

Influence of Foreign Culture and Hybrid Culture: The Case of Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka

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and Hybrid
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Abstract Culture has played a pivotal role in fashion from time immemorial. The objective of this research is to explore the power of cultural affiliation in fashion. The selected study setting is the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka. The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka lasted almost 3 ½ centuries from 1474- 1815. The whole period faced different foreign cultural forces. As a result of such diverse cultural influences the Kandyan dress showed a hybrid formation of Western and South Indian and Sinhalese traditional sartorial features. Sewing techniques and unsewn dress arrangement methods were mixed together. The dress became an amazing blend of Eastern and Western dress items. They combined different aspects of foreign dress together to yield a unique result. The analysis comprises observational study of actual descriptions made by observer- participants, historical records, murals of the period review of ancient literature and research papers relevant to the subject. Reliability of the data was ensured. The pictorial data were cross checked from different literary sources. Many original sources were used. Results: Culture and fashion have strong interconnection. When features of culture change, trends of fashion are gradually correspondingly changed.

Key words Foreign influences, Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka, Culture, Hybrid Fashion

Introduction

Culture has the ability to exert much influence. If the contents of a culture change there is a possibility of exerting influence on that culture. The Kandyan Kingdom lasted from the 15th century to 1815 until the British captured it. Compared to other ancient administrative eras the whole period of the Kandyan Kingdom faced different cultural forces. At its beginning South Indian features gradually descended from the Gampola Kingdom. The Portuguese colonial occupation exerted an influence of almost of 130 years. Next the Dutch occupation lasted for 163 years and the British for 33 years. South Indian dominant cultural features were quickly and strongly assimilated into the community because of the 76 years of resident Nayakkar influences. As a result of colonial occupational inspiration from the 16th century onward the natives soon embraced Western cultural values. The latter part of the Kingdom was ruled by South

Indian Nayakkar Kings. This situation opened the door to Tamil social and cultural influences. They brought their own cultural habits from the same reign.

The pattern of culture is similar wherever it exists. Culture is in the words of Tylor (as cited in Horton & Hunt, 1964) expressed, "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 51). Therefore culture can be assumed as a continuous chain which is nourished by human thoughts and experiences from time to time.

The Kandyan Kingdom had twelve Kings. Senasammata Vikramabahu 1469-1511, Jayavira 1511-1552, Karaliyadde Bandara 1552-1582, Vimala Dharma Suriya I 1591-1604, Senarat 1604-1635, Rajasimha II 1635-1687, Vimala Dharma Suriya II 1687-1707, Narendrasimha 1707-1739, Sri Vijaya Rajasimha 1739-1747, Kirti Sri Rajasimha 1747-782, Rajadhirajasimha 1782-1798, Sri Vikrama Rajasimha 1798-1815 who was the last King of the Kingdom. The Kings belonged to different religions and cultures. In Kandyan culture it is obvious that certain political phases, religious subversions, geographical location, economic changes caused differences in its culture. Also these situations added new social customs to the society. To understand the effect of foreign influences on Kandyan culture it is necessary to understand the main construction of Kandyan culture. The Kandyan culture stands upon mutual interrelations of state and religion. Dewaraja (1988) stated, "The relationship between the King and the priests had always been one of mutual interdependence. The King defended the faith and the faith legitimized the King" (p. 165). In Kandyan society the King was the head of civil institutions. Sovereignty was considered as divine. This foreign influence was first received by the royalty readily, then it trickled down to aristocrats and then to commoners. When a reliable person introduced any new etiquette the traditional values and norms were also modified and it was accepted by the rest. Therefore the royalty had the power of exerting much influence.

Research Methodology

The Kandyan era possesses well documented history as visual and written facts. Plenty of resources are available for studying the background of this setting such as living evidences, documented information, murals, and inscriptions. Therefore the Kandyan era has proved to be the most suitable to understand the influence acceptance and change in fashion. The research was carried out by studying wall paintings, sketches of foreign diplomats, statues, inscriptions of the period and reviewing ancient literature and research papers relevant to the subject. Information was gathered and analyzed in a way that different cultural fashions could be identified. Reliability of the data which was incorporated for the research was of much concern. The pictorial data such as temple paintings was cross checked with different literary sources and the particular literature.

Major Foreign Influences

Portuguese Influences

The Portuguese were the first European nation that was able to build a solid economy, naval, military and administration in the East for the first time. Therefore even their dress became a symbol of power. Many historical records provide evidence that all the Kings gave full attention to maintain good alliances with foreigners, even to the Portuguese, Dutch or British. The royalty constantly followed the usual procedure of sending valuable gifts, gave attention to foreigners, converted to Christianity and in the mean time they wore the Western dress. However, as the dress is a powerful signifier, it uplifted and struck better than other strategies adopted by royalty. It is obvious that Westerners who were richly clad in exquisite dresses were definitely subjected to thorough observation by the natives. Except the King of Portugal nineteen Portuguese captain generals visited Sri Lanka during the 15th Century A.D (De Silva, 2005, p. 743).

The people who were brought up by the Portuguese were instrumental in bringing about a real change. The royalty and elite who grew up under Portuguese protection embraced all the influences of the Portuguese and then took over the Kandyan throne (Perera, 1930, p. 483). Most of the early royalty of the Kandyan Kingdom from their childhood grew up under Portuguese protection. When Karalliyadde Bandara 1552-82 (Father of Queen Dona Catherine), was expelled to Mannar by King Mayadunne of Sitawaka 1521-81, Karalliyadde Bandara and his two children accepted the Catholic faith expecting political protection from the Portuguese (Lankananda, 1996, p. 73, p. 76). They had considerable Portuguese cultural influences.

According to literary descriptions and rare sketches Portuguese dress items can be identified as caps, coat, *kastane* sword (ceremonial sword), *kamesa* (shirt) and breeches which were the mostly influenced dress items. Two important Portuguese dress items are described as “*Cabaya* (long coat) and *barr-ette* (cap)” (Da Silva, 1967, p. 48). De Silva and Wijethunge (1998) stated, “The Sinhala term of *kalisama*/trouser was derived from the Portuguese word of *calcao*”(p. 8).

Siamese Influences

During the 18th Century a new dress was introduced to royalty by Siamese deputation. A new cultural impact influenced the dress of Sinhalese Kings at this time with the higher- ordination introduced from Siam. At the higher-ordination *tuppotti* (body cloth) with white pantaloons and many accessories are worn by the apprentice. Not only that, because of the frequent visits and contacts with Siam Sri Lankan Kings gifted many luxurious textiles and other accessories. Through the envoy of Vimala Dharma Suriya II to Siam twenty cloths embroidered with gold, twenty silk cloths, and various other articles were sent to the Sri Lankan King (Pieris, 1945, p. 103). The Sri Lankan Kings gradually got accustomed to embroidered cloths with gold threads and dazzling gems in Siamese tradition.

South Indian Influences

During the 16th Century the existing Sinhalese Buddhist tradition blended thoroughly with South Indian Culture. The elementary reason was, King Narendrasimha the last Sinhalese King by blood had several matrimonial alliances with South Indian princesses (Dewaraja, 1988, pp. 38–45). The era of Nayakkar Kings marks an important historical phase in South Indian dress inspirations. A series of royal marriages with South Indian families had created quite a colony in Kandy of Nayakkar relatives of the King towards the middle of the eighteenth century (Dewaraja, 1988, p. 43). This situation opened the door to Tamil social and cultural influences. They brought their own cultural habits to the same reign. Their language, their customs and manners, beliefs and practices as dress and the way of life closely resembled those of South Indian families (Shastri, 1955, pp. 302-304).

The dress of the Nayakkar Kings was a hybrid formation of Nayakkar, Siamese and Western sartorial styles. All the Kings wore a jacket for the upper body and long trousers for the lower body. They used to wear pantaloons as the main foundation lower garment that was a characteristic royal style. In the statue of King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha in the *Dambulla* Temple the royal attire is well depicted.

Nayakkar Kings needed social acceptance for smooth leading of the reign as they were of foreign origin. Dewaraja (1988) stated, “Nayakkars in contrast displayed an intense devotion to the faith and became lavish benefactors of the priest” (p. 163). Their aim undoubtedly was to stabilize their position amidst the powerful nobility by gaining popularity with the priests and thereby with the people. They had constant contradictions with the powerful native elite who regularly tried to gain the throne. Therefore Nayakkar Kings were very strategic. They imitated King Rajasimhe II who achieved immense civil power during his reign. They adopted the name Rajasimhe to their name to signify the great Sinhalese warrior King Rajasimhe II. A powerful character was always subjected to thorough observation.

Besides, they were fully influenced by contemporary trends as well. King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha was influenced by the newly introduced Siamese higher-ordination etiquette. His regalia consisted of a number of chains. The central one had a large pendant hanging from a row of chains winding down from the hip. The ornaments that are shown are of different proportions. The longest chain comes to knee level. Unlike other Kings, King Sri Vikrama Rajasimha carries a handkerchief and wears a pair of sandals that are unique to his fashion. This etiquette might have been adapted from the Dutch. He also carried a beautifully carved staff with studded gemstones as did the Portuguese captain generals of the 16th Century.

Foreign Influenced Dress in Different Social Strata

King's Dress

The Kandyan King's costume was heavily influenced by Western dress items. The earliest influences on the attire of Kings is provided by King Vimala Dharma Suriya I. Konnappu Bandara (baptismal name was D. Joao and he had later taken the name of Vimala Dharma Suriya I) was educated and instructed by the Portuguese (Don Peter, 1983, pp. 143–144). Therefore Vimala Dharma Suriya I showed more

Western oriented dress styles than the ancestors of the Kandyan Kingdom. The King wore a jacket for upper body as seen in figure 1. It is possible that King Vimala Dharma Suriya I introduced the long sleeved jacket which may have been adapted from the Portuguese. There is some basis for this hypothesis because the name of the jacket as stated by Codrington (1910) *juwan hette*, (jacket of juwan) derived its name from Vimala Dharma Suriya I's baptismal name of Don Juan Wimala Dharma Suriya I (p. 19).

It is for instance completely different from the traditional royal dress code of King Bhuvanekabahu IV 1341-1351 who ruled at Gampola. The King of Gampola wore a lower garment of a well adorned long piece of cloth arranged with frills on the front and bare upper body (Schroeder, 1990, p. 438).

King Rajasimha II devoted much attention to his apparel. He had his own ideas about fashion. He was richly clad as a European gentleman as seen in figure 2. Unlike other Kings he wore shoes, stockings and trousers. The trousers draped straight from the waist up to the ankles. The trousers seem to be a loose garment. The lower ends of the trousers are tight and fastened with buttons. According to Robert Knox's description the King's desire for Western dresses is well proven,

“His apparel is very strange and wonderful, not after his own country fashion, or any other, being made after his own invention. On his head he wears a cap with four corners like a Jesuit three tiers high, and a feather standing upright before, like that in a head of a fore –



Figure 1.
King Vimala Dharma Suriya I Coomaraswamy, A. (2011). Medieval Sinhalese Art. Dehiwala: Thisara Publishers.



Figure 2.
King Rajasimha II Knox, R. (1966). Historical relation of Ceylon. Dehiwala: TissaraPrakasakayo.

horse in a team, a long band hanging down his back after the Portuguese fashion, his doublet after so strong a shape, the body of one ,and the sleeves of another colour, he wears long breeches to his ankles, shoes and stockings”(Knox, 1966, p. 62).

One of the most interesting parts of the costume is the jacket in every male and female royalty and the elite. The frilled collar also known as *mante* or *tippet* might have been worn as a detachable item (Codrington, 1910, p. 17). It developed into a dress item which showed dignity and honor. The collar was awarded by Kings to pay honor during the Kotte reign (Da Silva, 1990, p. 491). During the Kandyan era it was an essential ornament of the attire of both Kings and the elite. According to Heyt King Narendrasimha is depicted in a dark collar decorated with precious stones (Codrington, 1910, p. 17).

Even though sketches and notes of foreign travelers and administrative officers give valuable facts about the dress of the Kandyan era, murals of the era provide more details and colourful descriptions. Kings would have been interested in differently patterned sleeves, hemlines, collars and trims. According to *Gangarama, Degaldoruwa* temple paintings jacket with long sleeves, V neck shaped or round shaped neck lines would have been popular.

The crowns of Kings are a combination of Hindu and Buddhist and Western traditions. In the illustration of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I as seen in figure 1, he wore a headdress which had a trident and Buddha figure in the front. The headdress of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I seems to have been made of fabric because clear woven patterns can be seen in the headdress. And it is more like a cap. According to early records caps were an essential sartorial item of Portuguese dress. It is said that in 1498 Vasco da Gama presented fifty scarlet *barret* caps to the King of Calicut (Codrington, 1910, p. 26). In 1506 Dom Lourenco da Almeida gave six scarlet *barret* caps to one of the state officers of Ceylon (Ferguson, 1907, p. 355). Therefore Codrington(1910) suggested, “The early Kandyan hat is not unlike the *barret* caps of the early Portuguese period”(p.26). Therefore it can be suggested that the King would have worn a headdress which was arranged like the Portuguese caps. King Senerath and King Rajasimhe II were depicted with caps instead of crowns.

The lower garment known as *tuppotti* was worn by both Kings and elite males during the Kandyan reign. The width and length of this cloth is arranged according to the social status of the wearer.

Royal and Elite Female Dress

Not only royal males but also royal female were highly influenced by western dresses. Direct Portuguese influences can be seen on Queen Dona Catherine 1602-1613 in her dress habits. Royal females including the Queen, princesses and their relatives in the early 16th Century were converted to Christianity. The first Dutch admiral Jori Van Spilbergen who visited Kandy in 1602 AD reported that the Queen and her children all were dressed in the Christian manner (Paranavitana, 1997, p. 32). Lace work was an exquisite Portuguese influenced item of dress of Sinhalese ladies during the 16th century. Moreover Perera

(1922) gives some Portuguese words in connection with lace making. *Biralu* (bobbin), *Bikkuva* (in dress-making) (p. 45, p. 60).

Elite females wore a collared jacket and a lower garment. The dress is depicted in many temple paintings as at the *Hanguranketha*, *Gangarama*, *Medawala* and *Degaldoruwa* temple paintings. In the popular scenery of attending the Buddha by a retinue of royal ladies all elite females wore a short sleeved collared jacket and a long lower garment. The collared jacket was no doubt elite female inspired by the royal male collared jacket. Jacket with a long lower garment is the most depicted dress in wall paintings.



Figure 3.
The Queens of the Kandyan Kingdom. A sketch by author from paintings of Degaldoruwa.

These dress styles belonged to local queens who did not completely follow Western dress styles. The jacket was introduced at a later period. With the arrival of queen Dona Catherine the rest of the local queens tended to change their styles. It is quite visible through pictorial evidence that Sinhalese queens did not follow the same dress styles as Dona Catherine, but took some elements like collar, jacket, hair pin and lace.

The collared jacket was a newly introduced sartorial item for costume of the local Queens as mentioned earlier. It shows the direct influences of Portuguese fashion. Coomaraswamy (1905) also stated, "The female jacket shows either Portuguese or Dutch influences" (p. 20). Loose waistcoat type collared jacket, tight, body fitted, high *mandarin* collar jacket, pleated jacket with a tail like different styles of jackets are depicted in temple paintings of the era.

The last phase of the Kandyan Kingdom was heavily influenced by South Indian Nayakkar's dress

habits. Nayakkar Queens' preceded the South Indian dress style which was quite different from the existing Kandyan Queens' dresses. According to temple murals they can be seen with a canopy or kerchief (*mottakkiliya*). The whole body is fully covered by the kerchief according to social laws or religious purposes. This dress style definitely affected only one status of women as it never blended with the Sri Lankan women's dress code. In the *Degaldoruwa* temple paintings the Nayakkar female royalty is depicted in kerchief. It can be suggested that their peer pressure might have been stronger than the Sinhalese traditional requirement to be changed by Sri Lankan culture because they had enough South Indian ladies at the royal palace to keep their tradition unbroken.

The lower garment style shows positive traces of South Indian influence. The lower garment arrangement is similar to 17th century costumes of Nayak queens' and elite women's. The Indian style of lower garment called *sakaccha* style came down to their ankles (Kumari, 1995, p. 34). The goddesses and queens wore their lower garments in the same pattern. In this garment the front was arranged in a decorative style with circular- shaped ends.

Kandyan Elite Male Dress

The Kandyan elite was another powerful distinguished group completely distinct in its dress etiquettes from the Royalty. The Kandyan elite were Sinhala speaking, Buddhist, sons of the soil and traditional leaders of the people (Dewaraja, 1985, p. 127). The elite consisted of high ranking officers in the King's service. Higher administrative officers were drawn from a few families of highstatus. Dewaraja (1988) stated, "Birth, office, wealth and military authority combined with a specific style of living and conspicuous status symbols made them a socially privileged group" (p. 66). They remained within their group and hardly escaped it.

During the Kandyan era it was strictly prohibited to imitate royal dress etiquette by other civilians. Usage of gold, wearing Jackets, hats and swords was only for the royalty but these privileges had been given to the elitewithin limits (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p. 34). The elite were allowed to wear silver jewellery but only the greats had the privilege of wearing ornaments of gold (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p. 34). Western influences first affected royalty; then the influences trickled down to the elite. The elite were influenced in their costumes by observing the King. For example the elite were influenced by the collared jacket. The King wore the jacket long sleeved. However, the elite wore the collared jacket with short sleeves reflecting the social rules of the era. Complete emulation of the King was prohibited by law. Otherwise they might have copied the full costume of the King without hesitation. The dress of elite was always a rudimentary form of the original royal costumes. When the King is depicted with his attendants in paintings, the jacket of the King is shown in a three piece, collar and with the elites in two piece collars. Royalty is depicted in long sleeved jackets while the elite are shown in short sleeved jackets.

The full costume of the elite shows further multicultural influences. From head gear to foot wear it was a combination of different cultural attainments. From time to time most of the dress items were

added to the main costume and some did not have a clear meaning. Codrington (1910) elaborated an interesting interpretation of Kandyan elite dress items. He investigates each and every item of their full costume. Codrington (1910) conjectured, “Flowery tree which stands upright on the hat appears to have come into use suddenly after 1833” (p. 22). According to Knox's (1966) descriptive in sketches of elite costume, the early elite wore conical hats instead of four cornered hats which were essentially worn by later elites. During King Rajasimha II's period the elite used to wear *tuppotti* cloth without trousers underneath. According to Codrington's collection, the full elite costume consisted of twelve items and most of them definitely appeared in later times. He (Codrington, 1910) explained, “The trousers extended up to the ankles; in later times it had frills at the bottom”. Furthermore he suggested, “The sword might be of Dutch make, and the silver hilt and the scabbard of red velvet were of Indian workmanship”. The method of wearing of the elite costume also gradually developed through the Kandyan period. The method of wearing resulted in an extravagant body form which derived the meaning of high status.



Figure 4
A Kandyan chief with *tuppotiya* (Coomaraswamy, 2011).

The elite were very sensitive of royal dress etiquette. They always tried to imitate the King. A Dutch officer (as cited in Dewaraja, 1988) recorded, “As royalties desired to have luxurious caparisons from abroad, natives also did. The high officer Lewke wished to have some particular silk from South India and hence Van Golle took pains to supply lace *kanten* for Lewke (*kanten* in Dutch means cap or neck chiefs) and also rubies for Ehelapola” (p. 102).

The main dress form was inspired by the Javanese royal court dress since the higher-ordination tradition had been renewed under Siamese patronage during the Kandyan Kingdom. Similarly the elite wore *tuppotti* by observing the long lower garment of the King although many other factors such as prevailing rules and available resources impeded them. However, they wore a simple version of *tuppotti* using a fewer number of cloths. King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha and Sri Vicrkama Rajasinga used handkerchiefs. Kandyan chief officers are depicted with handkerchiefs in ivory figures at the Museum in Kandy. Coomaraswamy (1956) too remarked, "Elite generally bored holes in their ears, and hung weights in them to make them grow long, like the *Malabars*, but this king did not bore his, so that fashion almost left off" (p. 34).

Same as the royalty the elites always protected their standard dress by imposing many rules to commoners as the dress represented their dignity and social class. The men of the *Navandanno* caste were required to wear their cloths below the knee, and the women the *ohoriya* or cloth thrown over the shoulder, but separate from the regular cloth (Pieris, 1956, p. 182, p. 182). D'Oyly (1975) stated, "The elite also had a right to certain exclusive items of dress, which they jealously guarded against infringement" (p. 6).

Conclusion

Kandyan society was the fruition of its cultural acquiescence, religious values, its occupational pattern, political stability and historically inherited values and practices. The Kandyan era proved that foreign elements never stayed in their original forms. The Kandyan dress was an amazing blend of Eastern and Western sartorial flavour.

Initial reasons for adopting foreign styles by royalty and elites can be identified. Some such important reasons are discussed in this research. The first is that foreign costumes were considered by locals as a symbol of their high social status. Royalty who belonged to the superior status of the society showed immense interest in Western dress habits. The eccentric taste of the Kandya royalty was the next powerful signifier for adopting foreign fashions. Education, Christian religion and culture demonstrated desire of the royalty for foreign fashions. Consequently, they were imparted a knowledge of the manners and customs of royalty in the West.

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.

However the secret underlying the survival and longevity secret of this sartorial bureaucracy could be understood as the reciprocal pressure between each social stratum. Peer pressure was clearly evident in the behavioural patterns among the Kandyan royalty and elite. One of the best examples for such peer pressure was provided by the Kandyan elite and the Nayakkar royalty. They showed individuality in their ways and customs by making a large group among Kandyans.

Kandyan traditional values and norms were so powerful that even the King could not easily escape their dominance. Some royalty completely dressed in foreign clothing. However, King Vimala Dharma Suriya I who became the first King of the Kandyan Kingdom followed Western fashions half way in order to suit the needs of the society which he represented.

It was a task oriented approach to dress as well. Dresses were worn in order to suite to different tasks. The crowns, collar, *tuppotti* were task oriented dresses.

Kandyan culture and society received a unique behavioural pattern of influence from foreign fashion. Kandyan society had the most delicate fashion history during the early administrative eras of Sri Lanka. As a fashion concept it was novel, ideal and did not obey to any rule and changed by itself.

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