

Unknown Dresses in the Kotte Period

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Dress is a powerful signifier of historical times. It is often discussed in relation to fashion and therefore, to change. Dress is also frequently examined in terms of local or traditional in contrast to Western or Eastern dress. The aim of this paper is to present a comprehensive study of some unknown elegant dress documentation during the Kotte period. Kotte was the last phase of the divided kingdom, (started in 1400 AD lasted for 197 years) where we got the first European influence and where much stronger South Indian Dravidian influence directly operated at the kings' court.

Two ivory caskets of Kotte period represent an interesting documentation of period attires which are inspired of Portuguese and South Indian Dravidian culture. A range of attires from king to the whole royal family, court officers, foreign delegations, common people, court dancers and solders throws light on the ceremonial aspects of the Kotte kingdom. Rhythmic attires of court dancers represent rich characteristics of dress elements. Nine elegant female attires can be found in both caskets. Within this range of classical dresses, exclusive patterned skirts can be categorized along with its unique features. In this range of skirts, fold and head dress can be identified as fashion devices. Abundance of jewelry and drapery signifies that these dresses were definitely utilized by the court performances of the period.

Keywords: ceremonial aspects, rhythmic attires, fashion devices

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