

Indian Woman as Fashion Icon

Dr. Veenus Jain

Professor, Amity Institute of Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

History makes us to believe and understand that ‘Fashion’ is something like a flamboyant act or practice that has been introduced by the West to India. However, the classic scriptures belonging to Tamil Sangam period has witnessed the procedure for make-up of women, even to the extent of process of preparing eyeliner. In addition to that, Sanskrit literature evidences about make-ups used by women of ancient India and Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana provides the details of information on the usage of make-ups in ancient times. This paper intends to provide an overview on Indian women towards fashion and its associated aspects in showing them as icons.

Keywords: Women, Fashion, Make-Ups, Temple, Culture.

Introduction

The inspiration for fashion is endless, which is more so in case of women. The cultural rich heritage of India has influences Indian fashion designers and also been a source of inspiration for international designers. The so existent fashion apparels today are either the revival of vintage patterns or enhanced versions with slight doses of modern elements within traditional fashion practices. In a bid to explore other inspirational elements, this paper is a trial for debunking Indian history only to gather the examples of heels, skirts and portable mirrors that has left enduring marks in the annals of history. The traces of their existence are not only illustrated in the sculpture, but also found in the Indian fashion archives.

High Heel Culture

The Konark Temple dedicated to Sun God (750 A.D.) has sculptures of women wearing high heeled shoes, carrying portable mirrors and wearing skirts. It is amazing to see a 750 year old sculpture in an Indian temple carved wearing high heels.¹ The figure 1 indicates the sculpture of a beautiful woman carved with high heels on both her legs. It has been observed that a strap on the ankle, which exhibits the shoe portion. In comparison with today’s modern day high heels it

¹ Ramanan, High Heels Portable Mirror See Through Skirt Ancient India, 2014 online at <https://ramanan50.wordpress.com/2015/04/29/high-heels-portable-mirror-see-through-skirt-ancient-india/>

is almost an exact match. This is not the only carving in this temple, wherein one can find women are proudly showing off their high-heeled footwear.



Figure 1²

This is absolutely incredible, because European women started to wear high heels or platform shoes as a part of their beauty display only after 1600 A.D. Moreover, this temple was built around 1250 A.D., which is 350 years before that time.³ The people from around the world have worn platform shoes for different purposes like horse riding etc., but the sculpture exemplifies that the woman wearing this to look beautiful while posing for the sculptor. The Ramalingeswara temple also known as *Ramappa gudi*, which is located 77 Km from Warangal and 157 Km from Hyderabad, shows woman wearing high heels in one of its 850 years old sculptures indicated in Figure 2.



Figure 2⁴

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLSQM8qp-Pc>

³ Fashion Modeling Began in India, 2015 online at <https://hitfull.com/pictures/pset.php?set=ancient-indian-women-fashion>

⁴ https://www.google.co.in/search?q=ramappa+temple+high+heels&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiC0_bA27XTAhVRLFAKHdxNCWwQ_AUIBigB&biw=1366&bih=

The fashionable ladies in India wore high heels 850 years ago exemplified in a sculpture at Ramappa Temple in Warangal, Telangana, India.



Figure 3⁵

The above figure indicates the sculpture at Ramappa Temple, which further exemplifies the fact that fashionable ladies in India wore high-heeled paduka. It is to be noted that Chinese lotus shoes, Japanese *okobos*, Roman gladiators or Indian *mojaris*—the fetish for stylish footwear is age-old. Societies all over the world have exhibited their culture through their couture. ⁶Furthermore, the cultural beliefs, values and traditions have always reflected upon the elements of our outer appearance and footwear is no exception. The Honourable Prime Minister of India Shri. Narendra Modi once addressed about culture and fashion at an event in Washington, wherein he mentioned ‘Skirts are a Part of Indian Culture’ to America that, it has repatriated Indian cultural property in terms of Skirts. He further cited that 13th century sculpture at Konark Sun Temple shows "figurines wearing modern fashionable girl wears skirts and carries purses"⁷

Portable Mirror

The mirrors are commonly used as aids to personal grooming of appearance in terms of fashion and decoration. The portable mirrors are available in various types: handheld, mobile, fixed or adjustable. The mirrors have been available in small sizes, so as to carry with them and ranging to full body sized.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Adavi Poorvi, A History of Culturally Inspired Shoes-Then and now, 2015, online at <http://www.india.com/lifestyle/a-history-of-culturally-inspired-shoes-then-and-now-322644/>

⁷ Kunal Anand, June 07, 2016 Online At: <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/pm-narendra-modi-just-reminded-india-that-skirts-are-a-part-of-indian-culture-256378.html>



Figure 4⁸

The ancient Indian women were very advanced in terms of fashion because quite a few sculptures, wherein the women were shown looking at their personal hand-held mirrors are found in India. The above figure depicts a sculpture from Konark temple, where a woman is seen with a portable personal mirror. This is a picture of a sculpture from a temple that was built 750 years ago and probably women must have had personal mirrors in every household at that time. This is apt when one compares this with a modern day woman who carries a small mirror in her purse.



Figure 5⁹

The figure 5 indicates the sculpture of Chennakeshwara Temple in Karnataka. This is one of the finest examples to prove the usage of portable mirrors by women during ancient times. These gadgets are perceived as European inventions but from these carvings, it is quite possible that Indian women also carried portable mirrors many centuries ago. There are many such sculptures

⁸https://www.google.co.in/search?q=konark+temple+mirror&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit_Izu3rXTAhUCNY8KHc7bCaUQsAQIIA&biw=1366&bih=667

⁹https://www.google.co.in/search?q=konark+temple+mirror&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit_Izu3rXTAhUCNY8KHc7bCaUQsAQIIA&biw=1366&bih=667#tbm=isch&q=Chennakeshwara+Temple+mirror

of Indian women getting dolled up all over India, so it is fair to say that they focused on their beauty a lot.

Skirts

The historians intend to understand the cultural progression in ancient times. This lead to an inquisitive state for them to understand their clothing style in terms of fashion wears. This in turn paves the way to understand the fashionable clothes, whichever existed in 13th century.



Figure 6¹⁰

The figure 6 exhibits woman in tight fitting, which is seen through her wearing style of see-through Skirt with a fantastic carving. This depicts a skirt because one can see to the outline of the wear. However, we are also able to see the entire shape of her legs. This must have been sculpted by a genius, because it is very hard to carve clothing style on a stone to show both the skirt and her legs. Yet one can see the other sculptures, which showed various degrees of transparency in their clothes. For instance, this sculpture only partially showed the clothing through her legs, which implied that a variety of clothes were designed at that time. This paves the gateway to an understanding that ancient Indian women probably spent a lot of time primping and thinking fashion just like modern day women.

Suggestions

The women today are viewed as fashion icons. However, the fashion practices have been exhibited in the historical sculptures at various temples in the present study has given an understanding of cultural progression and growth in ancient times with regard to women. The clothing style, usage of mirrors, high heels etc. are all the cultural exhibits of fashion in viewing woman as an iconic image. The future researchers may engage in an in-depth study on women's traditional heritage on fashionable aspects so as to understand their contribution towards arts and crafts in beautification and fashion development.

¹⁰[https://www.google.co.in/search?q=konark+temple+mirror&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUK
Ewit_Izu3rXTAhUCNY8KHc7bCaUQsAQIIA&biw=1366&bih=667#tbm=isch&q=ramappa+temple+skirt](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=konark+temple+mirror&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit_Izu3rXTAhUCNY8KHc7bCaUQsAQIIA&biw=1366&bih=667#tbm=isch&q=ramappa+temple+skirt)

Conclusion

The women in ancient times are dwelled with fashion avenues in beautifying themselves through high-heels, mirror for make-ups, clothing styles ranging from tight wear to see-through skirts, which implied culturally women are at par with modern women in adopting to fashion aspects. The cultural transition and its associated changes over time have transcended the woman's view on fashion utility and clothing styles with contemporary view. However, women have not changed drastically over years in terms of fashioning themselves to exhibit as icons in the society. Today's woman explicitly focuses on appearance through the usage of compact and time-centric apparels, cosmetics, utilities etc. for exhibiting herself with regard to cultural progression and pseudo fashion. The study indicated an overview of some historical evidences and avenues of woman, wherein she has been regarded as an icon of fashion at ancient times.