

Analytical Overview On Rajputi Women Clothing From Historical Evidences

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In India, a very critical political situation has been observed after the downfall of Gupta Empire. There was a vacuum and the formation of an empire was pivoted and this ambition became the heritage of Rajputs of early medieval period. By the 17th century, Rajput's established a well-defined pattern of existence. In this time, the hopefulness of holding an authoritarian sway in whole of India gave the Brahman Hindus these warriors, the Rajput clans, as protector. Clothing style of Rajasthan from historical era can be traced from literary evidences, archaeological and visual materials. Illustrations and painted characters from manuscripts, stupas and miniature paintings are also one of the resources to collate the idea of historical Rajasthan garments. The Mughal influence can be seen in socio cultural aspects in different regions. The impact was largely visible in cuisine and clothing style. The costumes of women, which appear in Rajput miniature paintings as a fashion statement of that period, are highly embedded with design aesthetics and engineered techniques, which probably is the consequence of amalgamation of indigenous styles with immigrated traditions of different cultures.

Keywords: cross-culture, Rajput, evidences, miniature painting, manuscript, illustration, costume.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and historians have described “cultures” in different ways. According to some scholars when knowledge, believe system, art & craft, customs and other attributes and habits which a society acquire gradually over time is called culture. On the other hand, some scholars also believe that a culture can be formed through out a passage of time, when a series of factors like core values, aspiration and attitude for the future are originated together. In Rajasthan also, such attributes still exist like: music, food, vegetation, geographical phenomenon, language, traditions, cloths, art & craft etc. As Lodrick says,

“The desert, the dress of the people, are certainly elements of a specific environmental setting, cultural traditions and social structures have all played a significant role in shaping the character of modern Rajasthan (Lodrick, 2001:2).”

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In the perspective of culture of Rajputana, domicile of Rajas has been significantly patronized by its geographical location in the western corner of the country connected by land of the Middle East and Europe. It helped many invaders like Afghans, Turks, Mongols, Persians, Huns, Scythians, Yavanas and many more. As blood was mixed-in war, in peace, the culture intermingled and created a new pallet of customs, life styles, eating habits and gestures of clothing and costumes.

DISCUSSION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand origin of traditional clothing of women in Rajputana, we need to keep in mind some features and factors of the history of this state. The Rajput's, warrior clans of Rajputana, started evolving in the political part from the 7th century onwards and started acquiring distinctiveness in political measures. From the beginning of 13th century onwards Rajput's created a network by invasion and migration. To keep their military strength integrated and expand their territories they entered into matrimonial alliances with each other. Since the medieval time, the amalgamation of different cultural and social values offered Indian society a gift of tradition unique for every cast or region. The golden era -400 A.D-600 A.D, the time of "Majestic Guptas", developed a great fusion of various cross-cultural aspects which directly emerged and inclined towards another warrior clan "The Rajputs". In India, a very critical political situation has been observed after the downfall of Gupta Empire. There was a vacuum and the formation of an empire was pivoted and this ambition became the heritage of Rajputs of early medieval period. By the 17th century, Rajputs established a well-defined pattern of existence. The rise of Mughal Empire became the evidence of blood and violence and the impact had been felt throughout the Indian society. In this time, the hopefulness of holding an authoritarian sway in whole of India gave the Brahman Hindus these warriors, the Rajput clans, as protector. The Rajputs became the victors of the society.

RAJPUTANA AND ITS CULTURE

The composition of the Rajput society was graded with different clans and castes. The Rajput Society was composed of a number of clans, and graded by castes. There were some tribes such as Bhils and Minas who were considered as outcaste as per the Hindu caste system. The rest of the population were Rajputs and as per the region they followed different religions as well. For example, Jain's has a certain different religious customs and practices. The Bishnois are also another example who are the converted Rajputs of 14th century. Brahmanical domination can be witnessed here and "Swamidharma'-a social relationship based on land and kinship, reciprocity services between chief and his men; played a significant role to frame social ethics. Rajputs were the new entrants in this period though the origin of them had different stories, such as "Agnikula myth", and they rose gradually to become a socially powerful clan. According to Dr. Dasaratha Sharma in his book, "Rajasthan through the Ages: Vol.I, Bikaner 1966. Pg. 441" stated that-"There can be no doubt about the fitness of the Rajputs to be classed as Kshatriyas. They were fighters by profession and knew how to shed their blood in the defence of their country and culture. But it would be idle to maintain that they belonged to one jati". On other hand, John T. Hitchcock, described in "Ibid. Pg. 441" about the assimilation through intermarriage of Rajputs and fostering the genealogical links with the epic families. According to him, the differentiates the martial Rajput from other Rajputs is the great stress he lays upon his connection with these

illustrious ancestors; largely because of this stress upon the blood relationship between themselves and the kings and heroes of the past, one of the most basic attributes of the martial Rajput is the strongly held belief that he himself, at least by tradition and innate capacity is a warrior and ruler. Even in present day, the ecstasy of Rajputs is well preserved. In a survey of modern Rajput society. Followed by the attitudes he added, "The martial Rajput, for example regard it as his duty to see that the proper social relationships between all castes are maintained, and the hierarchical order of society is preserved".

The traditions of Jains were also very significant throughout the time period but those who became merchants by profession, got huge success to influence financial aspects of the Rajput regions. They have exerted excessive influence on society mainly by their wealth. They were adventurous traders but not good soldiers. Borrowing from Sharma Dasarath in his book "Rajasthan through the Ages. Vol.I, Pg.438", "Among the Vaisyas as in same other castes, we find the two ideals of varna and jati. While varna lays stress on culture, character, profession, social duties and the organic nature of human society, jati emphasizes birth, heredity and hereditary privileges. The doors of the Vaisya varna were open to every new comer, who took up the profession of trade, even though the Incomers generally fell into a sub-caste of their own". In the lowest parameter of the caste system, the agricultural labours, the craft persons, the service men were considered as "Sudras". As urbanization started expanding, the number of skilled men started adding in the list and thus the population of Sudras also got increased in number. A large number of sub castes were also added in this time. Kayasthas, Khattris are the more significant in this. The outcast populations are also referred as Antyajas or Mlechha. According to Dasarath Sharma, the unabsorbed remnants of foreign immigrants like the Sakas, Yavanas and Hunas might have been included among these. But indigenous people as the sabaras, Kiratas, Khasas, Odras, Gauds, Pulindas, Kochas, Bhariyas and Bhillas also were termed Mlechha, because they too stood outside the pale of Aryan culture. Evidently these people lived with their own organizations, often retaining the basic structure of a tribal society. The retention of the caste pyramid and to maintain social hierarchy through the occupation standard gradually formed a feudal society. The loyalty based on land holding became a main force in Rajput society. Thus, under a strong monarchy these landholders formed a commanding feudal order. Conferring to Dr. G.N. Sharma, "feudalism emerged in Rajasthan, through the attempts of the Rajputs to crush the tribal people of that region."

The clothing style of Rajasthan from historical era can be traced from literary evidences, archaeological and visual materials. Illustrations and painted characters from manuscripts, stupas and miniature paintings are also one of the resources to collate the idea of historical Indian garments. The Mughal influence can be seen in socio cultural aspects in different regions of Rajputana. The impact was largely visible in cuisine and clothing style. The explanations given by G.N. Sharma in his book "Costumes of Male Dignitaries in Medieval Rajasthan', Pg.s. 55-56", the paintings can be treated as an extreme source for this. Evidently the associations with the Mughal court, which lead to in conceding of costumes and shield by the Emperor to the Rajput dignitaries. In Rajasthani painting, the adoption of the "Akbari chakdarJamah", and the "Jahangir turban" became common features. The clothing of women also got influenced in terms of colors, motifs and style. The "ghunghat" or "parda" by covering face with odhni become common for all women in Rajputana. The long sleeve blouses have also been appreciated. The length of the ghagra became foot length instead of knee length. This Transaction was not one sided, Mughals also adopted many socio-cultural features from Rajputana but these were limited

to Rajput aristocracy and the Muslim nobility. The common individuals stayed unaffected from all of these.

CONCLUSION

The history of clothing in India is age old but evidence of stitched clothes can only be traced to Gupta period, the golden age of India (320 AD to 550 AD). In this period, stitched garments along with basic draped fabrics became very fashionable and the sign of royalty. In Ajanta Paintings, it's revealed that women used to wear only lower garment leaving bust part bare in those times but later on various kinds of blouses (choli) evolved. Some of them have strings to tie on back side or on the front by exposing midriff. Gupta period was mainly for cut & sewn garments. Closely woven silk, cotton, linen and wool were the basic materials for fabrics. Block printed fabrics were also used to construct garment. A long sleeved brocaded tunic kind of garment became the popular costume for privileged people like the nobles and courtiers. Mughal dynasty incorporated magnificent costumes that that harmonized interest in art, poetry & culture. Clothing fabrics generally included very fine quality cotton (malaml), silks, velvets and brocades. In Rajasthani Miniatures we can see proper distribution of harmony, balance, unity, rhythm & proportion to create mind blowing compositions. Inspiration from apbransha school there is more pigments of colours were filled with very classical manner to achieve richness, lustre, depth and transparency; more lines are drawn to give true effect of stitching, there are simple dotes to decorate the clothes but more effective and drawn with concern to embellish the cloth. Choli is a stitched fitted garment fastened with strings or tie-cord at the back; and has erotic and romantic expressions reflected through its artful silhouette and it received major attention in Rajput Miniature Painting. To incarcerate the sensuality of the female figures in Rajput paintings, women were depicted wearing "choli" and "ghagra" draped along with transparent odhni. In the light of substantiation furnished by cave paintings, manuscripts and miniature paintings, it's clear that women used to wear two or three parts of clothing. The fashion of stitched garment in Rajasthan can be seen in Rajasthani miniature paintings and in manuscripts in accordance with the regional diversity in traditions which are reflected in some specific costumes as part of upper garment of women. "Choli, Ghagra & Odhni" were the three parts garment which were worn together as a timeless costume which are used till now in different regions in India.

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