopher Schwcitzer (1676 A.D) who served for the Dutch East India Company records about early local chieftains' dress a dignity as 'They wear piece of linen about their middle, from the navel down to their knees but they make a very great distinction of their apparel, according to their dignity and quality (Hulugalla 1999, 140) During the reign of King Rajanimha II high rank officers wore a more developed version of tupottiya dress. According Robert Knox's (1966, 171p) records elite wore white tupottiya dress including bravely engraved short dagger which was carved out silver and a painted cane. In the time of Kirthi Sri Rajasimha (17047-1782) mural of the Madawala temple represents a chief who wears white muslin pleated jacket with short sleeves, buttoned up the front, tuppotti cloth and belt.

- **Analysis of the Costume of the Elite – The Costume Donates the Meaning of High States**

Elite had the sense of signs denoted by their dress. Costume 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. The importance of costume as an item of communication can be assessed by the amount of money spends on costumes. Elite of the Kandyan era spent a considerable amount of money for costumes. Peris (1956, 282) explores that during the last phase of the Kandyan Kingdom which was Nayakkar dynasty; 'hetti' street was separated for Indian textile traders who brought Indian textiles specially for Royalty and elite usage. Textiles were woven by South Indian weavers (Coomaraswamy 1959, 232p). Fabrics –brocade, satin and velvet were imported from India or Indonesia. Lewke elite wished to have some particular silk from South India. It was recorded that Van Golle took great effort to supply lace for elite Lewke and also rubies for elite Ahelapola (Dewaraja, 1988 102p).That was an extravagant effort for effective communication through dress. The elite

preferred gold and silver accessories and luxurious imported fabrics such as brocade of gold and silver. There is subtle description on Lanarolle's formal dress appearance that on the occasion of the formal ceremony as "he was invested with cap of state embroidered with gold rings and chains"(Hulugalla 1999,133). Brocade can be seen only in elite and royal family. This was also an imported textile material from Batavia (Indonesia). Brocade can be seen only in Gold and Silver colour. Maxwell R (2003,72) says that every wear, past and present, In Asia, and in Europe Gold evokes similar responses and signals clear messages: the owner controls great wealth and power, and he or she possesses objects of enormous value. Moreover he (2003,25) expresses about the meaning and function of Brocade as, Silk and Gold textiles in Indic court were not just preferred fabric for state ceremonials. They provided a means of visualizing the complex status systems that supported court ritual. Thus the formal relationship subjects to the ruler and his recognition and patronage'.

From head gear to foot wear it was a combination of different cultural attainments. Codrington (1910) explores an interesting discovery of Kandyan elites dress items. He investigates each and every item of their full costume. He (Codrington 1910, 22) forms that flowery tree which stands upright on the hat appears to have come into use suddenly after 1833. According to Knox's (1966) descriptive sketches of elite costume, the early elites wore conical hat instead of four cornered hat which was essentially worn by later elites. According to Codrington's collection, the full elite costume consisted of 12 items and most of them definitely appeared after later time. He explains that the trousers extended up to the ankle; in later times it had frills at the bottom. Western influences were more prominent in the costume of the elite during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. More South Indian style designs and motifs are visible by 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Kandyan decorative motifs and design elements were widely used in decorating elite dresses, jewellery and accessory. A variety of jewellery items came to use during the Kandyan era. The greatest exponent of the traditional philosophy of art Coomaraswamy (1959) in his 'Medieval Sinhalese Art' describes many south Indian origin craftsmanship, craftsmen and jewellery names were popular during the Kandyan era. Aristocrats also gave high value to traditional art and craft. They were lavish patriots. Lewke was liked by the Dutch as he had interests of his religion and country at heart (Dewaraja 1988, 95p). Trim works – designs, materials and colours were Indian concepts. Traditional costume designer who lives in the Kandyna territory describes that Sada-poorni, chamak -poorni such Indian names are still using in recognising trim works of the elite jacket (Jayarathne, 2010). Over a period of time a variety of cultural element entered the costume, to gradually enhance the costume. Therefore it is obvious that when the culture changed norms and values of the costume of the elite also changed consequently. Social psychologist Kaiser (1997, 497p) states that once fashion changes, it is established as an institution within a cultural context and the norms supporting fashion change. They neither obeyed Western constructed dresses nor Eastern draperies but made their own original exotic one by mixing all dress types. Western and Eastern mixed hybrid dress was the epitome of their fashion attitude. It can be suggested that their tastes was being enhanced with many cultures influences. Bourdieu, (1984) claims that taste is culturally patterned. Kandyan elite attire was developed and modified as a hybrid dress of Western and Eastern cultural influences which occurred over a period of time. Sociologist Bourdieu (1984, 1p) states that taste is legitimate culture as a gift of nature. Further he (1984, 99p) remarks that taste is the sense of faculty of immediately and intuitively judging aesthetic values. Wickramasinghe (2003, 58p) also states that 'consumerism even in its early incarnation democratized fashion but fashion was not always synonymous with Western dress'. Further she points out that Bourdieu to Gill Liptevsky describe it as a paradigm of modernity.

Elites were heavily influenced by royalty and high office foreigners with whom they were more associated. Elite wore "tuppotti" by observing the King's same long lower garment according to observational learning theory. They wore simple version of "tuppotti" using few numbers of cloths. King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha and Sri Vicrkama Rajasimga used

handkerchiefs. Kandyan chief officers were depicted with handkerchiefs in ivory figures at the Museum in Kandy. Coomaraswamy (1959, 34) too remarks that 'elites generally bored holes in their ears, and hung weights in them to make them grow long, like the 'Malabars', but this king not boring his, that fashion almost left off'. Social pressure is reflected in the dress of the Kandyan elites. The dress was unique to their group. The dress is the dignity of the states. Kandyan nobles were Sinhala speaking, Buddhist, sons of the soil and traditional leaders of the people (Dewaraja 1985/86, 127). They were stick into the group and hardly escape through. They had constant contest between royalties for the throne (Lankananda 1996, Verse 428). Lorna (1988, 60) suggests that the elite preserved its status by frequent intermarriages within its own ranks. Robert Knox (Knox 1966, 106) says that thus by marrying constantly each rank within itself, the descent and dignity thereof is preserved forever. Lorna (1988, 66) suggests that birth, office, wealth and military authority combined with a specific style of living and conspicuous status symbols made the elite a socially privileged group. D'Oyly' (1975,6) states that 'the elite also had a right to certain exclusive items of dress, which they jealously guarded against infringement. Sociologist Bourdieu (1984, 372p) sates that class habitus is normally (with a high statistical probability) associated with its position. With their inheritance, education and intellectuality they perceived fashion. Their extensive luxurious costume signifies their dignity, power and high social standard. The clothes they wore and the colour and style of their headgear too revealed their higher status in society. At this point semiotic aspect was more matter than utility. Therefore elite wore costumes to communicate rather than practical usefulness.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

The Kandyan era proved that elite costume never stayed in their original forms. The Kandyan dress was an amazing blend of Eastern and Western sartorial flavour. Costume was a means of communication of the social standing and status of a person during the Kandyan Kingdom. This communication may include the necessity of an individual to reflect his culture, wealth, desires, ambitions and personal power and to give some special messages to another group of people or an individual.

The amount of money spends on costume reflects the effective communication of high states through dress. Expensive, rare, luxurious imported textiles Gold, Silver and precious stones were used for their costume. Art and crafts were played a pivotal role in decorating their costume. Traditional design motifs were used in wide variety of methods and techniques of embellishments of embroidery, hand painting, weaving, crafting, sequinning, studding and embedding of jewellery.

The dress is a hybrid formation of different cultural element. The Kandyan era proved that foreign elements never stayed in their original forms. Foreign elements were changed, modified in the course of the time. Message of communication was more important. Extravagant body silhouette, precious accessories, colour and material are the emblem of dignity of high states. As a fashion concept Houte Couture fashion of elite of the Kandyan Kingodm of Sri Lanka was novel, ideal and did not obey to any rule and changed by itself.

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