

Outfits and Ornaments of Early Medieval Women of Rajasthan Depicted Through Temple Sculptures

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Abstract

Varahamihira had remarked that *Desanurupa bhusanavesalankara murtibih karya*¹, i.e., An image should be represented in such a way that its equipment, dress, ornaments and outward form be in agreement with the county. The images of gods, goddesses, other divinities, scenes drawn from mythology and secular life, generally depicted on the thin recessed friezes of the *vedibandha* and elsewhere on the temples portray various aspects of life. A study of these sculptures reveals to us the material life of early medieval Rajasthan and gives flashes of light on the dress, ornaments, coiffures, cosmetics of women.

Keywords

Sari, dupatta, kanchuki, kundala, katisutra, girdle. Dress is not mere clothing but an important adjunct of personality. It gives a peep into the personality of the wearer, occupation, social status and nationality as well as the climatic conditions, products, customs and manners, taste and aesthetic sensibilities of the times.

Dress

The dress of women, according to our sculptures, generally consists of a lower garment, such as sari, bhanga or lungi, and the upper garment includes the scarf (dupatta), bodice (kanchuki) and sometimes kudtas (kanchuka). Sometimes female images, both divine and human, are shown without an upper garment, for example, goddess Mahisasuramardini in the Surya temple and a lady in the Sachiya Mata temple have an undraped torso². On the other hand, in some of the representations, goddesses, apsaras and womenfolk are shown putting on kanchuka and dupatta. Modern scholars have different opinions about the bareness of the upper part of the women, and they differ in their conclusions. First, Cunningham thought that nudity conveyed no sense of indecency in India prior to the advent of Muslims; so women in sculptures and paintings naturally appear to be scantily dressed³. In this connection, Charles Fabery states, "It is difficult to believe for most Indians of today that Indian women of all classes went about bare from the waist upwards (as do the Balinese) for many hundreds of years, ... The evidence is not only overwhelming; it is absolutely conclusive. Anyone with eyes can see that in the whole history of Indian art, from the earliest times to approximately the twelfth century A.D., women are invariably shown (with the

sole exception of foreign fashions at one period) as wearing no garment to cover their breasts⁴." Dr. J.N. Banerjea has a somewhat different opinion about the nudity of women, "It could not have been otherwise, for the nudity of the upper part of the body in the case of gods and goddesses had become an iconographic tradition⁵."

The breast garment called kanchuki covers the breasts only⁶. It is a small piece of cloth which just covers the middle portion of the breasts, while the abdomen and waist are left bare. Generally, it is beautifully fastened by two long strips in front⁷. As a variation, we notice a lady putting on a bodice in a different style. It is a bit broader at the back and goes round without any knot in front or at the back⁸.

In the Pipla Devi temple, we find two figures of goddess Mahisassuramardini putting on a bodice and a dupatta. In one case, her bodice is elaborately tied in front. Its long strips are dangling down to the navel, while in the other case she is wearing a striped bodice and her dupatta is seen below here bodice. Its long flowing ends rest in the middle of the waist.

Besides the bodice, in the Sachiya Mata temple, a lady is wearing a well-shaped, tight-fitting and stitched kudta or kanchuka in place of the narrow striped bodice. It is not clear whether it is half-sleeved or sleeveless. It extends up to her joins with its sides open. The sides appear to be either embroidered or printed. It is tight and close-fitting and reveals the curves of her body.

Contemporary literature also provides various references to the dress of the ladies which was invariably used by them. The Vikramankadevacharita mentions cholika. It was one of the most important garments of women, and they used to put it on for covering their chest region. Yasasatila-kachampu also refers to the cholika, a cloth for covering the breasts of women. Rajasekhara suggests kuppasa in the Karpuramanjari, a piece of cloth worn by the ladies for covering their breasts. A piece of cloth covering the breasts of women is also mentioned in the Tilakamanjari. This Kanchuki is absolutely absent in the divine and human beings at Abhaneri.

Another important item of apparel in the upper garment was the dupatta. It was one of the most considerable and popular articles of dress. This garment was invariably used by both sexes. The dupatta, which was usually worn by women, was long and thin which could be easily arranged in different ways. Generally, it was striped and beautifully thrown over the shoulders with its ends flowing down vertically on either side of the body. There are several scenes where we notice the ladies putting on the dupatta in various ways.

The dupatta was pleated and thrown over the back of the shoulders. Its two ends passed under the arms in front and the lower ends went smoothly downwards. This mode of using the dupatta appears to have been very popular with the ladies of the region. In the Jaina temple, a lady is shown wearing a pleated dupatta in a pleasing manner. It is gracefully placed at the middle of her back and the ends are dangling down on either side of the body in front, one end passing through

her thigh and projecting back. In yet another case, the dupatta hangs in a curve about the middle of the back with the two ends flung in front and hanging down.

The divine and semi-divine figures were long sari touching to the ankle, which is loose and some times transparent and struck with their body contour.

The sari was the most important and most popular item of the dress of women. It was worn almost as it is worn now in modern Rajasthan. Our sculptures reveal that the ladies who belonged to the upper class of society always wore the sari reaching down to their feet. On the other hand, the sari of the poorer sections of the community reached either up to the knees or slightly below the knees. It was usually fastened round the waist; a part of it was converted into graceful pleats and tucked in front and the other end dangling downwards and finally thrown over the shoulders to wrap the upper part of the body. In our sculptures, the sari has been worn both in nirkachchha and sakachchha fashion. The former style is popular in North India and the latter in South India, particularly in Maharashtra.

At Osian, a lady is shown wearing the sari, the upper part of which is neatly striped and thrown over one of her shoulders. In another case there is a variation, a lady is shown putting on a beautiful bordered and tight-fitting sari. Its upper portion is striped and goes over her chest. There are certain images where we find ladies putting on a sari just as males still do in Rajasthan. It is closely clinging to both the legs with folds clearly marked throughout, both on the front part and the rear part of legs. The sari has been worn in sakachchha fashion, and both the lower ends appear to have been tucked at the back probably its upper end is fastened round the waist like a belt and forming into beautiful pleats which reach up to the ankles. Unlike the usual style of wearing the sari, here it does not cover the upper part of the body.

In some of the sculptures, ladies are shown wearing a close-fitting sari which looks like a pair of trousers. In the Sachiya Mata temple, goddess Parvati is putting on a tight-fitting sari which goes up to her ankles. It looks like a close-fitting pair of trousers. Another similar figures is noticed in the same temple.

Short-sized saris, like modern lungis, were also used. They hardly reach upto the knees but may cling to the body. A similar short-sized sari is also noticed in a sculpture in the Jaina temple, where we find a lady either trying to put on or put off such a sari, both its supper ends are in her hands.

The lahanga or ghagra was as popular as the sari with the ladies of the age represented by our sculptures. In literature, it is known as chandataka⁹. It still retains its popularity in Rajasthan. It is a pleated garment narrow at the upper end and wide at the lower. A somewhat similar type of lahanga noticed in our sculptures is sometimes plain and loose. At other times it seems tight-fitting with uniform horizontal and wavy lines at regular intervals. In some cases,



Female Dresses

we notice a loose lahanga which is embroidered with floral designs. This type of garment was usually secured by a heavy girdle. It reaches down to the ankles in both cases. The female dancer wears either a lahanga or a close-fitting sari which usually goes down to the ankles. It must have proved convenient to the dancers while performing their dances. Besides these, chamaradharims and other female attendants are also noticed putting on the same type of garment.

Ornaments

Indian women, through the ages, have always exhibited a special weakness for a variety of ornaments, and it continues even today in some form or the other. To a married Hindu woman, in particular, her 'Sohag' signified the use of ornaments on almost all the limbs of her body, from the top to the toe. It was only when she unfortunately became a widow that she threw away all her ornaments and jewellery, broke off her bracelets (churis), and wiped out the vermilion mark from her head.

Women were normally accustomed to put on ornaments from their very early years. The ears of both boys and girls and the nose of the latter only, were pierced at a very tender age, and ornaments of gold, silver, brass or other metals according to the economic status of their parents, were thrust through the pierced holes, which grew wider and wider as the years rolled on¹⁰. There was wonderful variety of women's ornaments which were used for the different limbs of the body,

e.g., head, neck, nose, ears, arms, fingers, waist, thigh, feet etc. Abul Fazl mentions thirty seven different types of ornaments, either plain or studded with jewels, for adorning the various feminine limbs.

(I) Head Ornaments

Bendas are worn by married women of all classes. Differences in social status are projected mainly by chains going round the head over the hair on each side holding the benda in place. Those of the affluent classes have multi-stranded, highly elaborate gold or silver chains with beads or pearls, gold pieces and precious stones for holding the benda, while those of modest means use simple strings or wires to support their bendas.

The benda proper was round or arched or oval. All these types are highly ornate, usually with a series of concentric rings of beads or pearls along the margin. Often the circlets radiated from a large central bead, pearl or gem.

Teeka is another important ornament for married women. It is a beautifully designed ornament made up of a cluster of beads, precious stones, pearls, etc., with metal pieces. The teeka hangs on the forehead, or just above it, and is held in position by a long beaded chain, passing across the middle of the head (simanta), its end being inserted in the big bun at the back with the help of a loop.

Borlas or kesaphulas, mentioned earlier, are globular studs variously ornamented and inlaid with beads, pearls and other semi-precious stones in various designs worn by married women.

The females of Abaneri are wearing a headdress which is more elaborate and luxurious and rakdi is most common head ornament. Rakdis are highly ornate, usually with a series of concentric rings of beads or pearls along with margin. Often the circlets radiated from large central bead, pearl or gem, is round in shape. An unique kind of rakdi is found in female head ornaments which are having long suspended strings with small pendants in the centre. The chain of rakdi is made of fine strings of beads or metals twisted together and tied on the back of their heads. The mang-bendi or ornament wearing on the parting like rakdi, is worn by the female deities of Abaneri. It is oval or trefoil in shape and gems studded in the centre and lined with pearls. The similar kind of rakdi is still in vogue among the females of Rajasthan.

(ii) Ear Ornaments

In the early periods of Indian civilization, men and women considered large ear ornaments, inserted in the lobes, as an aid to personal beauty.

The custom of perforating the ear-lobes and ears for the insertion of various types of ear ornaments is very old in India, and it is still current among the women, though in a much restricted manner; but in ancient and mediaeval times it was common to both men and women. The ceremony of karnavedha (perforation of the ear) is one of the important samskaras in the life of a twice-born, and the wearing of kundalas was once regarded as one of the privileges of a brahmacharin (student initiate) and of a grhastha householder.

Our sculptures also bear the evidence of ear ornaments ; but these are not so numerous as we notice in the Khajuraho groups¹¹. At Osian, ear ornaments are not as varied as the other ornaments.

A majority of the ear ornaments belong to the ring or kundala type. We have a broad crescent-shaped earring with a design of arches on the surface, suspended from the ear-lobe, or having a wire suspender. A similar but plain earring hangs from the ear-lobe. A plain circular earring, or an engraved oval earring, or a rectangular earring hangs from the ear-lobe. A thin spiral wire, winding like a watch-spring passing through the ear-lobe, is also observed. An oval-shaped earring with the centre embossed and the margin beaded all along, and fixed on the lobe has been noticed; so also a small round plate with a beaded design or beads on the surface is fixed on the ear-lobe. It is probable that these ornaments were fixed on the lobes with screwed plus and nuts as today.

A common variety of the kundala was a ring made of a cylindrical tube, and it was fixed on the ear-lobe, as in the last two ornaments described above. A variation of this is found with a central piece in the ring.

The hanging earrings are known as kundalas and the fixed ones are called karnabhusana, now called karnaphulas.

The kundala is a most common type of ear ornament at Abaneri which is suspended in the ear lobes. Both male and females are having identical type of kundalas and there is no gender discriminations. Two kinds of kundalas i.e. plain and beaded, are noticed in the male divine figures of Abaneri. The plain kundalas are made of round hollow metallic rod and it is channeled or plain in shape, is most common type. The beaded or embedded ratna-kundala are worn by gods like Siv, Ardhanarisvara, Yoga-Narayana, Lakshmi-Narayana, Balarama, Harihara etc.

(iii) Neck Ornaments

Necklaces were worn by both male and female figures, the difference between the two occasionally being an extra pendant hanging from a long chain between the breasts and reaching up to or below the navel in the female. Compared to other ornaments, necklaces show a wide range of variation in our sculptures. Basically two main types can be distinguished: (i) short necklaces, worn close to the neck, and (ii) long necklaces, worn low down on the chest. Necklaces are either short or long, and single, double or treble stringed.

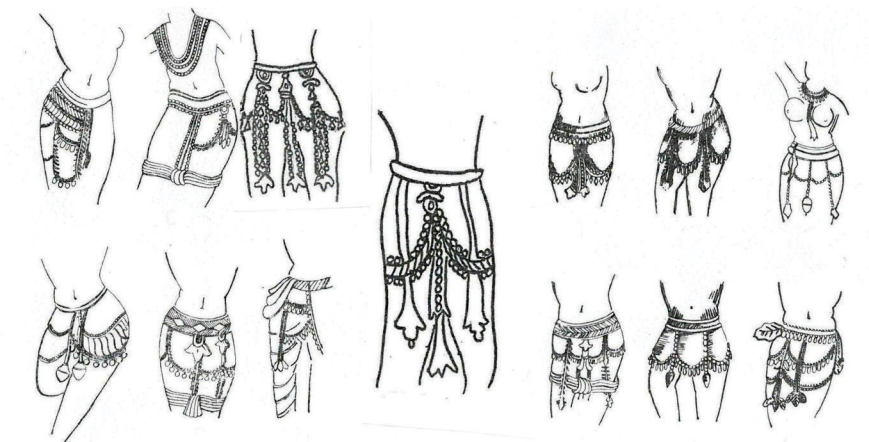
The neck ornaments including ekawali, torque, haras are common for all male and females. The female hara of Abaneri are long and dangling between breasts. These long haras are made of beads and having long chain with pendant or lalantika in the centre. The chain of hara is as long as up to the waist and navel. A figure of Durga, Mahishasuramardini and nayika are wearing this kind of elaborate hara with circular locket or lalantika. The lalantika worn by the goddesses are spoke-wheel type tagged with the help of loop.

(iv) Arm Ornaments

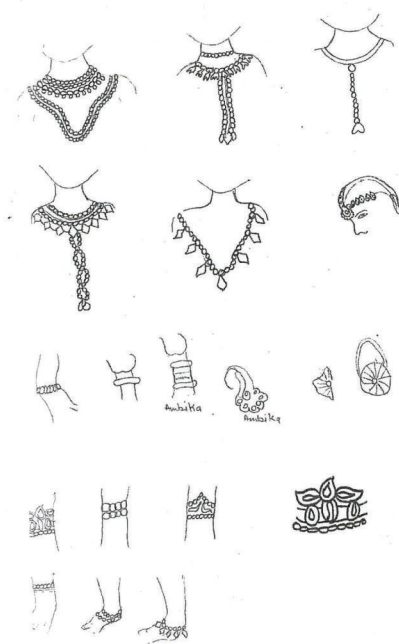
On the upper arm women are wearing armlets and bracelets on the wrist. They are worn by both men and women. Some of women are wearing simple armlets consisting of beads of various sizes. A number of beads string on as cord and bud shaped appendages projected from it. Some armlets are decorated with beaded borders, circlets concentric and floral designs. These armlets are also known as keyura.

(v) **Girdle (mekhala)**

Mekhala, Katisulra was worn by men and women of all classes. It keeps the lower garment in position. In the females, girdles with their sundry



Necklaces and Girdles



Necklaces and Arm Ornaments

attachments greatly served to accentuate the curves of the body and the slimness of the waist. In sculptures of Rajasthan all three components of this ornament, viz., (i) the waist-band or belt, (ii) the tassels, and (iii) the various looped chains are present.

(vi) Anklets

Padavalaya and nupura are common leg ornaments for male and female of every class of society. The nupura worn in ankles instead while padavalaya worn slightly above the toe and sometimes in the toe. The padavalayas are made of simply by a hollow or solid metallic rod and both ends are soldered together. The similar kind of padavalaya locally known as kadula is still in vogue among the females of Rajasthan.

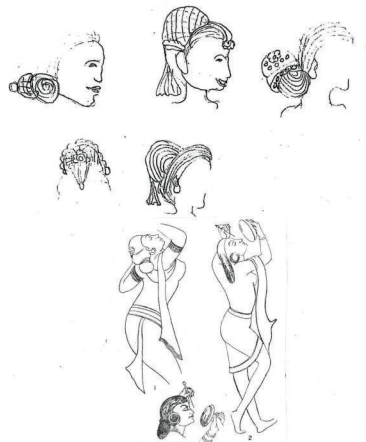
Hair Styles

It has rightly been remarked by a scholar that India is a land of hair styles¹². In Rajasthan sculptures we find a very large variety of hair-coiffures, the ladies surpassing men in elaborate, attractive and varied arrangements.

The ladies combed their hair backwards, neatly turned them half way and twisted them or tied them with a ribbon or beaded string or knotted them on the nape of the neck, sometimes hair were arranged in separate strands and bedecked with beaded strings and jewels, curling, coiling, combing, bejewelling, looping, plaiting, rolling, stranding, stressing etc. were the different methods adopted for the hair-dos.

Cosmetics

The custom of decorating the forehead with different types of marks (tilaka), which persists to date from ancient times, can be seen at Osian in the figures of fanners on the stairs leading to SMT. It was, however, not so popular at Osian as at Khajuraho. Vermilion (sindura) was used by married women as even now for adorning their simanta, the line of the parting of the hair. This can be seen at Osian on VT-5, DK-1 and HH-1. Just like the modern women, the suras-sundar is depicted on Osian temples must have been using scented dust



Hair Style and Cosmetics

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and powder for their faces. Samaraicakaha, a work of c eighth-ninth century A.D., refers to various cosmetic materials¹³. Collyrium was applied to the eyes, and perhaps the lips were also stained. Some fashionable ladies seem to have coloured the soles of their feet (and perhaps the palms of their hands also) with alaktaka and henna powder (mehandi) as evidenced by pedicuring apasarases on VT-4, DK-4, DK-2, etc. Mirror is an indispensable adjunct of makeup. Ladies with mirrors can be seen on ST-3, HH-1, ST-2 etc. Toilet-attendants are also depicted on VT-5 (with Subhangini) and VT-4 (with nupura-typing dancer).

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