

'THE CLOTH WAS THE CLOTHING': ZERO WASTE FASHION TRADITION AND SUSTAINABILITY A DISCUSSION PAPER

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ABSTRACT: *Exploring zero waste one-piece cloth consumption from a sustainable perspective offers, a myriad of fashion interpretations. The study investigates the historical background of the traditional draping technique of clothes of royalty, the crafting of body form, and its sustainable consumption. The paper examines zero-waste design, a traditional draping method practiced during the Kotte and Kandyan periods respectively, where geometric textile pieces were used; leaving no negative space around the patterns of design activity resulting in zero-waste garments. Interviews and observation were used in collecting the needed data at selected places in Kandy. The study employed both descriptive and survey research methods based on the qualitative research approach. This survey shows tremendous draping systems that can be adapted to a modern touch and also inspiring attitudes as beginning groundwork in good practices, moving away from mass consumption of dresses of rich cultural antecedents that show the range of skills and resources that are available. In view of this, it is recommended that the stakeholders of the garment industry such as designers who are endowed with this unique craft incorporate to their designs to sustain and promote Sri Lankan tradition in the world of fashion. It is also aimed at identifying and describing how this traditional sustainable draping technique is executed, what materials, and changing trends it has undergone through the ages. A new era has thus come to look back at an ancient sustainable consumption of dress. The survey was based on the dresses depicted in mural paintings and other sculptures that existed during Kotte and Kandyan eras respectively. The mode of collecting the data was carried out through personal in-depth observational field studies which helped to reveal the widely use subtle draping systems of dress practices of royalty.*

Key Words: Fashion, Tradition, Zero Waste, Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Passion for fashion is over in terms of historical, cultural and geographical boundaries (Tanrisever, 2015). According to Tanrisever the concept of fashion based on the word of “*facito*” that means “*doing*” in Latin, has expressed the concepts of compatibility, social relations, rebellion, a desire of becoming different, social expectations and status, seduction and deception. The common idea is about the concept of clothing and fashion based on clothing fashion that belongs to the World of West. Besides, the roots of fashion (clothing) separate from traditional clothing by the effect of French in terms of stripes and section (cutting) (Tanrisever, 2015). Recognition of clothing as a concept of fashion is not coincidental. However the expression of an interest for the fashion of human and being different from each other visible through holding of the fabric of body. This phenomenon comes from the day of birth of human in civilized society.

Today fashion plays a major role in massive contributor to the world economy and produced ready to wear garments. Therefore fast fashion becomes an integral part of the lifestyle. Besides, consumers tend to merchandise fashion very often created extreme consuming. This created an unnecessary increase in textile waste as numbers on clothes' products such as produced, sold and thrown out clothes created environmental, social and economic

problems. A new era has thus come to look back at ancient sustainable consumption pattern. It is realized that traditional consuming comprehension is differed to present sustainable consuming. That traditional consuming comprehension has provided the behavior of consuming that emphasized the dimension of consuming result. Tanrisever (2015) states that sustainable consumption is not a new method; it is a perspective of thought. Moreover, it has to require all processes being evaluated and created useful thoughts. It is realized that sustainable fashion stands against fashion *eğilim* (routine). The fashion designers who promote sustainable fashion mission today have been focusing their designs into the zero waste approach in fashion. It is part of the sustainable fashion movement. Zero waste fashion means no waste or little waste in clothes production (Tanrisever, 2015). They minimize the using of fabrics unnecessarily and decrease the waste of textile materials. The selected study setting of the research is Kotte (1411-1597AD) and Kandy(17th Century) eras of Sri Lanka bears exquisite drapery clothing fashion provides sumptuous examples of the ancient method of zero waste fashion consumption.

1.1 The concept of zero waste

The zero-waste design is a sustainable way of manufacturing products (Carrico & Kim 2014). It is a kind of design technique that removes the waste of textile during designing. An approach to zero waste is not a new concept (Saeidi & Wimberley, 2017). Pieces of patterns, considered in historical clothing, show that less fabric was wasted in the process of making dresses. According to Rudofsky, (1947) traditional dress such as the Greek Ionic *chiton* and Indian *sari* a length of cloth that is draped and wrapped around the body without being cut or stitched are the best examples of zero waste design concepts because 'cloth was clothing itself' since they are pieces of cloth draped around the body without being cut or stitched; therefore, nothing is wasted. Saeidi & Wimberley (2017) state that the designer needs to know the fabric and design dimension in order to make the zero-waste garment. Rissanen (2013) says that textile width is always a crucial consideration in zero waste design. Further, he states how difficulties occur when designing a zero waste dress without knowing exactly how wide the textile is. The textile width is the space within which you create zero-waste fashion designs (Saeidi & Wimberley 2017).

1.2 Sustainable consumption of clothes

Shove et al. (2013) says that consumption of clothes is a practice that is part of everyday life. Their studies indicate that sustainable fashion consumption involves and draws on complex social processes that include both the discursive and the material (Jurado & Fuentes, 2014). This identifies sustainable fashion consumption as a set of things that are doings and sayings which are routinely performed and shared among consuming people in everyday life. This indicates that sustainable fashion consumption does not need to consider isolating it but as a practice that exists in connection with a network of social practices. Furthermore, sustainable fashion consumption involves various cognitive techniques, embodied knowledge, meanings, and material artifacts (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001).

1.3 Literature review: Tradition

The concept of tradition is of utmost importance in every society. Tradition is never static; it is subject to change from time to time with internal and external cultural, economic and political forces. The accepted notion of tradition stresses the idea of handing down of ideas, objects, practices, assumptions, and values from generation to generation and at the same time tradition also implies reception by an active public, alert to both the imperatives of the past as well as the present (Dissanayake 2005). Ranathunga (2018) citing Edward Shills stated that tradition means many things, in its barest, most elementary sense, it means simply a *traditum*, it is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. As Ranathunga (2018) pointed out human actions are the vehicle by which tradition is transmitted. Shills (1981) stated the transcendence of the transience of physical artifacts such as statues, paintings, medals and books having per se no significant practical uses, are even more obviously constituted by the spirit or mind which resides in them. The relationship to them or their audience of readers and contemplators is not one of use; it is entirely a relationship of interpretation. Tradition allows constructing a narrative of the past, the present, and future on the basis of a certain present dealing with a certain past. The concept of tradition seeks to enforce certain values and assumptions and modes of behavior. It is also regarded as a transcendental phenomenon and is seen to be endowed with certain timeless qualities. (Dissanayake 2005) Writings of Walter Benjamin (1982, 18) have underlined the importance of understanding tradition not as an ontological question but rather as one of political endeavor. Ranathunga (2018) further stated how culture plays a major role in the journey of developing a unique tradition of a society. The essentialist attitude to tradition is interconnected with culture.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study was a mixed method—using the descriptive research tool under the qualitative approach. This helped in the narration of relevant information to interpret the historical background of draping techniques. Interviews conducted with artisans, dancers, to experts engaged in draping design. Interview and observation are the main data collection instruments. According to Leedy and Ormod (2005) in qualitative research stated that it is a requirement of acquiring data from varied sources for the purpose of data triangulation. Unstructured interviews were carried out with the artisans. Gathered data were sorted and analyzed in a systematic manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Draping dress tradition



Fig 1 Draping lower body dresses of the Anuradhapura and the Gampola eras



Fig 2 Draping lower body dresses of the Kotte era

The pictorial evidence of previous eras shows that the traditional dress of the King consisted of an unstitched loose lower clinging draped cloth which was formed by lots of wads of pleats and folds with jewelry adorning the bare upper body. Furthermore, the long lower cloth has a unique methodology of arranging on the body by forming many folds to both sides of the waist and below the navel without having any single stitching by emphasizing the body curves. It means an arrangement of fascinating frills in the center of the lower dress done up with bunching the two edges of the cloth (*Salu*) into the center of the lower dress. Fold constitutes a move from effective to effective spaces; folding is a description of the activity, intended to flow smoothly and continually with no evidence of the ambiguity of interruption (Karunaratne, 2015).

The layers of lower dresses are suggested by lines descending from their length of layers. It could be assumed that the lower dress's formed by more than one piece of cloth. The dress is confined by

a decorated waistband. The King draped the lower cloth according to the traditional practice of the era. Comparing with the previous eras it was seen that the lower dresses of the Kotte era were formed in a different manner. There was only a single fold arranged to one side of the waist (most probably the left side) which has a pointed edge. The fold on the left side of the waist developed in its size to a much greater extent during the last phase of the 16th Century evident in the dress of King Wimaladharmasooriya 1(1591-1604).



Fig 3 King Wimaladharmasooriya1



Fig 4 King at Aludeniya temple, Gampola

However, the lower dress depicted in the Aludeniya wooden door jamb shows that the fold was placed at the center of the navel area and was arranged like a fan. The lower dress is unique in form because it had a circularly shaped fold. In fact, the feature was depicted in a more pronounced manner during the sixteenth century King's dress. It was refashioned in its form to a much greater extent by manipulation of the fabric in great width and length. Even though this was mainly worn by the Kings, the elite of the court also seems to have adopted the feature in a different way. Pictorial evidence shows that the feature evolved gradually throughout history with subtle adjustments in forming the shape of it.

The ceremonial robe is said to be of three kinds in different lengths in cubits as 13, 9, or 7. The entire cloth should be draped around the King from left to right. He also used a silk shawl while he was present at the *Dharmashala*,

(*Preaching hall*) or the religious place. *Parakumba Siritha* (verse 60) (Paranavithana, 1997) indicates that King Parakramabahu VI was dressed in silk cloth. Sometimes, it mentioned the quality of the silk cloth that King wore. He had received a gift of fine silk from a foreign King. (Verse 151)

Kapuru sandun muwa mada soda suwada ethi

Rusiru siumpata salu samaganan veni

Wathuru lesin gena nan desa nirindu nithi

Athuru nodi weda weda ehi

sitithi

Sometimes the King used gold and silver as an added value to enhance the timeless quality of dresses giving a cozy look to dresses. The description of Queyroz noted that the King was girt with a cloth of silver and the King's Lion Throne of six stages was covered with cloth and gold. The King wore a white *cabaya*. (Pieris, 1992)

3.2 Characteristics of Draping: pleats / folds / knots

A textural effect to the surface of the long lower dress was created by pleats. It also added value to visualization of the form of dress. Multiple ripples of pleats validated the ultimate delicacy of fabrics. (Karunaratne 2018) Pleats were created from the middle of the navel and enhanced the horizontal axis of the body. Firmness and neatness in the creases of pleats show a gradual increase in each line of the pleat. As the wearer moved the body the pleated section expanded and created extra space and ease to the body.

Folding is a method of finishing the dress form by placing it around the waist, and it is a basic method of forming pleats on the structures of the dress. Therefore folding plays a pivotal role in attempts at design, form, and structures. According to Bradley Quinn (2003) fold constitutes a move from effective to effective spaces; folding is a description of the activity and intended to flow smoothly and continually with no evidence of ambiguity of interruption, the folds being classified according to the length in three ways; long, medium and short. (Karunaratne, 2015)

The extravagant dress form was formed by many knots. Twisting the edge of the cloth or pieces and wrapping around the waist creates a firm knot. Coomaraswamy (1913) states 'needless to remark, there is much art in wearing garments which are not fastened by any stitch or pin', it is suggested that the knot is a creative indigenous mechanism of joining fabrics together. Extended twisted knots were placed suspending both waist sides.



Fig 4 tightening the cloth to the waist by making a knot



Fig 5 different knots of “Thuppottiya” dress

3.3 Measurement of cloth

The cloth worn over the lower body is known as *thuppottiya* which is eight to nine cubits long and four to six spans in breadth. This white and red colored narrow fabric band is 20 cubits long. The extent of length would differ in some instances. As Ranathunga (2015) says 'The dress is unpredictable until it is arranged'.

4. CONCLUSION

The process of creating zero-waste garments is unpredictable provides a tremendous design challenge. At the same time, the wearer optimizes the body space satisfying it by draping wads of cloth and engages in work on aesthetic and functional concerns of the dress form simultaneously. Further experimentation is necessary to discover ways zero waste draping dress forms can be realized in actual ready to wear dress production. The creative advantage of manipulation benefits designers who can discover new silhouettes and styles irrespective of trends. Such styles would become the new 'classics' of our wardrobes and also bring timeless value. The study also revealed that designing zero waste garments by utilizing fabric draping method is about challenging conventions in order to push practice and shift perceptions about what constitutes creativity' (Townsend & Mills, 2013). More designers are enthusiastically invited to add to the conversation through investigation and discovery to face the stringent requirements of the garment industry.

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