



From the Court to Contemporary: The Enduring Legacy of Mughal Attire and Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT: *This research paper describes the effective usage of Mughal attires and aesthetical indulgence of the Mughal Empire into the decorative art of textile, fashion and design. Their entire work regarding fabrics, weaving's, embedded motifs, decor, embellishments and perfectly employed thread work in textiles is still worthy reference in today's artwork. The Mughal(s) derived their aesthetics from nature whether it was any kind of decorative arts or textile. This research underlines the usage of Mughals traditional motifs into the modern textile being produced with the exclusive technologies. The Mughal art is being constantly followed during the contemporary time and it significantly influences the current fashion industry either in the style or in the patterns. The classical legacy being turned into the modern undeniable icon to show, how Mughals developed the aesthetics and metaphoric potential of the clothing they wore.*

Key words: *Mughal Attires, Aesthetics, Textiles, Decorative Art, Motifs*

Introduction:

The Mughals era had been extensively studied before but the information of how they came up with thousands of designs in their clothes still remains elusive. The current study instituted on the premise to address the following tenacities.

- Development and improvisation of new fabrics in the textile Industry of that time.
- The use of motifs, designs and investigation of the ornamentation of the fabrics that Mughals has shown via attire.
- The Impact and use of Mughal clothing in the contemporary fashion industry in India & Pakistan.



This study represents the inclusive approach towards the collection of the imperial clothing and textiles worn during the Mughal period that started in 15th century with the reign of Zaheer ud Din Babar as a first emperor of the Mughals Empire. This study entails the beauty, aesthetics, and significance of the Mughal's attires. Mughal costumes serve as a track in investigating cultural and traditional norms of that era. Besides providing protection and calmness, dress code communicates the identity and truly represents a person's character. Shakespeare coded in Hamlet; "The apparel oft proclaims the man"¹. Attire defines our place in our living circle. Foreign countries ensure a great dress sense in all their surroundings as stated by Michel wright Nancy: "Abroad we judge the dress; at home we judge the man"². He emphasized on the significance of the wearable's aesthetics in another statement saying, "Dressing up a stick turns it into a doll". Humans have an innate attraction towards things that incorporate aesthetics. To satisfy their souls, Mughals were more concerned about their clothing sense, patterns and designs. For the accomplishment of this purpose, they produced master pieces by the renowned artists and tailors of that time. Till now there is no parallel to Mughal(s) textile and their perfect sense of aesthetics, their work with gold and silver threads, motifs and designs and extraordinary satisfying color contrasts in the absence of technology and comfort we can employ today. Mughal(s) created wonderful draperies that have strongly impacted our modern textile industry. Their aesthetics are a complete outlook of their interests and their classical approach towards art. From 1526 to 1857 Mughals dynasty emerged as an era of tranquility and prosperity and carved out the most magnificent and sophisticated artworks in the Muslim world³. "They vigorously enjoyed implementation of natural vegetation, birds and animals to adorn their surfaces belong to textiles and decorative arts"⁴That was truly a great artistic achievement in the Indian sub-continent. The expansion of the empire was more attributed toward the cultural and commercial contacts with the adjoining world. The wider connections made with the outer world resulted in invention of new technologies and philosophies that helped in enriching the artistic minds with innovative ideas.

Mughal culture blended Persian, Islamic and regional Indian elements into a rare form that emerged as the new style. The illustrative designs like bulls, horses, leaping cheetah, loin, elephant, deer, and falcon are arranged in symmetrical patterns repeated in mirror arrangements and sometimes in irregular manner, directed a person's attention towards the vast, pleasing and tempting creation of Allah. The pioneers of the Mughal Empire Babur, and later on Humayun and Akbar contributed at their best in producing the Mughals domain of arts that is still admired in the current time. Akbar brought improvement in the dress designing since he was fond of art and a milestone of perfection was achieved during his reign into the arena of arts. "Wide-ranging taste in textiles did not mean that the Mughal emperors repudiated the "shared culture of objects" that characterized early modern Islamic courts, or failed to participate in the practice of gifting a luxury robe of honor, called a khila, that was an obligatory act of safeguarding fealty"⁵. "The Imperial Costumes of Mughal Era" in which the authors have declared costumes as the main sources to determine the polity, social status and hierarchy in any society. The other important factor which determines the nature of costumes is the climatic cond

itions of the region⁶.

Mughal costumes provide us a meaningful story with their folds and outlook of the drapery, the colors that granted a huge impact on the viewers' the way their fragments were adorned, the professionalism

in the designs and structure. Its study tells us a lot about the traditions and requirements of that time period such as K.D. Sharma has written “Costume design is the fabrication of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or performer. In many civilizations’ costumes reflect something more than mere clothing. Costumes reflect mainly the structure of society”⁷.

A costume defines a lot about the charisma of a person. In that manner if we talk about Mughals their royal costumes definitely relate with their prodigiousness. Their splendid art of textile and designs on the robe’s spell, bounded the viewer because of their great impact of skillfully handled continuity in the forms and motifs. It refers to the clothing like *Peshwaz* styled robes and *Yalek* robes that was made between 16th to the 18th century during the Mughals Empire in the Indian sub-continent. The Mughals majestic robes were usually made of wool, silk and brocade (a multicolored silk fabric which can either contain gold and silver threads. At that time the textile was at its peak of development, innovation, multiple designs and patterns into the fabrics that had a great sense of symmetry and harmony as defined by Sharma “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”. (K.D. Sharma et al)⁸.

The fabric contained variety of the patterns depending on the interests and cultural demands of that time period. It all depended on the interests of the people that had to wear the costume from the emperor to the common people and till now it happens in the same way as in the Mughal’s time. The most important fabric that was produced for the gratification of the emperor was *Zari brocades* that had the beautiful aesthetically pleasing style covered with precious stonework.

Textiles of that time era, massively enriched with the gold and silver thread embroidery and had a different appealing impact on the viewers which showed a great significance and respect for the emperor. *Zari* decoration is still, the main element in the bridal dresses and other dresses mainly designed for the special occasions as referred in the fig 5 and Fig 6. Mughals traditionally wore long overcoat known as *Jama* with *Patka* sash fastened around the waist and Pajama that they used to wear under the *Jama* coat.

A *pagri* (turban) was worn on the head to give a complete stylized appearance as shown in the Fig1. It was accessory in the male garments in Mughals period. Their style in the wrapping of the headwear varied from region to region, even it had become the source of recognition of the individual whose belongings were identified from the type and wrapping style of the turban. They were usually tie and dye and worn with end left hanging at the back. “For the daily purpose single colored turban was used while for the special occasion’s different techniques and patterns of tie and dye *Lehria*, *Mothra* and *Chunri* were used” (Pernau Magrit, 2013).



Fig 1: Turban Carried by Emperor Akbar

“The Mughal rulers Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and Jahangir (r. 1605–27) understood that textiles were accompanied by traditional expectations of patronage and existed within a sophisticated metaphorical and social world unique to South Asia”⁹. “The recognition of these “subtle political constituencies,” and the reinsertion of Mughal rulers into local or long-standing regional customs, did not forbid them from also engaging in the culture of objects shared throughout the Persianate sphere”¹⁰

For the imperial purposes a special type of *pagri* was prepared embedded with stonework and jewels to provide it a majestic look. It is evident from this portrait of Noor Jahan (the 20th wife of Emperor Jahangir) that the females of the Mughals period also used to wear turbans on the head, and they were decorated with the beautiful designs on it as shown in Fig 2.



Figure2. Idealised portrait of the Mughal Empress Nur Jahan c. 1627

The Mughals had a keen interest in the beauty and in creating beautiful and intellectual work either in the art or in the other territory tasks. Till now in the contemporary era this trend is being followed everywhere in the Sub-Continent but on the special occasions such as on the wedding ceremonies where the groom wears *pagri* whose drapery falls down on the back or somewhere in the traditional festive occasions. The cultural heritage can't be forgotten or ignored, because it is being preserved from centuries' it doesn't requires a day but years to build up and wherever we go, no matter how much time has been passed' we can never ignore the traditions and culture of the area. As the Mughals heritage is an important icon of the Muslims history its style and culture are still followed in the era of technology and advancement. It has now become the beauty of the most important occasions such as wedding ceremonies where *Ghagras* and *Jama's* are worn both in India and Pakistan. Acknowledgement

It provides a brief comment on the aesthetics of the South Asian weaves produced in the 17th century and how their clothes presented a metaphorical representation of their majestic life. New Fabric, Motifs and designs were introduced during the reign of Emperor Akbar, like *Jamdani*, *Mashru*, *Aab-i-Rawan*, *Daft Hawa*, *Chamba Rumals*, *Kalamkari*, *Jamawar*

“When historian, Abu'l Fazal of the court of Emperor Akbar listed the textiles in circulation in Mughal India at the time, the textiles made of silk, was given Persian name *Zarbaft* and Arabic name *Atlas* whose production was being done in South Asia. Still the valued textiles were made of gold and silk; the gold-brocaded silk velvet from Yazd could range in price from fifteen to one hundred and fifty mohurs. Yet the *khāṣa*, the special kingly cotton *malma*, could rival the cloth-of-gold in cost, as the price for a vaguely defined “piece” of cloth could range from three rupees to fifteen mohurs” (Blochman Henry, Manis D. Farooqui, pg-92-96.).

It can be seen from the Mughals miniatures and the manuscripts that the most worn dress during the Mughals time was *Jama* shown in fig-10.11. And they preferred wearing that type of dresses in their time which usually covers their entire body till their knees in the male costumes while females worn the *Gagras* that covered body till the toes. Among the *Jama's* made for the Mughals court and emperor was the *Yaktahi Jama* (an unlined *Jama*) that was originated in Persia and Central Asia, and it was worn over the pajama and the complete dress was named as *Bast Agag*. *Jama* is the Persian word referring to the coats, gowns, robes and frocks etc. The Miniatures made during the Mughal period reveals the style mostly followed in which the *Jama* was worn as the side-fastening frockcoat with tight-fitting, clipped-in waist and carried a wide skirt, with their lengths reaching the knees. The other most dominant wearable was *Chogha* (fig.3) that refers to a long-sleeved coat, with the open front that was long enough to reach the knee. It was a great ornamented fabric that was mostly worn over the *Angrakhas* and *Jama's*. It is the most ancient garment followed from the Mongolian times, can also be seen in Persia and the Persian art had a great influence in the Mughal Art.



Fig 3: Chogha's worn in Mughal's period

“Thevenot as writing that the jama were “commonly made of white stuff, that’s to say of cotton-cloth, the end they may be the lighter, and the neater by being often washed; and that agrees with the fashion of the ancient Indians.”(B. N. Goswamy pg-196)

“During the emperor’s public appearances, the white color of the cloth may have also affirmed for his subjects that the fabric was indeed the more pious cotton, and not fine silk. (B. N. Goswamy pg-198.)

To show the royal craftsmanship a long fine quality fabric was tied like a sash around the waist which was called *Patka* with which the sword could be hung. Everything is seen to be adorned a lot. The royal *Patka*’s were also embroidered and adorned to show the majestic influence. The *Pakta* was an important element in the Mughal clothing which was decorated with the flowers and with a repeatedly using motif, which was usually worn by the emperor and the few prominent court members with whom the emperor consulted. They were hand woven, printed sometimes embroidered or hand printed showing complex and aesthetically engaging designs on it. Taking reference from the Akbar Nama we find a detailed study of the clothing styles worn in time of Mughals era, it gives a detailed record of the costumes along with the written details of the garment styles and how they were worn in Akbar’s region. He gave much important to the Mongolian and Iranian styled costumes and he had hired the special Iranian artists for the implementation of Iranian style art into the art of sub-continent.

“One thousand suits were prepared every year for the royal wardrobe where skilled tailors were employed to introduce new fashions” (K.D. Sharma et el. Pg-235).

It can be seen that he had a special interest in the fashioning of court costumes and the most well renowned costume of that time was *Chak Dar Jama* referred in fig-12. This garment was used in the subcontinent in the time when foreign invaders were shown in Jama like Coats in Gandhara sculptures and on the coins of that period and then Akbar re styled Jama by removing the slits rounding the hemline and increased the size of the skirt making it full sized. It seemed like a simple jama, but its skirt was made in such a way that the hem fell into 4-6 points. The new innovated version defined the distinction of the religion by changing the order of fastening the Jama, the Hindus were asked to fasten it on the left and Muslims on the right side of the costume. The length of sleeves was shown as a depiction towards wealth and social status. To enhance the beauty of the garment the amount of Kalis were added into the designs of the costumes.

“The artists in Akbar’s atelier were equally proficient at blending elements from Indian, Persian, and Western traditions, while developing a distinct style of their own” (Kalasmeeyer K.).

As it is evident from the history that Akbar in his reign supported all cultures and religious distinctions and thus produced an unprecedented history that’s why in the manuscripts, paintings and in the other art forms created during this period shows a blend of different styles.

Mughals in their peak of majestic approach and in art media created such an intellectual artwork that manifested its glorification through inserting their intellect into their quality and then resulted in the most refined work production in the textiles.

Emphasizing on the structural details they created the most creative and precious work. Even now this style is being adopted in the contemporary textiles because it hasn’t loosened its charm till now. The Mughals patterns are still fascinating the current minds because of its cherishing beauty and details. The smoothness in their designs is being adapted’ providing the today’s artist new ideas such as folds, tucks, smocking, pockets and *Gotta* work etc. Recently in (2019-2020) *Angrakhas* were again circulated as the popular trend. The antique styles are copied till now with alteration. The Mughal art was enriched in the usage of the color combinations, in the textural development and in the design details in their textiles. Mughals art has always been fascinating and enchanting and it served as the explicit source that provided us with the comprehensive knowledge of the Mughal culture and traditions. Because the clothing is the indication of the aura of any time period. The impact of Mughals inclusive designed art, their motifs and patterns of flora and fauna are still being implicated into the textiles printed today digitally or manually as referred in fig.4. These patterns along with the motifs and birds are influencing the modern era’s trend. The patterns are arranged both horizontally and vertically and is constantly repeated giving it a complete aesthetical structure.



Fig 4: flora and fauna in contemporary textiles



Fig 5: Zari decoration in contemporary textiles



Fig 6: Zari decoration in modern textile



Fig 17: Kalamkari Rumal- The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Mughal Empire maintained the social regime through the numerous ways from the language, literature to the social strata of aesthetics, art, architecture, design and clothing. Dressing up in extravagant pieces has always been the tailored way of the subcontinent and Mughals have played the most integral part in this knack for the future. The imperial clothing had a powerful impact on the

minds of the people till now. The well-heeled jewels almost used in all the imperial clothing and finest draperies production showed superiority and it drew the attention of the creative minds towards its elegant mystery. The quality was more focused, and the court costumes were therefore played a very powerful symbol of the religious and social identity as well.

The patterns, cuts and different techniques of the fine clothing and designs that Mughals has introduced, gave rise to contemporary costume designing movement which shaped not only the South Asia but also impacted the western costume designers who took influence from their magnificent art of dress-designing. In the contemporary period, Mughals embedded traditional structures for clothing is still in use in many areas of Pakistan as well as in India because of their collective historical inspiration for example *Ghagra, Choli, Gharara, Lehnga* is still a popular choice in bridal-wear across Pakistan and India. Royal structures that are confined to the ladies from confidential classes of Uttar Pradesh wore the *Farshi Pajama* in the Muslims courts of Awadh modeled after the flowing gowns worn by British noble women. Large quantity of expensive cloths and embroidery used to make a *Farshi Pajama* reflected the grandeur and extravagance of the nobles and rulers of that era. *Angrakhas* that has been referred from the Mughals special stylized clothing have been slightly modified over the years but still make it appearance at weddings, red carpets and of course all these fashionable runways in the Pakistan fashion industry. The motifs derived from the imperial clothing were usually naturalistic and inspired the most commonly used element in the contemporary draperies, rugs, and curtains The '*izar*' which was wore by both Mughal men and women that were used in pairing with *Pishwas* and a *kurta* is now been modified as plane, dyed and stripped cloth. *Choori Dar pajama, Farshi Shalwar* has again showed up in the recent modernized walkways. The influence of Persian flora and fauna and the booti design that is most evident in the miniature paintings and also on the frescos of the Mughal miniature paintings can be identified in the Mughals textile patterns.

Conclusion:

The term 'Design' is used in all treatises regarding almost every art form. In common parlance, the term "Design" stands for a plan, a composition, a pattern or an arrangement of elements but in more elaborated definitions, creativity is often associated with this term¹¹. The Mughal era is a quart example of creativity and the detailed study of Mughal(s) legacy of art clarify that design and aesthetics have left an inevitable streak around the globe after them.

The history has shown how clothing acts as an important source of understanding the political, cultural, economic, hierarchical and even religious ideas of an empire. Even in the present day context, what one wears is not only a representation of how they wish to portray themselves but also an indication as explained by K.D. Sharma that "Costumes reflect mainly the structure of society"¹², either directly or indirectly refers to their social status. The outer appearance marks both the status of a person being in a society or individually such as Mughals ranked their positions with their appearances with being loaded with a lot of expensive jewelry and attire decorated with gold and silver threads. Thus', the sophistication related to the wearable's meanwhile describing the fervent move towards the orthodox and aesthetical approach of Mughals towards art. It functioned as the agencies in making the hierarchical cultures and norms. It is professed that the designs, patterns and decorative structures of Mughal(s) were a remarkable accomplishment being in that time and so on to this contemporary period help us to keep bonded to the legacy of our ancient traditions and culture.

Wherever these trends are being followed they instantly serve as providing the flashback into the esteemed aura of Mughal aesthetics that hasn't slackened its charm till now.

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