

## The Imperial Costumes of Mughal Era

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### Abstract

*In each and every civilization costumes are the main sources to determine the polity, social status and hierarchy in any society. The Costumes help to determine economic status too and to some extent culture and religion also.<sup>1</sup> The other important factor which determines the nature of costumes is the climatic conditions of the region. Costume is a set of clothes of a particular country or historical period. Costumes are the mirror of civilization. The different stages in a civilization urban, rural, tribal, feudal or industrial can be easily observed with the help of dress. The dress of the Mughals like their fine art and architecture was not completely confined to one race. The contemporary culture like that of Muslims or Hindus, Persians or Turks had influenced its culture. This great combination of different cultures contributed a lot to the development of the culture of the Mughals.*

**Key words:** 1. Costume 2. Fabrication 3. Aristocracy 4. Vogue 5. Gorgeous 6. Contemporary 7. Gossamer 8. Influence 9. Legacy 10. Embroidery

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

**Dr. K. D. Sharma\***,  
**Swati Sharma\*\***  
“The Imperial  
Constumes of  
Mughal Era”,  
RJPSSs 2017, Vol. 43,  
No.1, pp. 233-241  
[http://anubooks.com/  
?page\\_id=2012](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=2012)  
Article No. 31 (RJ1907)

## **Introduction**

Costume design is the fabrication of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or performer. Costume is specific in the style of dress particular to a nation, a class, or a period. The most basic designs are produced to denote status, provide protection or modesty, or simply decorate a character.<sup>2</sup> Costume design is a tool to express an art form, such as a play or film script, dance piece. Costumes may be for a theatre, cinema or musical performance but may not be limited to such. In many civilizations costumes reflect something more than mere clothing. Costumes reflect mainly the structure of society.

## **A Historical Perspective of Mughal Costumes**

When we talk about the clothing of Mughal rulers in India we cannot forget that they had their roots in Central Asia and were the descendants of Timur and Chenghiz Khan. They had their cultural roots in Samarkand and Mongolia. The weather of Central Asia is quite cold because it lies in the North. Therefore woolen clothing was the necessity of that climate. People in Central Asia were making and wearing woolen clothes since 400 B.C. which was necessary to stay warm and dry in cold weather. From 500 BC Scythian people and Mongols living in Central Asia wore robes and pants by spinning hemp or leather. Central Asian people invented pants because they were useful for men and women who spent a lot of time riding horses.<sup>3</sup> By the 1200 AD the Mongols invaded India and China, where they learned about cotton and silk clothing. After that, while some Mongol clothes were still made of hemp, others were made in the same style, but of cotton or silk. Underneath these jackets, Mongol men like earlier Scythian men, still wore hemp or cotton pants, tucked into leather boots. In winter, men wore fur vests, short fur caps and fur-lined leather, hemp or cotton hats.<sup>4</sup>

## **Costumes and designs under the Mughals**

The Mughal Imperial classes rolled in wealth and enjoyed luxurious lives. They not only maintained huge harems, built big mansions, reared up herds of elephants, horses and cattle and kept armies of domestic servants and slaves but also maintained very big costume wardrobe in general. Mughal aristocracy was known to be the best dressed people of the contemporary world with a very high

standard of living. The Indian Textile Industry was highly developed and it made use of cotton, wool as well as silk for production of clothes of many shades and hues for men's and women's wear. The skilled craftsmen produced a rich variety of material and costumes for the use by the Mughal Aristocracy.

The Mughal Emperors were very much interested in new fashions and variety in dresses. Our medieval dress impressed foreigners particularly European travelers, who have spoken in very high terms about the neat and well-fitted garments of the Mughal Imperial class. Humayun invented several kinds of new dresses. Akbar whose aesthetic taste was highly developed, employed skilled tailors to improve the style of dresses in the word-robe. Humayun and Akbar generally changed their dresses daily to match with the colour of the planet of the day. Akbar paid much attention to various stuffs like Irani, European and Mangolian articles of dressing and he had himself acquired in a short time a theoretical and practical knowledge of these. He wore garments of silk, beautifully embroidered in gold with pearls and gold Jewellery. He established imperial factories at Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur and Gujrat where skillful manufacturers even from foreign countries were employed. One thousands suits were prepared every year for the royal wardrobe where skilled tailors were employed to introduce new fashions. Jahangir also was fond of fashionable dresses which were profusely adorned with costly rubies, pearls and diamonds. His rich turban had been specially designed and decorated. Shahjahan was even more fond of gorgeous and gaudy dresses than his father. The ribbons on his garments become more spectacular and attractive. After the death of Mumtaj-al-Zamani, he wore only white suits (*Sarasar libas - Safid*) on Wednesdays, the day of her death, and throughout the month of *Dul-i-Qudah*. Puritanic Aurangzeb, however was a man of moderate tastes and habits, and he, undoubtedly, made an attempt at simplicity in matters of dressing. Although on special occasions, he also seems to have maintained the undimmed traditional grandeur of his house.<sup>5</sup>

The well-to-do classes spent lavishly on their dresses, specially designed and embroidered with golden thread. They also used fine *Kashmiri Shawls* on festive occasions. The rich sections also used silken cloth to suit their variety. Costly dresses worn at feasts or presented to the nobles and servants of the state as a mark of honour were also of a wide variety. Every season a thousand complete suits (*Saropa*, dresses from head to foot) were made for the Imperial wardrobe and were presented

to the nobles of different ranks Ain-i-Akbari mentions the thousands of robes of costly material were made in each season and 120 were always ready. The material used in the dress were usually *silk*, *doria* (striped cloth), *Zarbaft* (varieties of cloth woven by golden thread), *Tiladoz*, *Mukkeshkar*, *Kamkhwab* (cloth made of gold), *Kalabattu* and *Muslin* especially the muslin of Malwa (different fabric used for dresses) was very popular. The merchants were ordered to send it only to nobles and courtiers of the Mughal Court. The difference of the dress of royalty and nobility and middle class lay in quality, material, price and style.<sup>6</sup>

### **Dresses of the Mughal Emperors**

The number of different pieces of costume, worn by the Mughals, was about eighteen. Their form is difficult to describe. A large variety of material, cotton, silk and brocade, rich and costly was used to suit the clothing of the emperors. A detailed list of such material is given by Abul-Fazal with their prices. The number of garments for the upper part of the body was seventeen. The most favoured apparel of the Mughals before Akbar's reign, was the *Jamah*, a coat with full and tight sleeves, worn over the shoulders, reaching upto the ankles, sometimes upto the knees. It was tied usually on the right side. They also clad themselves in the *Pishwaz*, a garment of the same pattern as the *Jamah*, with this difference that it was fastened in front, in the middle of the chest. At the time of wearing, either the upper flap was fastened to the lower by means of "finely carved" gold buttons, or with buttons worked round with braids as in the uniform of the *huzzars*. Like the *Jamah* it also hung as low as the knees or the ankles. Either it had a small turndown collar or a wide and richly decorated one.<sup>7</sup> The third was the *Farji* a long cloak worn over the shoulder, open in front, but shorter than the *Jamah* or the *Pishwaz* in length. Its sleeves were either loose and long or loose and short. They generally wore it over the *Jamah* or the *Pishwaz*. It has an edging of fur round the neck during the winter, and remained plain or embroidered during the summer. *Takawchiyah*, a kind of one fold garment, became very popular during the reign of Akbar, and continued to be worn by all upto the end of our period. The *Takawchiyah* and the *Jamah* differed in style. While the *Jamah* was foreign, the *Takawchiyah* was typically Indian, originating from the costumes of the Rajputs. The *Takawchiyah* of the Rajputs was a garment with a rent skirt, its slits hanging sideways. It was tied on the left side of the chest under the arms. Its length was short, only reaching upto the thighs. Akbar combined with it some of the

characteristics of the *Jamah*. He increased its length upto the knees or even lower. He made it round skirted without slits. It was either made out of silk or cloth of gold, fine in texture, but never out of cotton. The *Qaba*, a cotton made tunic, mostly of fine muslin was worn in summer. The Indian *Qaba* was wider than the Persian one. It was a kind of gown with a long jerkin fastened to it open before and pleated from top to bottom. It had a collar “two fringes breadth high.” made out of the same stuff as the *Qaba*. It was not buttoned “on the vest” rather folded crossways over the stomach, first from right to the left and then from left to right. It was tied with ribbons two fingers broad and foot long. They were stitched in various styles. Three of them are mentioned by Jahangir, a *Qaba* with a folded collar and embroidered sleeves edging, another with a border and fringes of cloth sewn round the skirt, collars and sleeves, and the third of *Gujrati Satin*.<sup>8</sup>

Three double folded garments were in vogue too, the *Dotahi*, the *Shahajidah* or *Shast Khat* and the *Gadar*. The *Dotahi* had four fastenings (*Girahbands*) and a bordering, the *Shahajidah* was filled with cotton and executed with six ornamented stitched in one “*Girah*” of the cloth, and the *Gadar* was made longer and wider than the ordinary *Qaba*, with four Fastenings (*Girahbands*), serving the purpose of the *Postin* in Hindustan.

A quilted garment, *Qalmi* was worn when the seasons was very cold. It was donned as an over-coat, above the clothes”. It was made of the cloth of gold and other rich stuffs. The *Ulbagehah* another cloak worn over the *Jamah* or the *Pishwaz*, was short sleeved and open in front. It reached upto the middle of the body and was broadly lined with fur on the collar. On the outside were embroidered pictures of animals, such as the deer and the buck, sitting, standing or running.

The *Farghul* a garment resembling *Farji* but more comfortable and becoming scarlet in colour, either double folded or single was borrowed from the Europeans. The *Chakman* was used as a rain coat, made either out of broad cloth (*Saqarllat*), wool (suf or wax cloth) *Momjamah* containing five fastenings *girahbands*.<sup>9</sup>

The *Sozni* and the *Nimtanah*, were two more garments whose form and shape are difficult to describe. The later was probably a sort of under-garment, which at a later stage was called the *Kurtah*. The *Postin* a kind of fur coat was used

in very cold weather. The *Nadiri* a sleeveless coat, its length extending upto the thighs, with buttons in front was worn over the *Qaba*. Besides these the Shawl, brought from Kashmir, was thrown over the shoulder without a fold. Shawls were manufactured in three main varieties, the *Tus* in black and white, the *Alchah* in various colors and the *Zordozin* or *Kalabatun* worked in gold.

The lower part of body was covered generally with *Shalwar*, a kind of drawers made out of various material, plain, striped or decorated.<sup>10</sup>

### **Costumes of Mughal Imperial Women**

The Mughal ladies of aristocratic class dressed themselves in very gorgeous costumes. They were very fond of adapting the new styles of fashion and designs. *Purdah* was in vogue during the medieval period particular among the aristocratic families. It was a sign of delicacy. The Royal ladies used to wear beautiful dresses with transparent and opaque fabric in a very delicate manner. the most famous costumes used by the Mughal ladies were tight fitting *Pajama* or *Shalwar* a *Choli* or bodice to cover the breasts, and a *Peshwaz* which was usually transparent, remained open from the front, had a v-neck, and its length was up to the ankles. The shirts of women were open in front and fastened to the neck, sometimes 'v' shaped collars were also used in these shirts. These shirts were made of silk, cotton with well-furnished gold and jewels embroidery. Sometimes they used an assemblage with this shirt, which is known a *Yalek*. It was a type of long vest fastening to the ankles. The *Yalek* had a series of buttons from bosom to griddle. Sometimes it was half sleeved which may be the result of the necessity of the climate conditions of the place for their waist the women were using a waist belt which was generally two fingers wide and was embellished with precious stones. Abul Fazal also mentions about a waist belt embellished with golden bells and gold wires know as *Kati-Mekhla* or *Chhudr-Kantika*.

Nurjahan, wife of Jahangir introduced some dresses. She had introduced a new dress "*Nur-Mahlf*. It was particularly used by bride or bride groom. Nurjahan had designed the clothes in very innovative styles. She introduced a light weight dress *Dodami* (weight only two dams). Her *Panchtolia* scarf was a substitute of *Orhani*. she launched new patterns in *Badla*, Brocade, *Kinari* (Lace). She made

*Nur Mahalli* (marriage dress) that cost only 25 rupees. Khafi Khan remarks that “The Fashion introduced by Nurjahan governed the society and old ones survived only among backward towns of Afghans.”<sup>11</sup>

### Upper Garment

The dress codes for Royal Mughal ladies were the *Peshwaz*, (a Jama like garment). A female upper garment known as *Peshwaz* generally opened in front. Its length was almost up to the knees or varies according to the taste. The *Shalwar* or *Izar*. The *Burqa*, *Naqab* or *Chitragupita*. In harem Mughal women were wearing a short tight bodice tops with midriff showing ankle-length loose pants under thin long skirt and a large veil which covered their head not faces which is evident from the contemporary paintings. The *Nimtana* was another jacket worn over the dress like a vest. Gulbadan Begum in her Humayunama mentions about nine-jackets with Jewelled blase (*Nimtana*) which describing Mirza Hindal's Marriage.<sup>12</sup>

### Draped Garment

Head cover, Both Hindu and Muslim women were covering their head with an *Orhni* or *Dupatta*. Manucci describes the cloth used to cover the head was made of gold material. The *Orhani* covered the head and hung down on both sides up to the knees. It was sometimes, made of white *Calicos*. The Mughal ladies were also covering their head with a *Shawl* on *Mantilla* made of a very fine material Royal ladies were also wearing *Taq*, a cap and were covering their head with a *Lachak*, a kerchief folded crossway tied under the chin by two corners. The Mughal women used *Burqa* to cover their entire body. They also put on *Qabas* during winters. The *Qaba* was made in Kashmir. Likewise the shawl used by them were made of fine wool made in Kashmir.<sup>13</sup>

The dresses of the Begums are superb and costly, perfumed with the essences of roses, says Manucci. They changed their clothes several times a day especially in summer. The gossamer muslin that the Begums wore had such romantic names as *Ab-i-Rawan* (running water), *Shabnam* (Wight dew) and *Daft Hawa* (woven air). “They sleep in these clothes and never put them on again, but give them away to their servants.” says Manucci. While sleeping the only apparel put aside was the *Dupatta*, a cloth worn over the head, sometimes reaching down to the knees, made

of the finest Muslin and woven with gold thread. In the cold they wore a long open gown of fine wool and a woollen shawl which says Manucci, was so thin that....(it) can be passed through a small finger ring.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore Mughal women played an important role in each and every aspect of life. i.e. political economic, social or cultural, Amongst them Gulbadan Bano Begum, Nurjahan, Jahanara are notable. As mentioned above Gulbadan Begum in her Humayunnama gives us a very relevant information regarding the costumes of Mughal period. Further Nurjahan herself is attributed for doing some inventions in the field of costumes.

### **Conclusion**

Thus it is concluded that the costumes used by the Mughals were very gorgeous. The costumes of the early Mughals have some Central Asian influence as the major change in the costumes of the Mughals is marked from the age of Akbar. During the reign of Akbar the synthesis of two cultural identities was at its peak. As a result of this a number of reforms were introduced by Akbar. This change or influence in the field of culture was further increased in the reign of Jahangir. Shahjahan's reign was famous for the highly gorgeous costumes decorated with gold and silver embroidery. Where the reign of Aurangzeb is marked by a setback in almost all cultural fields. During the later Mughals this all development was shifted to the regional courts. It is evident from the contemporary costumes that the Mughal rulers themselves were taking interest in the development of different types of costumers.

This all was so influential that even today we are enjoying the legacy of Mughals in the field of costumes.

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