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Clothing Style in Western India during Mughal Period

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Abstract

This paper examines the clothing styles of Western India during the Mughal period, focusing on the significant transformations brought about by the establishment of Mughal rule and its cultural integration with regional traditions. The study highlights the influence of Persian, Hindu, and Rajput attire, particularly under the reign of Akbar, whose reforms blended Indian and Persian fashions. The paper explores various sources, including traveler accounts, paintings, and literary references, to analyze the diversity of garments worn by different social classes. Key elements of the clothing styles, such as the *jama*, *choga*, and turbans, are discussed in relation to their social and cultural symbolism. Additionally, the paper investigates the materials used in attire, such as silk, muslin, and *zarbaft*, reflecting the craftsmanship and opulence of the time. Women's clothing, including *shalwar*, *choli*, and *lehenga*, is explored in the context of both Muslim and Hindu noble attire, highlighting the role of ornamentation and head coverings in signifying status and identity. Overall, the clothing practices in Western India during the Mughal period reveal a fusion of cultural influences, showcasing the social hierarchy and the evolving urban fashion of the time.

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Introduction

Clothes, foods, and houses have stood as basic needs of human beings since ancient times. From the simple, decorative, or customized dress, the clothes of human beings in urban spaces have undergone significant changes. In this process, the climate conditions of the region, political events, and social changes of the people played a significant role in shaping the dresses and dressing styles of the people. The study of contemporary sources and paintings reveals that there is a great variation in the clothing style, jewelry items, and costumes of the people of Western India during the 16th century.

During the early 16th century, Western India was ruled by Sultans and Rajputs, but in 1573 A.D., under the leadership of Akbar, urban centres in Western India were added to the Mughal Empire. The dresses of the people in Western India have continued the practices of earlier times. With the establishment of Muslim rule in Western India, significant changes came in the style of clothing of the people belonging to various sections of this region. This period also witnessed the arrival of European trading companies into the various parts of Western India.

In this research paper, an attempt is made to present the clothing items, dressing styles, patterns, and materials preferred by higher classes in urban spaces in western India during the 16th century. The contemporary sources, traveller accounts ^[1], paintings, and literary sources contain sufficient details about the dresses and their styles in urban spaces in Western India.

During the period of the Slave, Tughlaq, Khilji, Sayyid, and Lodi periods, India had significant changes in the dressing culture. Due to the hectic migration of people, rapid urbanisation, establishment of Mughal Empire rule over Western India, and entry of European trading companies, etc., the clothing style, wearing items, material of clothes, and the style of conducting private programs such as marriages, festival events, and official hosting practices by the ruling class at their courts, or '*Darbar*', urban areas have undergone rapid changes, especially after Western India was under the Mughal Empire.

Even in the travellers' accounts of the Mughal period, like John Fryer, Pietro Della Valle, Thomas Roe, Peter Mundy and Mandelslo over their era in Western India, they have mentioned the prominence of dress as a status difference and

accordingly creating a class. Alexander Forbes, in his book '*Ras Mala*' A Hindu Annals of Western India with references to Gujarat, writes about the different types of dresses that they wore in different classes or festivals in urban centres.^[2] During the reign of Babur, the link to their homeland was strong, and there was a greater influence of Persian style of costumes during this period.^[3] The primary sources for Babur's costumes or dresses are the miniature paintings created under Akbar's patronage during the Mughal era. Therefore, there may have been an influence of the costumes of Akbar's period^[4]. The dresses that were in vogue during the reign of Babur were *futa* (bathing coat)^[5], *qara-quzi-burq* (black lamb-skin cap)^[6], *duwulgha-burq* (hemp cap)^[7], *char-qab*, *taq-band* (girdle)^[8], *jiba* (surtout)^[9], *chapan* (coat)^[10], *nimcha* (short tunic)^[11], *kiping* (rain coat).^[12] During Akbar's rule, a fusion of Hindu and Persian Muslim clothing styles emerged. Akbar was a very farsighted ruler. He rejected the traditional attire of his ancestors, as the heavy garments were impractical for India's climate. But at the same time, if we observe the things minutely, we come to the point that the changes in the costumes introduced by Akbar were also politically motivated. He was in need of the service of Hindu nobles; this is the reason that he adopted some of the Indian dressing styles, introduced some changes, and also renamed them. When Akbar reformed the Indian costumes by making the synthesis between the Indian and Persian styles, there was also an ideology behind this. The influence of

Hindu costumes and designs, mainly the Rajput elements, is well reflected through the paintings of the Mughal period.^[13] (See in Plate no. 2 where Akbar enters in Surat.).

The materials used in the dress were usually silk, *doria* (striped cloth), *zarbaft* (varieties of cloth woven by golden thread), *tiladoz*, *mukkeskar*, and *Kamkhwab* (cloth made of gold). *Kalabattu* and *muslin* (cotton fabric), especially the *muslin* of Malwa (different fabrics used for dresses) were very popular. The merchants were ordered to send it only to nobles and courtiers of the court or *Darbar*.^[14]

Western India was one of the regions of India under Mughal administration. Because of their rich history, mediaeval clothing styles have had a significant impact on the current fashion business. At that time, rich, embroidered silk was the most popular style. Indian brides continue to wear this style of dress to their wedding ceremony since it is still commonly accepted. Stylish extravaganzas were attributed to the Mughal men, unlike popular assumption. Traditionally, they wore a long over-lapping coat known as '*Jama*' with a *patka* (long piece of fine fabric) sash tied around the waist, and pajama-style pants were worn under the *Jama*.^[15] The 16th century saw its adoption as Indian clothing.^[16] The term '*choga*' describes a long-sleeved coat that is open along the front, usually down to knee-length, that were also worn. All these choices showcased some of the best craftsmanship of all time.

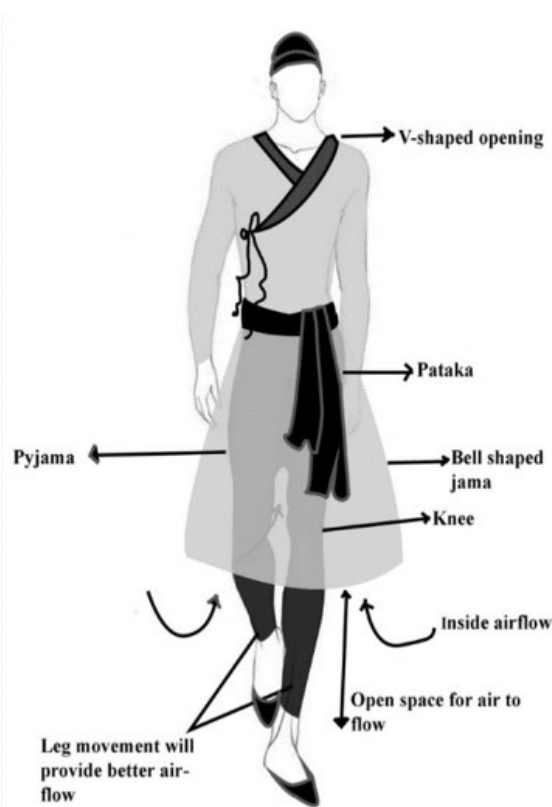


Fig 1: (Sketch of a man of distinction that detailed about the dressing items.)

The dress of Rajputs and Hindu nobility was quite different attire. They used three pieces to cover their bodies: one around the loins, the other for the head, and the third on the shoulders.^[17] These were made of velvet, satin, damaske, scarlet or white bumbast cloth. This was a typical outfit for wealthy Hindu households. The dress of a Hindu was not complete without his binding pieces of red cloth round his sleeves.^[18] However, it appears that the Hindu emperors wore clothing resembling that of Muslim aristocrats. (See in Fig. 2)

The role of *Takauchiya* was to defend the body, much like that of the *jama* or *angarakha*.^[19] It was adopted as an Indian garment in the 16th century. Indians were using it before the coming of Mughals or it was famous among the Rajputs. Abu'l Fazl says that "The *Takauchiya* is a coat without lining, of Indian form, with slits in skirt and tied on the left side His Majesty has ordered it to be made with round skirt and to be tied on the right side".^[20]



Fig 2: The two Rajputs nobles are shown wearing Indian type of *jama* with slits in the skirt or *chakdar jama*.

Amongst the learnt professions depicted, the *Ulema* and the dress code of the scholars and teachers were nearly always the same. A basic *patka* and *katzeb* were used to hold the ankle-length *jama* in place while the majority wore a long sleeved *qaba*. In the case of scholars and instructors, this might have been composed of cotton. ^[21]



Fig 3: "Portrait of Mir Musawwir in his old age" signed by Mir Sayyid Ali, C.1565. Paris, Musee Guimet.

The most distinguishing feature of the higher-class attire was the *dastar* or turban. The *dastar* was mainly used by men, which signified the religion, region of origin, and social status of a person. ^[22] There was a great variety of turbans, i.e. *Mundeel*, a turban of *muslin*, with gold stripes, spots, and ends usually worn by military officers. The *surbuttee* was another; this term is derived from the *sur*, the head, and the *bandhua* to bind –*buttee* means twisted or coiled round. Other types were the *morassa*, a short turban; *umamu*, a loose turban; *dastar*, a fine muslin turban, *shumla*, a shawl turban, and *nastalik*, a full dress turban made of fine quality plain muslin, which was used as the court dress of *darbar*. ^[23] The pundits are depicted wearing tiny turbans appropriately on their heads while they lecture. (See in Fig no.4.)



Fig 4: *Turbans* Reproduced from S.P. Verma, Art and Material Culture in the Paintings of Akbar's Court, New Delhi, 1978

Women in Higher Class

A woman inherently gravitates towards the decorative, evident in both her clothing and her demeanor. On the other hand, a man's attire often emphasizes practicality and functionality, prioritizing substance over embellishment. Women from the upper class adorned themselves in exquisite garments. They were very fond of adopting the new styles of fashion and designs. During the Medieval period, *Purdah* was very popular, particularly among the higher class or aristocratic families. They used to wear beautiful dresses with transparent and opaque fabric in a very delicate manner. ^[24] the most famous Muslim women's clothing consisted of a tight-fitting *shalwar* or *pajama*, a choli or bodice to cover the breasts, and a *peshwaz*, which was usually translucent, held open from the front, had a v-neck, and was ankle-length. Women's shirts were opened in front and secured at the neck; occasionally, "V"-shaped collars were also employed. These shirts had gold and jewel embroidery and were composed of silk and cotton. It was normal for Muslim women to wear breeches, or trousers. It was ankle-length. The breeches of men and women did not differ substantially. ^[25]

The dress of the ladies of the Hindu nobles and Rajputs was very costly and varied according to their status. According to Barbosa they wore white garments of very thin cotton or silk of bright colors ^[26], five yards long, one part of which was girt round below and the other part thrown over one shoulder and across their breasts. ^[27] Describing the dress of these ladies Pietro Della Valle says that these women were clothed with figured silk from the girdle downwards and used a scrap of very pure linen over their shoulders. ^[28] The Lehenga, Choli, which was initially worn in the regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan is a long, cut, and flared skirt paired with a blouse fitted around the waist. The exquisite design and bold embroidery of this garment are borrowed from the Mughal culture. Gujarati women exhibit a great deal of diversity and choice in their color choices, which are less susceptible to abrupt and violent changes that are controlled by those temperature moods that are categorized under the umbrella of fashion. ^[29]



Fig 5: Miniature Painting Originated From the era of the Mughal with indicates details and a Persian influence.

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. ^[30] The Royal ladies were also wearing turbans which were embellished with precious jewels, and stones.

Women Ornaments: A wide range of decorations were piled on by the Muslims and Hindu ladies. The Majority of travelers concur that their favorite part was the jewelry. Throughout the Mughal Empire, various types of ornaments were used for the head, ears, nose, necklaces, arms, waist, ankles and feet.

In conclusion, the costumes of higher classes in urban western India during the 16th century were heavily influenced by the

Mughal Empire, European traders and existing regional traditions. The synthesis of Persian, Hindu, and local Rajput styles created unique and elaborates attire reflecting social status and cultural integration. Material like silk, muslin and zarbaft with intricate embroidery showcased fine craftsmanship. Gender specific garments and ornamentation highlighted decorative aesthetics for women and functional elegance for men. Headgear and jewelry further distinguished class and identity. Overall, clothing in this era symbolized social hierarchy and cultural amalgamation in a rapidly evolving urban society.



Fig 6: Hosein Qulij Khan presents Prisoners of War of Gujarat. Composition by Basawan, coloring by Mansur an Illustration from the Akbarnama, c.1590, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig 2: Akbar's Triumphant Entry into Surat. Composition by Farrukh Beg. An illustration from the Akbarnama, c. 1590. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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