

THE ATTIRE AND ORNAMENTATION OF ANDHRA PEOPLE GLEANED FROM THE TRAVELLERS

Dr. J. CHALAPATHI RAO

Assistant Professor, Department of History,
Kasthurba College for Women, Villianur, Puducherry- 605 110
Email: janjalichalapathirao@gmail.com

Abstract

Dress is being worn for warmth in all civilizations in the world. It may be treated as a second skin, because it covers the body like a house and gives shelter for human being to protect from cold, dirt, heat and rainfall. There was an adage says that “the body is the shell of the soul, and dress the husk of that shell”. Dress is not only meant for protection but also to enhance the appearance of the wearer which proclaims his place in society that indicates rank, occupation, age, gender, place of origin, conjugal status and religion. Dressing is a secondary human character even though it enhanced the dignity of a person. In every land and every period of history the way of people dress styles were influenced by various factors and conditions like social, political, economic, religion and geography. The way of attire is different from male to female and it is also true in the case of ornamentation, jewelry and forms of body decoration.

The hot climate of Deccan or South Indians not necessitates much clothing like Westerns. When the travellers visited India in general and particular in Andhradesa depicted the insufficient or lack of dress, ornamentation and decoration of natives. The present paper has been made an attempt and focuses the light on travel accounts which referred the dress of both Hindu and Muslim women as well as men, coiffure of women, ornaments of men and women, decoration of women.

Key words: Attire, Coiffure, Travellers, Decoration, Ornamentation

Introduction

Attire in general means covering, or clothing and accessories for the human body. Dress is being worn for warmth in all civilizations. It may be treated as a second skin, because it covers the body like a house and gives shelter for human being to protect from his environs. There was an adage says that “the body is the shell of the soul, and dress the husk of that shell”. Dress is not only providing protection but also to enhance the appearance of the wearer which proclaims his place in society that indicates rank, occupation, age, gender, place of origin, conjugal status and religion. Dressing is a secondary human character even though it enhanced the dignity of a person. In every land and every period of history the way people dress styles were influenced by various social, political, economic, and geographic conditions. It is also true in the case of ornamentation, jewelry and forms of body decoration. The hot climate of Deccan or South India did not necessitate much clothing. When the travellers visited India in general and particular in Andhra depicted the dress of both Hindu and Muslim men as well as Hindu and Muslim women, coiffure of women, ornaments of men and women, decoration of women and children outfit.

Study area

The study area consists of the three Telugu speaking geographical regions namely Coastal Andhra or Northern Circars, Rayalaseema or Ceded Districts and Telangana or Nizam territory are traditionally known as Andhradesa. The area of study is concentrated mainly on the accounts of the travellers who visited India in general and particular in Andhra depicted the wearing of dress, ornamentation and decoration of natives as preserved in their accounts from the late medieval to the early modern period.

Dress

The travellers' accounts shed true and unvarnished light on the costume, coiffure and ornamentation of Indians as they viewed. Thomas Bowrey accentuated about the attire that the garments of the Gentus (Telugu people) were very thin suitable enough for the climate in which they live in, but not at all fashionable.¹ For instance the Anonymous

author clearly depicted the Andhra male style of covering their private part with a small single cloth, locally known as *gochi*, during the daytime hard labour in the scorching sun heat whereas covering their lower portion with a long cloth perhaps a *pancha* or *lungi*, from waist to knees, at other times.² Niccolo Manucci was more specific while describing a labourer while working. He informs that they bound a cloth round their head so as to protect their cranium; a small cloth of an ordinary napkin size (*gochi*) was attached to a little string attached to their waist (known as *molatradu*) to cover ‘the parts of the body that natural modesty requires to be concealed’.³ Abbe Dubois gave an accurate account of the simple dress of the common people more specifically the dress of an agricultural labourer or the poorer class. They used a single piece of uncut cloth of about three yards long and one in width which was the only apparel wrapped round the loins, one end passes between the thighs, and is fastened behind, while the other end, after being cast into several folds in front. Bathing gives little trouble with such a garment. They maintained another similar cloth for a change over which was used to spread round the shoulders if needed.⁴

Manuci also informs that the people also use another cloth bound round the body (*pancha* or *lungi*) ‘which serves in the day-time as a garment and at night as a bed’⁵ which can be observed now a days in the rural areas of Andhra. However those who were employed or interaction with the ruling class usually wore *cabayas* (a long coat or tunic) in the Muslim style.⁶

Methwold says that both the grown up sexes were clothed ‘devoutly and civilly’. The women fully cover their body with a cloth whereas the men wrapped it downwards from their waist while covering their upper portion with a white calico cloth round their shoulders. Their hair was bound up. They put on earrings and necklaces made of precious metals.⁷

The attire of Hindu and Muslim Women

The Anonymous author mentions that women of Andhra was in the habit of covering their body with a six yards long saree (12 cubits long and 2 cubits broad), which was tied round the waist and brought over the shoulder.⁸ Niccolao Manucci calls one end of the saree as *pane* (*punjam*) instead of *pyta* was thrown over the shoulders or the head

when speaking to a person of any position but when they go to the well or a spring to fetch water and when at work in their houses, they keep the whole *pane* (*punjam*) bound round the waist and thence upwards are naked.⁹ Abbe Dubois adds one more information regarding the part of the saree (*pyta*) that the cloth passes over the head, shoulders and breast and covers the upper portion of the body. He further adds that in some parts of South India they wear a sort of jacket, which does not reach so high as the shoulders.¹⁰ The Anonymous author curiously observes that some of the women “wear a small bodice, fitting closely under the arms and breasts, where is fastened and reaching below the elbows, leaving the body naked from the breasts to the navel.

Pietro Della Valle elsewhere refers that the Muslim women were very partial towards red coloured clothing. He also remarks that the Muslim women covered their faces with white veils when they go along the city on foot or on horseback as the custom which need not when they go on closed coaches.¹¹

The attire of Nobles

Niccolo was a keen observer of the local customs than other foreign travellers. Apart from describing the apparel of the common people, he describes the dress of the rich and the nobility belonging to Hindu and Muslim social groups though specifically not mentioning the religious names. He informs that the nobles (belonging to Hinduism) bind their head with a scarf of gold stuff (*jari*) known as *romals*. They tied round their waist red bordered white cloth (*Pancha*) of about two yards (four cubits long as per Manucci) which come down to knees. To cover their upper portion of the body with a white shirt (Manucci’s white wrapper) that vary from caste to caste.¹² Concerning the dress of Muslim nobles, Manucci informs that they wore a sort of turban, a gown known as *cabaye*, a very tight drawers and shoes of velvet or leather. He observes that it was considered as bad manners to enter into the house or speak to a person of quality with shoes and head uncovered. However the ascetics and Brahmins were exempted as they tonsure their head and keep a little tail (*pilaka*) respectively.¹³ According to Abbe J.A. Dubois many wear a turban consisting of a long piece of fine cloth, sometimes twenty yards in length, by one in breadth and with this they encircle the head in many folds. Concerning the people who

were employed in the service of the Europeans or of the Muslims wear a long robe of muslin or very fine cloth besides their ordinary dress in imitation of the Muslims which formerly unknown in the country. He curiously noticed that the Brahmins differentiated themselves from others by fastening it to the left side instead of the right as practiced by others.¹⁴

European influence

Abbe Dubois noticed European influence on native dressing. Since Europeans manufactures have become general in the country, many Brahmins and other Hindus have bought themselves a piece of scarlet. According to him many were using a piece of woolen cloth, to swathe themselves in during the night or in the cool of the morning.¹⁵

Coiffure of women

Niccolao Manucci informs that the girls from the age of twelve and upwards allow their hair to grow long up to that age they wear only a small tail of hair on the top of the head, like that of the little boys.¹⁶ Dubois remarked that Indian women were having beautifully black hair. They apply oil for a sleek and glossy appearance of the hair. Describing the coiffure of women he stated that they separate the hair 'into two equal clusters from the forehead to the crown, one on the right and the other on the left' and 'unite them together behind and rolling them up in a particular way form a copious bunch which is fixed over the left ear'. The hair style was decorated with sweet scented flowers and trinkets of gold.¹⁷ Methwold noticed that the men of Andhra also grow long hair like the women.¹⁸

Ornamentation

The ears of both the sexes of Hindus were pierced to wear ear-rings, of a larger or smaller size and of different shapes, according to the custom.¹⁹ Methwold notices that the men had 'in their ears rings of gold, with small pearls, and about their necks a chain of *ginetra* or silver, for few can attain unto gold'.²⁰

Many instances can be gleaned relating to the women ornamentation in the travelogues. They describe the feminine jewelry from top to toe. Concerning the ornamentation of ears, the women decorate their ears according to her degree or her wealth. Some fix a little golden trinket at the middle of the ear for which precious stones were attached, whilst others fix this ornament to the upper part of the cartilage. The poor people have small pendants of little value dangling at each ear.²¹ Pietro Della Valle informs that the pendants they wore were sufficiently enormous with a circle of gold or silver at their ears. ‘The diameter whereof is oftentimes above half a span and this made of a plate two fingers broad and engrave with sundry works’.²² Niccolao Manucci curiously observes that the holes of the ears were so large that the ears droop almost to the shoulders.²³ In many parts the women wear nose stud or nose ring suspended through a little hole purposely bored at the extremity of the nostril. Though Dubois mentioned that they wear it to the right side of the nose, it may be seen on the right side quite frequently as it varied from caste to caste as per the custom. Dubois curiously informs that the nose ring hangs sometimes as low as the under lip,²⁴ which can be seen in northern Andhra districts even today generally known as *bulaki*. Bowrey also informs that the Gentus wear in their noses a ring or pendant of gold or silver. Curiously he observed that the females had very large holes cut in the ear, wherein they wear very large rings like to small hoops not as pendant, but hoops surrounded with the skin of the ear. “When they are young, they have small ones made of palmero leaf push in and so as thy increase on age, larger, esteemed so much the more beautiful”.²⁵

Many of the women were seen with finger rings of gold or silver studded with precious or semi precious stones.²⁶ The travelogues inform that the women various kinds of ornaments to the arms. They were manufactured in either gold or silver and of various shapes according to the fashion and the caste. The bracelets were sometimes formed globular and hollow and more than an inch in diameter, while others was flat up to two inch breadth of more than a pound weight each. Dubois seems to have confused while mentioning that “some wear them round the wrist and others above the elbow”.²⁷ In fact the first variety is known as bangles or *gajulu* and second one is known as *vankilu*. Buchanan also mentions that women wore bangles as a mark of delicacy and beauty, which were passed through the hands.²⁸ He further observes that every well-dressed girl has a

number of glass bangles rings which break frequently. Many of the women were seen with finger rings of gold or silver studded with precious or semi precious stones. They also wear bracelets of massy gold of more than a pound weight each.²⁹ The ornaments of silver were appropriated to the arms but more commonly to the legs and feet and each toe has its particular ring (*mettelu*), 'as broad above as to conceal the whole toe'.³⁰ Dubois describes various types of ornaments adorned to the neck. He informs that round their necks were hung several chains of gold or silver and strings of large beads of gold, pearls, coral and glass according to the ability of the wearer. Some had collars (now called choker) of gold and inch broad in which set with rubies, topazes, emeralds and other precious stones as per the fancy of the wearer.³¹ Pendants are of different sorts and shapes were suspended to the centre of the chain to add beauty. Some wear round their necks gold chains, or a species of chaplets of pearls which descend to the bosom.³²

John Frayer noticed during his visit to Masulipatnam "The Women are manacled with chains of silver (or Fetters rather) and hung with earrings of gold and jewels. Their Noses stretched with weighty jewels, rings of gold on their toes. Their waist a painted clout, over their shoulders they cast a mantle. Their hair tied behind their head which both in men and women are naturally very long; a top a coronet of gold beset with stones. They completely bodied and so flexible".³³

Decoration of women

Concerning the decoration of women Dubois observes that they keep a vermilion circle of an inch in diameter of on the middle of the forehead, of red, black, or yellow colours called *pottu*. They frequently rub the face, legs and all the parts of the body that are exposed with turmeric mixed with water.³⁴ They also apply black the borders to the eye-lashes known as *katuka*.³⁵ The practice of tattooing was also noticed among the Indian women by Dubois on the arms with various figures and flowers and not in frequently on chin and cheeks. These marks were never effaced and continue imperishable on the skin during life.³⁶

Children are stark naked

The Anonymous author notices that children up to the age of three to five years both boys and girls sometimes run about stark naked which was concurred by Dubois.³⁷ The girls had a plate of silver or gold metal suspended so as to conceal in some measure their nakedness known as *siggu billa*. On the other hand the boys had little bells hung round the waist, or some similar device attached to the little belt with which they are girt.³⁸ Niccolao Manucci also informs that “the children -- carry from birth to seven years of age little bells on their legs, either of gold or silver and a little chain of the same metal round the waist. As for the rest, they are no more covered than when brought into the world”.³⁹

John Frayer observed that most of the Hindus go round with a barefoot while the Muslims shod with sandals.⁴⁰ Similarly Manucci states that the women wear nothing on the feet, not even princesses and queens.⁴¹

Conclusion

. In every land and every period of history the way people dress styles were influenced by various social, political, economic, and geographic conditions. Attire in general means covering, or clothing and accessories for the human body. Dress is not only providing protection but also to enhance the appearance of the wearer which proclaims his place in society that indicates rank, occupation, age, gender, place of origin, conjugal status and religion. The travellers accentuate about the attire that the garments of the Gentes (Telugu people) were very thin suitable enough for the climate in which they live in, but not at all fashionable. Men at work in the field used a single piece of cloth which is called Gochi and in the rest of the time as well as at night commonly locals used Pancha or Lungi. Women wore a single cloth which length six meter, is called saree. The girls from the age of twelve and upwards allow their hair to grow long up to that age they wear only a small tail of hair on the top of the head. The hair style was decorated with sweet scented flowers and trinkets of gold. The men of Andhra also grow long hair like the women. The ears of both the sexes of Hindus were pierced to wear ear-rings. Concerning the decoration of women they keep a vermillion on the middle of the forehead. Children up to the age of three to five years both boys and girls sometimes run about stark naked. The girls had a

plate of silver or gold metal to conceal their nakedness known as *siggu billa*. On the other hand the boys had little bells hung round the waist.

References

1. Thomas Roe and John Fryer, *Travels in India in the 17th century*, Asian Educational services, New Delhi, Madras, 1993, p. 32.
2. W.H. Moreland, (Ed.), *Relations of the Kingdom of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*, The Hakluyat Society, London, 1931, Anonymous Relations, pp. 76-77.
3. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci, Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India 1653- 1708, Vol – III*, John Murray, Albemarle street, London, published by Government of India, 1907, Niccolao Manucci, vol iii pp. 39- 40.
4. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, A Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India; and of their Institutions, Religious and Civil*, J. Higgin Bothams, London, Madras, 1862, p. 150.
5. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, pp. 39- 40.
6. W.H. Moreland, (Ed.), *Anonymous Relations, Op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.
7. W.H. Moreland, (Ed.), *Relations of the Kingdom of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*, The Hakluyat Society, London, 1931, *Methwold Relations*, pp. 26- 27.
8. One end of the saree or *pyta* was generally brought over the left shoulder among the women of majority of communities. The present researcher noticed bringing the *pyta* over the right shoulder very rarely among the women belonging to Chakali (washerman), Yanadi etc. communities. However the Anonymous author mentions that the Telugu people bring it over the right shoulder.
9. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
10. Abbe Dubois considered it as a foreign custom borrowed from the Muslims. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 161.
11. Edward Grey, (Ed.), G. Havers, (Tr.), *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India, Vol. I*, Hakluyt Society, London 1892, pp. 44-45.
12. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, pp. 38- 39.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
14. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 150.
15. *Ibid.*
16. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
17. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 162,
18. W.H. Moreland, (Ed.), *Methwold Relations, Op. cit.*, p. 26.
19. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 151.
20. W.H. Moreland, (Ed.), *Methwold Relations, Op. cit.*, pp. 26- 27.
21. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 156.
22. Edward Grey, (Ed.), G. Havers, (Tr.), *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India, Vol. I*, Hakluyt Society, London 1892, p. 45.
23. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, p. 40, Such a droop can be noticed even today in Northern Andhra parts and Madurai region of Tamil Nadu.
24. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 163.
25. Thomas Roe and John Fryer, *Op. cit.*, pp.34-35.
26. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 156.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
28. Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, Vol.- I*, Asiatic Society of India, London, 1807, p. 150,. He informs that ‘in doing this a girl seldom escapes without drawing blood and rubbing part of the skin from her hand’.
29. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 156.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

33. Thomas Roe and John Fryer, *Op. cit.*, p. 182.
34. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, pp. 156- 158.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
36. *Ibid.*
37. W.H. Moreland, (Ed.), *Anonymous Relations, Op. cit.*, pp. 76-77,; G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 163,. Dubois informs that they go perfectly naked till the age of six or seven years old.
38. G.U. Pope, (Tr.), *Abbe J.A. Dubois, Op. cit.*, p. 163.
39. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.
40. Thomas Roe and John Fryer, *Op. cit.*, p.181.
41. William Irvine, (Ed.), & (Tr.), *Niccolao Manucci*, vol iii *Op. cit.*, p. 40.