

Costumes and adornment of ancient dancers: an archaeological study based on dancing figures of Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Costumes and adornment are major components which express the cultural identity of a dance style or a tradition. A set of clothes, ornaments, make-up and hairstyles including masks and occasionally dance implements of a dance item can be defined as 'costumes and adornment'. Although the costumes of present dancing traditions of Sri Lanka have sufficiently been discussed, costumes of ancient dancers were rarely analyzed. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the designs and types of costumes and related adornment of ancient dancers.

Methodology

The study is limited to Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods considering it as the early historic period of Sri Lanka. Dancing figures dated from 2nd century AD are examined through detailed and comparative analysis methods.

Results and Discussion

Garment

Outfits for upper body and lower body are discussed separately.

Lower garment

Four major designs for lower garment can be identified as:

- i. *Long cloth up to ankle*: Two different types of this design can be seen. The first one is a

long cloth covering the entire legs with a straight front opening (fig.1). This opening may be designed to allow the legs more freedom to move. Though there is no evidence for the backside of the design, the similarity to dress of the present Ves dancers called 'Ulludaya' can be identified. The second type is a long cloth with a curved front opening (fig.2). Only two examples have been found for this type. The design is correlated to dress in the Indian Odissi dance tradition.

- ii. *Folded dhoti*: Half of the cloth is folded and tightens up to knee length for one leg and let loose up to ankle for the other (fig.3). Lower garments of the male and female parts of Ardhanārīśvara image together represent this design. This can be identified as a creative dress and can be seen in the present creative dances in Sri Lanka.
- iii. *Short skirt*: A short skirt without opening is the third design (fig.4). This type is loosening enough to move legs more freely.
- iv. *Tight short dhoti*: The tight dhoti was lengthening above

the knee (fig.5). This type of dress is represented in the traditional Natarāja images.

A special design of an outfit which is differing from above discussed types can be identified in female dancing figure of Dedigama elephant lamp. She is wearing a dhoti up to calf length and a well pleated frill is attached to the front of it. The design has close similarity to the dress of present Bharata Nāṭyam dance tradition. Dhoti and the frill called 'Visiri' of the Bharata Nāṭyam can be clearly identified.

Upper garment

The bust of the majority of male dancers seems to be unclothed. It can be identified that the female dancers might have worn a transparent blouse with sleeves and a neck or left bare. Uncompressed breasts may be evidence of a nude bust. The specified tighten breasts and the drawn lines below the breasts can be identified as evidence to a worn transparent blouse.

Ornaments

Although the literary sources have recorded a long list of ornaments,

very few of them are depicted by dancing figures. Ornaments like hair and head ornaments, ear ornaments, necklaces, varied bangles, *kuchadāma*, *Udarabanda* and ornaments for legs can be identified.

Head ornaments

Headbands, headgears and hair ornaments were used as head ornaments. The types of headgears (traditionally called *makuta*) namely *jatāmakuta*, *kirītamakuta* and *karanda makuta* (Rao, 1914:27-30) can be clearly identified.

Ear ornaments

Both male and female dancers wore ear ornaments. Three major types can be identified. The first type is the ear ornament made in the form of the mythical *makara* or in form of a cobra called respectively the *nakra* or *makara* and *sarpa kundala* (ibid: 24,25). This type hangs down from the hole of the ear lobes and was worn by male dancers only. Second type is a cylinder shaped ornament which was thrust into the dilated hole of the lobes. Both male and female dancers had worn them and can also be seen in *vāmana* figures.

Third type is a circular ear-ring similarly to traditional *patra kundala*, *sankapatra kundala*, *ratna kundala* or *kundala vālikā* (ibid). This is also called *tādanka* or *tōdu*.

Necklaces

Necklaces varied by its shape and length can be identified. Necklets, neckbands, string with a pendant or three beads can be seen often. The designs were excessively different from each other.

Bangles

Three types of bangles including armlets can be identified. The first one is common bangles worn on the lower arm called *valaya*. The second type is the round armlets (worn in upper arm) called *amgada*. The third type is the flat jeweled ornament wearing on biceps of upper arm called *kēyura*. One or more of these types had been worn by both male and female dancers.

Kuchadāma

The belt going round the hip and the zone employed to support and keep in position the breast of female figures is called *kuchadāma* or *kuchabanda* (ibid:23). While the

ornament was restricted to women, a painting of a dancer from *Tivanka* image house and later a wood carving of *Panavitiya ambalama* are evidence that men were wearing such an ornament. Considering the close similarity to chest ornament of *Ves* dancers called *avulhara*, the ornament might be the earlier stage of it.

Udarabanda

The ornament which was worn at the junction of the thorax and the abdomen is called *udarabanda* (ibid). Varied designs of this can be seen. Only male dancers wore them.

Leg ornaments

Anklets and *nūpura* can be identified as leg ornaments. The ankle size ring which was worn above the ankle bone called anklets while the *nūpura* was an elongated hollow ring with small metal balls inside to tinkle. It is similar to the present ornament called *cilambu*.

Dancing implements

Implements for the dance in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods are rarely identified. Only two instances of holding a shawl and a *trisūla* as implements have

found yet. Players who were depicted in dancing postures could be evidence of using musical instruments as dancing implements. *Atata* or *ātata*, *vitata* and *ghanaya* dances which were practiced in traditional dances of Sri Lanka are example for musical instruments as dancing implements.

Conclusion

Varied types of dancing costumes including four major designs for lower garment were identified. Costumes alone did not exhibit the identity of the dance style. But it can be inferred that the design and the type of costume were dependent on the dance item or event. It was identified that the jewellery which was worn by dancers did not vary from the ornaments of royal and elite classes of the contemporary era.

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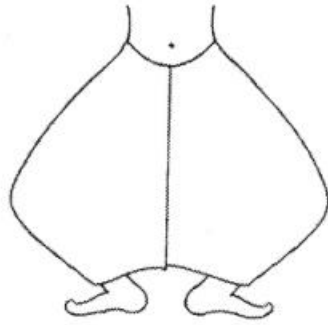


Fig. 1

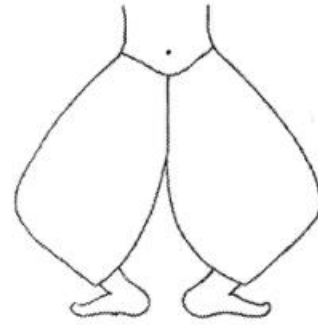


Fig. 2

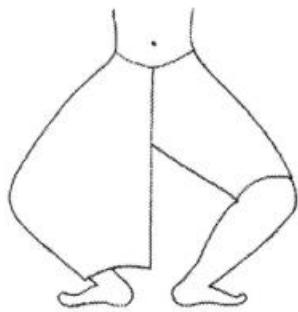


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

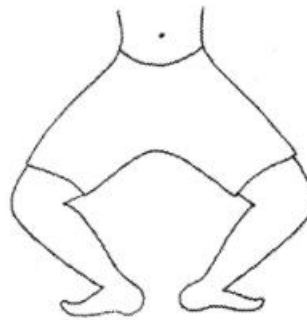


Fig. 5