

Artistic Review of Sri Lankan Female Fashion and It's Movement



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Abstract

British fashion had the greatest influence on local women rather than any others. The reason may be that the British had the longest and the last occupation in Sri Lanka until it became Independent. Even after independence some women continued to follow British fashion because this influences on local fashion was enormous. On the other hand, Sri Lankan women simply imitated British fashion due to the close relationship between them. This review is concerned about how British fashion influenced the local fashion arena. In contemporary fashion world the past fashion placed in the fashion cycle time by time and thus this would be an important for review future fashion prediction.

Keywords: Fashion; Female; Movement; British; Sri lankan

Introduction

The Second World War immensely revolutionized British fashion. As a result the supply of new garments became limited. Further, resources and raw materials for clothing became insufficient to satisfy the consumer requirements. The prices of fashion clothing rose and some raw materials such as silk were no longer available in the market. However fashion flourished in wartime. The civilian clothes became practical as well as being more stylish. During wartime most women were employed as voluntary and industry workers and thus they preferred to wear uniforms that were fit for the purpose. Therefore, utility clothes such as trousers, siren suits and boxy jackets became highly retailed clothes in the market [1].

In 1947 Christian Dior's 'New Look' revolutionized 1940s fashion and continued to the 1950s. This fashion trend changed the wartime short skirt to longer and fuller skirts, and boxy shoulders were softened to become floppy. Further, narrow pencil skirt came into fashion during 1950s. During the 1960s young British peoples' income was increased from a low level to the highest due to the effect of ending the Second World War. Thus, they were able to purchase what was fashionable in the markets. The mini skirt came into British fashion arena and soon became popular attire of young British women. On the other hand hippy movement emerged in the west coast of America and that influenced British women to wear colourful clothes with bright colours and bold prints. However, conservative British women continued their dress with skirts below the knee level and tailored jackets [2].

Data Analysis

The introduction of the female trouser or jeans from Britain was a decisive moment in the Sri Lankan fashion history. It revolutionized 20th century dress, introducing male attire to the female wardrobe [3]; (Figure 1). Further, wartime fashions were gradually influenced local women to wear trousers in public. However, in earlier periods Sri Lankan women dancers wore a similar type of trouser underneath the dancing costume, but it was not as prominent as jeans.



Figure 1: Vijitha Mallika, Sinhalese film actress wearing a trouser and jacket, 1965.

The 'bell-bottom' was a very popular trouser style among young Sri Lankan women during the 1970s. This style entered Sri Lanka from Hollywood films, pop culture music and television programmes. Bell-bottoms became fashionable for both men and women in Europe and North America during the mid-1960s, arriving in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the 1970s. Bell-bottoms are trousers that become wider from the knees down, and thus look bell-shaped; the shape is also called 'flared.' United States (US) navy men wore this trouser as part of their uniform in the 19th century, and during the mid 1960s people especially in the hippie culture adopted this bell-bottom cut trouser; it soon became a highly fashionable garment among singers and rock groups. These jeans were commonly made from denim, bright cotton and crimplene, and were widespread in Sri Lanka during the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, Hollywood cinema affected urban women and actresses to wear jeans in public and in Sinhala cinema. After the mid 1990s bell-bottoms came into the fashion under the name 'boot-cut' trousers (for boot wearers), as the flare was slimmer and frequently made of soft and draped fabrics. Similar styles, including loon pants were also popular in Sri Lanka. They thus became baggier with extra space to move the legs and included open darts at the waist. The baggier pencil-shaped jeans were popular among urban Sri Lankan women up to the beginning of the 21st century. Further, drainpipe trousers were popular trousers among the urban women during the mid 20th century and later on. It was a slim-fit jeans made from woven fabrics. This style of jeans was influenced by popular stars and actresses from western culture to the Sri Lankan fashion arena. Later, this style of trousers reintroduced to the mainstream market as skinny jeans.

Hipster jeans and miniskirts were very popular in the 1960s, and in Sri Lanka this trend continued even to the end of the 20th century. Shorter-length full-flared skirts, body-hugging miniskirts, shorter length 'A'-lined skirts and 'H'-lined skirts were constructed in hipster style. Most of the short skirts were shorter than the mid-thigh level, with a waistline frequently several inches below the navel, and were frequently worn with very short body-hugging blouses or short blouses. These blouses often had plunging necklines and long sleeves or no sleeves. This silhouette made women appear more erotic and exposing the thigh became popular among young Sri Lankan women [4]. In rural areas girls have been beaten for such inappropriate dress, illustrating the intensity of condemnation of the mini skirt. Further, it was reported that the figure-hugging mini skirt of a 19-year-old girl had caused her to fall off a train to her death [5]. However, youth continued to become more fashionable and influenced by western fashion. Hipsters and miniskirts became essential fashion items during the 1960s, 1970s and thereafter [6].

These styles were a matter of concern among nationalists. Further, Buddhist leaders highly criticized the 'mini' and 'hipster' during the 1960s and 1970s, which was becoming an offense to heritage and a western threat to Sri Lankan culture.

Further, there was a campaign against mini dresses and skirts. Exposing the midriff was traditional in the draping of the sari; however, viewing the thigh was not seen as acceptable, based on the identification of women's erogenous zones. For Asians the midriff is not an erogenous zone, while the thigh is not one for westerners. Thus, it is clear that cultural norms were highly affected to shifting erogenous zones from one level to another. Femininity and erogenous zones differ according to cultural values.

The tunic top with long 'bell'-shaped sleeves was a new attire of urban women in the 1960s. This was mostly worn with 'bell-bottom' jeans, short 'A'-line skirts and miniskirts. This top has a curved front neckline with a high-necked back, similar to the Indonesian kebaya top. The kebaya was a traditional combination of blouse-dress originating in Indonesia and also worn by women in Malaysia, Brunei, Burma, Singapore and southern Thailand. The word kebaya is from Arabic, meaning 'clothing.' It was stitched from sheer material, such as silk, fine cotton, semi-transparent nylon or polyester, and commonly adorned with brocade or floral-patterned embroidery. A similar tunic top used in India is called the kurta, and it was very popular in Sri Lanka during the late 20th century. Kurta tops are worn as blouses, usually over jeans and skirts. They are typically much shorter than traditional kurta garments and are made of lighter materials. This top is worn in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. It can reveal female body curves while maintaining the appropriate body proportions.

Empire line cut blouses and dresses were popular in the latter part of the 20th century, and were inspired from western fashion. The empire style line is just under the breast line and thus the bodice is fitted, portraying a 'high waist' appearance. This was a fashion in 18th century Europe, and continued to present date. The word 'empire' refers to the first French empire under Napoleon, whose wife Empress Joséphine de Beauharnais popularized it [7]; it is a neoclassical style [8]. In Sri Lanka it was popular due to ergonomic factors; it was easy to wear in hot weather and revealed most of the neck, shoulders, breast and waistline sensually. This silhouette can flatten pear-shaped bodies while hiding the abdominal area and emphasizing the bust. The empire line cut lengthens the body's appearance. Therefore, those type of clothing famed among local women in 1960s and 1970s.

The 'tunic dress' was popular in Sri Lanka during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. It is an influence from ancient Rome and Greece [7] that later became fashionable in Europe. Women frequently wore it while doing sports and exercises. The length of the dress varies from mid-thigh to ankle length. In Sri Lanka this mid-thigh dress was popular among urban women, and was made with or without sleeves. Sleeves were frequently bell-shaped or 'set-in' in varying lengths. Sometimes 'cap' sleeves were used. The tunic dress with sleeves is called the 'Ruth Tunic' dress and was very popular in Sri Lanka. The shift dress was another kind

of short dress made with or without sleeves [9] (Figure 2). It has a body-hugging shape. The pattern uses the princess-lined dress pattern, while adding slightly more detail. To develop the shape it is necessary to remove the darts. The fabrics typically used were medium-weight twill, cotton or denim. Peplum skirts and Charleston-style dresses were also popular among young women as an influence from western fashion.



Figure 2: Sinhalese film actress Jeewarani Kurukulasooriya wearing shalwar cameeza, 1966.



Figure 3 : Shift Dress, 1972.

Shirtdresses were widely worn by young women in Sri Lanka during the 1970s and 1980s. This dress was influenced by the men's classical shirt silhouette. Sometimes it was worn with jeans or skirts [10] (Figure 3). They were mostly made out of checked cotton material. The front of the dress has an opening with button stand running from neckline to them. Another design detail is side pockets with pocket closures. Commonly 'slant' and 'jetted' pockets were in the sides of the dress parallel to the lower hip level. The full-flared long and short skirt with short blouse was also popular. The skirt was made of soft chiffon kind of fabric in printed versions. It had six or eight pieces. The blouse was short and tight to the body [11] (Figure 4). The front of the blouse had knotted detail to tighten the silhouette to the wearer's waist.



Figure 4 : Checked Shirt and Corduroy 'A' lined skirt, 1979.



Figure 5 : Sinhalese film actress Veena Jayakody, 1979.

Sri Lankan batik kaftans and wrap around long skirts were very popular in Sri Lanka and abroad. Harlan Daily Enterprise [12] described how to wear a batik wrapping skirt [12] (Figure 5). This shows that Sri Lankan batik attire was a

trend among foreign women. The kaftan or poncho is an eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern attire that migrated to Europe and from there to Sri Lanka. It is a one-piece garment with two side seams used to attach the front and back pieces together. It is very comfortable to wear in hot weather and is made of various cotton or silk materials with lace trimmings. Short kaftan dresses were fashionable in the 1970s, often using contrasting piping or binding on the edges of the sleeves and hems. These dresses maintain the correct shape of the figure when made from finer quality materials (Figure 6).



Figure 6 : Harlan Daily Enterprise [12] From Ceylon, Eastern Tradition Meets Western Fashion On One-of-kind Batiks. How to wrap the long skirt.



Figure 7: Clothing Fashion of women, 1989.

In the 1970s the conventional Sri Lankan redda (cloth) and hatte (jacket) became more fashionable with gradual modifications. The hatte became short in length and just covered the breasts. The front fastening was a knot developed in self-fabric and constructed parallel to the upper-waist level or just under the bust level. This became very sensual attire at that time, and the redda draped at the low waist added sensual attraction to the silhouette. The exposed midriff was the most common aspect of this style, and became a fashion trend in the 1970s. The redda with long bell-sleeved jacket was hybrid attire influenced by both western and Sri Lankan tradition. The jacket had a deep 'V'-shaped neckline, and the fastening is usually on the front and knotted. The back neck is slightly deep, and the length of the

jacket comparatively shorter than conventional styles. It shows a bare midriff, and is also worn with the sari. The eye-catching details of the jacket are the deep-plunging front neckline and the flounces attached at the edges of the three-quarter sleeves. These details give a graceful look. Further, the redda was used as the lower garment with a western jacket style - a clearly hybrid attire inspired by both western and local fashion. The fabrics used for the redda were mostly in printed chintz designs; it was worn below the navel tight to the body. The neriya or waist frill was on the left or right hand side of the redda to maintain the balance of the attire (Figure 7).

In addition, long maxi dresses were popular in Sri Lanka during the latter part of the 20th century. This dress was usually made of soft silks, georgettes and chiffon fabrics. The lining of the dress was essential, as the outer fabric was transparent. The dress gave an attractive look due to its glorious draping and swinging quality of the fabric and silhouette. They were popular wear for dinner dances, clubbing and cocktail parties. Some designs used several layers of frills in different lengths from the top to bottom of the dress. To hold the dress properly, two straps over the shoulders were attached from front to back. These straps were elasticated and were sometimes made from self-fabric.

Photographs and the visuals show the most fashionable design details and elements in 20th century Sri Lanka. The sleeves were mostly puffed, cape, long bell, frill, shirt, short bell, pagoda, bishop, petal, set-in, wing ruffle, kimono, raglan, peasant and leg of mutton. The most popular necklines were scooped, built-up funnel, décolleté, halter, Sabrina, crew, off shoulder, cowl, envelope, slashed, keyhole and mitred. The waist designs were wrap over, yoke and shaped. The cowboy look was also popular in the 1970s. This may have been an influence from western films. They mostly used bishop, napoleon high court, bateau, peter pan, convertible open, Danton, reverse, clover reverse, puritan, Dutch and pierrot collar shapes for dresses, blouses and tops. Further, contrasting piping, large sized buttons, buckles, bows detailing and braiding were common.

Conclusion

Due to the Cultural Revolution that occurred around 1977, the gaps between ethnic groups, religious conviction, cultural barriers and caste variation became gradually minimized. This happened mainly due to access to free education and opportunities for women. The increase in the freedom of women globally obtained after the Second World War affected women in Sri Lanka. As a result, women's dress and social patterns were greatly transformed. Younger generations in particular developed their culture, which served to standardize dress in the country.

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