

Dress and Ornaments in Early Medieval Kashmir

Sayeema Nizam

Research scholar, Centre of Advanced Study, Deptt. of History, AMU, Aligarh.

Email:sayeema.masudi@gmail.com Contact No: 7300898909.

Abstract

The present paper aims to highlight the dress and the ornaments worn by the people during the period under study. The primary sources include Kalhana's Rajatarangini and Damodargupta's Kuttanimata Kavya which provides sufficient information regarding the dress and ornaments of the people in early medieval Kashmir. The clothes of male and female consists of two garments upper and lower one. Both male and female used ornaments made of gold, silver and precious metals. Cosmetics were also used by both men and women. This paper attempts to analysis the difference between the dress and ornaments of upper and lower class people.

Keywords: *Rajatarangini, garments, cosmetics, saffron, ornaments, hairdressing.*

Dress:

Nilamata Purana mentions various terms for clothing such as *Vastra*, *Ambara*, *Vasas*, *Vasana* and *Samvita*.¹ *Cinamuska* was a term used for silk imported from China.² It also refers to *Kambala* for woollen blankets. The term *pravarna* is mentioned in connection with the festival of snowfall.³ The same term also mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that implies the cloth offering protection against the cold.⁴ The clothes were offered to a number of deities like Vishnu and Nila. The clothes of male and female comprised of two garments upper and lower one.⁵ Both white and coloured clothes were used. The term *ahata* was used for new clothes.⁶

Damodargupta's *Kuttanimata Kavya* provides detailed information regarding the dress worn in Kashmir. There is also a reference of bed sheet in it.⁷ The same source mentions that the use of dress and adornments were accordance to the need of time and climate. It was regarded as a sign of refining taste.⁸ Different types of various garments fashioned from cotton, wool. China silk and *patika* (a type of fabric) was used by the people.⁹ The rich people wore clothes made from China silk and *patika* enriched with golden work. Coloured clothes were favoured by the people. *Kuttanimata Kavya* mentions at one place a son of an influential government official,

¹ Ved Kumari, *The Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, J &K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar, 1958, p.116.

² Ibid,

³ Ibid,

⁴ Ibid,

⁵ Ibid,pp.116-117.

⁶ Ibid,

⁷ Ibid, p.117.

⁸ A. M. Shastri, *India as seen in the Kuttanimata Kavya*, Motilal Banarsidass, Dehli, 1995,p133.

⁹ Ibid,

who was attired in garments dyed with saffron and worked with golden threads. The poor classes of society usually dressed in old tattered clothes and used to wear clothes by joining several pieces of clothes together. Their clothes formed as a rough variety of cotton textiles. Clothes stuffed with cotton were also popular in use. Such types of clothes were still used nowadays. Damodargupta refers to a Brahman who wore girdles and replaced it if they were torned.¹⁰ *Katitra* or waistband was also an important item of dress. Ascetics dressed by ochre-coloured garments carried a staff.

It is clear that the standard female costume consisted of a pair of clothes upper and lower. Both these outfits appeared to be unstitched. The lower one is the present day *dhoti* and the upper one used in the fashion of the *uttariya* or scarf. The lower garment was worn by putting a knot to it.¹¹ According to Damodargupta, the fashionable ladies loved to wear soft, clean and perfumed clothes and were fond of Chinese silk.¹² The same authority also mentions women as fond of using coloured clothes and dyed with saffron. It is evident from *Kuttanimata Kavya* that *abhisarikas* adorned themselves in black garments in nights so that they could not easily be detected by others.¹³ However, aged women favoured white clothes. Stitched garments were also in vogue. Two such stitched items of dress viz., *kancuka* and *varabana* are mentioned in *Rajatarangini*. The same text refers to a half-sleeved jacket resembling modern *choli* and *palaka*. Ladies cover and dressed in jackets (*kancukas*), half of the length of their arms.¹⁴ *Rajatarangini* mentions *angaraksha* (upper) and an *adharansuka* (lower garment), the latter i.e. *antariya* synonymous with the modern *dhoti* was worn by all men. Kalhana mentions that women of Kashmir also wore short jacket or blouses with half sleeves and a long lower garment (probably a sari), the tail end of which touched the ground.¹⁵ The flying scarves attached to the military dress may be similar to *virapatta* or lapels of the said dress mentioned by Kalhana.¹⁶ Hunters and those living in the forests wore knickers while the servants and attendants wore dhotis and knickers. A small cloth was joined to the left half of the knickers falling between the legs. The businessmen wore *choga* (overcoats) and *kurta* (shirts) made of cotton. Alberuni speaks of a female dress namely *Kurtaka*, a short shirt, with sleeves extending from shoulders to the middle of the body and having slashes on both the right and the left sides.¹⁷ The poor generally wore a linen cloth. The people used blankets (*Kutha*)¹⁸ and woollen cloaks (*pravara*) in the hilly regions and other places

¹⁰ Ibid, p135.

¹¹ Ibid,

¹² Ibid,

¹³ Ibid, p136.

¹⁴ Ibid, p137.

¹⁵ Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, tr. Stein, M.A, Vol. I, Bk VII, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, Ed. 1979, v.930

¹⁶ Ibid; Kalhana, Op.Cit., Vol.I, Bk V, v.33; Vol.II, BK VIII, v. 1774

¹⁷ Alberuni's, *Kitab ul Hind*, tr. Sachau. Edward C, Vol.I, S. Chand and CO., Delhi, 1964, pp.180-81

¹⁸ Ibid, Vol.II, BK IV, v. 349

where it was cold.¹⁹ But these were the luxury of only the rich.²⁰ The common folk, in general, used the skins of black antelopes (*krsnajina*)²¹ and course woollen cloaks (sthulakambala) which were sometimes given as charity by the rich.²² *Rallaka* and blankets were extensively used in the winter.

According to Kshemendra, the students from Bengal studying in Kashmir dressed in printed or embroidery silk²³ and also made use of the turbans.

Ornaments:

The literary and epigraphic sources, sculpture, as well as paintings, highlight the fondness of jewellery by the people of Kashmir. *Nilamata Purana* mentions various ornaments such as earrings, bracelets, diadem and jewels.²⁴ Alberuni, who was in India in 1030 A.D., mentions the wide popularity of ornaments among the people.²⁵ Kalhana speaks of a ring that was prominent among both sexes.²⁶

Female Ornaments:

Kalhana mentions that women of early medieval Kashmir were not wanting in their eternal fondness for ornaments.²⁷ Among different kinds of ornaments which were worn by the women of Kashmir, Kalhana mentions anklets (*nupura*), necklaces (*hara*), wristlets (*kaiha*), armlet (*kanjura*), bracelets (*parihara*) and ear-rings (*kundala*).²⁸ Damodargupta provided a number of references regarding the necklaces.²⁹ The same author takes pleasure in giving the description of necklaces which adorned the chest of women.³⁰ He describes the different patterns of them like the one having pierced pearls. These necklaces comprised of one or more strands of pearls. At one place, he states that a necklace was pierced from the inside, which refers to the boring of pearls sting together.³¹ It also refers that the combination of *tarala* with a pearl necklace.³² The wearing of a thread around the neck is also referred in which various medicinal herbs and precious gems were joined together.³³

¹⁹ Ibid, Vol.IBK VIII, v. 1310

²⁰ Ibid, Vol.I, BK IV, vv. 349-52

²¹ Hiuen tsang's statement who writes due to the cold climate of Kashmir, the people wear leather doublets and clothes of white linen

²² S. C. Ray, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Delhi Ed.1969, p. 208.

²³ Kshemendra's, *Desopadesa*, tr. A.N.D. Haksar, Penguin books, Mumbai, ed.2011, p.110

²⁴ Ved Kumari, Op.Cit, p.117.

²⁵ S.C.Ray, Op.Cit, p.209.

²⁶ Kalhana, Op.Cit., Vol.I, BK III, v.241; BK IV, vv.349-42; BK VII, vv.876-78, 922.

²⁷ S. C. Ray, Op.Cit., p. 209.

²⁸ Ibid, BK VII, v.930.

²⁹ A. M. Shastri, Op.Cit, p. 142.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

The different kinds of ear adornments were being used on a daily basis. Among them, *kanaka nadi* is mentioned.³⁴ It seems to be palm-shaped small teardrop.³⁵ Kshemendra speaks of ear ornament as *tadi yuga* (a pair of *tadis*) and which remains in vogue up to eleventh century AD.³⁶ Besides, golden armlet, a special type of armlet called *valaya kalapi* that was worn on the upper arm and having the face of a peacock and moon shaped was also worn by women.³⁷

Male Ornaments:

Not only women but men were also too fond of ornaments. *Kuttanimata Kavya* of Damodargupta refers to Cintamani, who was in service of king and was the son of an officer and a variety of ornaments such as earrings, necklaces, armlets, bracelets and finger rings worn by him.³⁸ He is also described as wearing the two types of earrings. One of which called *dilabitaka* and the other *sisapatraka*.³⁹ The same source also mentions the dress of an attendant who has got in his neck coarse and cheap *kacavartakamata* and conch shell in his hands.⁴⁰ It is evident from Kalhana's work too that male population used various ornaments viz., finger rings, earrings, necklaces and bracelets.⁴¹ Alberuni mentions that "the men wear articles of female dress; use cosmetics and wear earrings as well as on the toes of feet,"⁴²

Both males and females wore the bracelets on the wrists. The term for wearing the ornament on the wrist was called *valaya* and *kataka*.⁴³ The number of bracelets to be worn on the wrist was not fixed. Besides the above-mentioned ornaments, king Harsha in the eleventh century AD introduced the various types of jewellery which are *kataka* leafed tiaras (*svarnakatakapatranka*), pendants on the forehead (*tilaka*) and golden strings at the end of locks (*kisantavaddha hemopavilaka*).⁴⁴

Hair Style:

Both men and women provided attention to arranging and decorating their hair in a number of ways. The upper-class section of the society kept long hair and tied them with ribbons.⁴⁵ Sometimes, hair was adorned with a bunch of cord fastened at one end. The common masses used *sirabasta* (headcover) to cover their head,⁴⁶ while

³⁴ Ibid, p.143.

³⁵ S. C. Ray, Op.Cit., 209.

³⁶ A. M. Shastri, Op,Cit, p. 142.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 144.

³⁸ Ibid., p.139. see also S.C. Ray, Op.Cit, p.209.

³⁹ A. M. Shastri, Op.Cit, p. 140.

⁴⁰ S. C. Ray, Op.Cit, p. 209.

⁴¹ Kalhana, Op.Cit, BK III,v.214; BK IV, vv. 349-52; BK VII v.78, vv.876-714,v.812, v.922; Vol. II, BK VIII, v.329,v.1744.

⁴² Sachau, Op.Cit., p.181.

⁴³ Ibid,

⁴⁴ Kalhana, Op.Cit, Vol. I, BK VII, vv.928-931.

⁴⁵ A. M. Shastri, Op,Cit, p.146.

⁴⁶ S.C. Ray, Op,Cit, p.208-209. see also Pamanand Parashar, *Kashmir The Paradise Of Asia*, p.159.

others kept long hair with a long piece of cloth on the three-fourths of the head.⁴⁷ Some left one-fourth portion of the head bare and applied a saffron paste to the hair close to the ears.⁴⁸ In rural areas, both sexes arranged and decorated hair with the garland of flowers.⁴⁹ Women devoted much more attention to hairdressing. They kept long hair dress themselves in various ways. The same text also has compared the black hair of a woman to a swarm of bees and their curly locks to smoke.⁵⁰ The locks of hair were knotted with a spray of flowers after having been scented by the smoke rising from the centre. Kalhana speaks of the locks bound with flowers.⁵¹ He while referring to the musical concert at the court of Harsha states that the beautiful white headdress of nobles and princes brought glamour to the party.⁵² Comb played an important part in the toilet and dressing of hair. Like comb, the mirror was also equally important for the toilet.

Cosmetics:

A beautiful body, good health, bright face and proper limbs were conceived as decoration in themselves, yet decoration had importance as it enhances beauty. *Nilamata Purana* very oftenly advocates the use of ornaments for decorating the body.⁵³ The use of garlands and perfumes was considered as important for the deities as well as for worshippers.⁵⁴ Hence, devotees were supposed to beautify themselves with ornaments, cosmetics and other things at the time of worship, different types of scents, perfumes, unguents, flowers and garlands.⁵⁵ Various methods were prevalent for beautifying the body such as rubbing the feet with emollient unguents (*udvartana*), anointing it with unguents (*utsidas*) and applying the sandal paste after bathing.⁵⁶ It is said that many types of unguents were made from sandal, saffron and musk.⁵⁷ *Kumkuma* and *lodhra* were used for the complexion and *alakata* and red resin of trees was used for dyeing the lips, nails and the soles of feet. The paste prepared from *kesara* was also applied to the body.⁵⁸ They were also used lac die for reddening the feet and lips. Many toilet scenes in which women were standing holding the mirror in hand applying *Sindura* or collyrium in the parting of the hair or eyes respectively or even admiring their own beauty. The married woman irrespective

⁴⁷ A. M. Shastri, Op.Cit, p.146, see also Pamanand Parashar, *Kashmir The Paradise Of Asia*, p.159.

⁴⁸ Ibid,

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.147.

⁵⁰ B. N. Sharma, *Social and Cultural life in Northern India*.p.83.

⁵¹ Ibid, BK V,v.357; BK VII,vv.928-31,945.

⁵² Kalhana, Op.Cit, Vol. I, BK V, v.356. see also Pamanand Parashar, *Kashmir The Paradise Of Asia*, p.120.

⁵³ Ved Kumari, Op.Cit, p.117

⁵⁴ Ibid,

⁵⁵ Ibid,

⁵⁶ Ibid,

⁵⁷ S. C. Ray, Op.Cit, p.256.

⁵⁸ Damodargupta at one place informs us that the clothes had become somewhat yellow by using of *kesara*.

of her status applied *sindura* or vermilion on the parting of her hair to differentiate herself from the virgins and the widows. The widows did not apply *sindura* or vermilion.

Footwear:

The use of leather shoes⁵⁹ and wooden sandals⁶⁰ has been mentioned in the contemporary literature. Kshemendra refers to a particular type of shoe known as peacock shoe (*mayuropanat*)⁶¹ which was very popular. Alberuni also tells us about the use of shoes to cover their feet by the Indians.⁶²

Conclusions:

To conclude we can say that the sources related to the present theme are voluminous which provide us with a lot of information about the garments, worn both by the people. On the basis of information provided by sources, we can say that people were very careful and sensitive about their dressing. They not only cared for their own dresses but also paid attention to the clothes of Gods that were worshipped. A huge number of clothes were offered to them and the poor. Needless to say, it seems that women were found more engaged in adhering themselves to decoration and dressing in comparison to men. Every group of people had their own dress code be it poor, rich, labourers, merchants, kings etc

⁵⁹Ibid, Vol.II, BK VIII, v.137.

⁶⁰ Kshemendra's, *Narmamala*, Kashmir texts and Series, No.40, Poona,1923, p.13.

⁶¹ Sachau, Op.Cit., p.181.

⁶² Ibid.