



...made with traditional
jewellery. The decadence
of the Mughal dynasty
its intricate techniques
which included elaborate
embedding (also known
as jadau) and enamelling
flourished, and remains
an important part of the
lexicon even today.
both men and women
necklaces, it is impor-
note that the pieces
for the king were gra-
than those of the que-
Popular necklaces
included ariya, char-
galapattai (gulban-
lara har, patri har, k-
(hansli), kantha, k-
and tamania (three
The hansuli (which
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Kundan petals
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bridging THE GAP

Centuries before gender-neutral clothing became a global buzzword, ancient India was blurring the lines to good effect. Through pieces that have stood the test of time, GEETA KHANNA takes us back to an era where ornate necklaces adorned the necks of kings and queens, and drapes didn't know him from her

Photographed by ANKITA CHANDRA Styled by PRIYANKA KAPADIA

GENDER BINARY IN THE HISTORY OF INDIAN FASHION

The symbolism of gender binary cannot be better explained than by the human body itself. The Ida and Pingla (the left and right nadis) that run along the human spine. The subtle perfection of the human system and how it mingles the yin and the yang energies to create a seemingly distinct feature in men and women is the perfect proof of gender binary that is inherent in our very being as humans.

Introduction:

Gender Binary looks at how an individual asserts individuality through clothing and accessories. It draws our attention to the entire 'look' or how we put ourselves together. The origins of 'dress' is always a matter of debate. Textile itself is difficult to restore since it can not withstand the ravishes of time. Much of the interpretation therefore relies on excavated scripts, seals, sculptures, and fragments of cloth found. Unstitched drapes have been the inherent way of clothing in the Indian subcontinent since ancient Indian historic times as can be gathered from tangible proofs. We know that India is not only one of the ancient cultures of the world, but is also the only 'continuous' and unbroken culture of the world. Withstanding the several influences in the very way of dressing, at the hands of invasions, the simple drape styles never really left the Indian way of dressing. The 'unisex' style of drape lingers even today, in very few parts of the India. This in turn reflects on the gender binary that existed. Some remnants of gender binary linger with us in today's time as well, but they are few and in between to identify. The celebration of life is translated with the same look in men and women in the ancient Indian historic analysis. The adornment of jewelry, long hair, kohl in the eyes, and the unisex drape is the benchmark of the gender binary that prevailed in pre Vedic times in the Indian subcontinent. Pre Vedic times, before defined religions emerged, the human way of living was more fluid and functional.

DHOTI:

'Antariya' is mentioned in Vedic Age analysis (c.1500bce to c.500bce). The way people of this period dressed is likely a result of the hierarchy that resulted as a consequence of the varna (caste) system. As in earlier periods of history, unisex drapes continued to be the preferred attire for men and women during this period of time as well. While excavations in Harappa revealed evidence of the use of needles; cutting and stitching of cloth is known to have been considered

inauspicious through the Vedic Age. Men and women sported bare torsos. Drapes included the use of a loincloth called *kaupina* or *kachcha*, with one end of the cloth passed between the legs and tied at the back or held at the waist with a belt. The cloth was draped in such a way that it adequately covered the wearer's pelvic region. The remainder of the cloth acted as a wrap or a throw or an apron. The present-day *uttariya* (stole-like piece of cloth worn on the upper body) and *antariya* (a drape that covers the hips and legs) can be traced back to this period.

The 'dhoti' is another word for 'Antariya'; a drape wrapped around the waist, reaching the ankles or below knees depending the status of the person wearing it. It is a piece of cloth, traditionally pure cotton, could be in fine muslin or coarse cotton, wrapped around the waist with a knot. It seems to be the most ancient recorded Indian drape. It has a variant called the 'Lungi'. Dhotis are still worn by men all over India and in some parts by women too. The Katcha style dhoti, which is a popular way of wearing it, involves wrapping the fabric around the hips and thighs with one end brought between the legs and tucked into the waistband, the dhoti resembles baggy, knee-length trousers.

Antariya being the referred to the drape around the waist, making its way all the way to the ankle length sometimes, and sometimes only worn below the knee length or even shorter. The antariya was invariably supported by a Kayabandh – a sort of a girdle to hold the lower drape steadfast – the antariya. Although the coins of Gupta age show stitched garments similar to the kushan kings, as seen in the Ajanta paintings, the kings and members of the court are seen in fine silk or muslin cloth antariya.

'Utariya' was a term used for a stole like fabric that was draped over the shoulders, or simply folded and placed on one shoulder. It was worn by the 'preveliged' people in ancient India. The Utariya was also worn in several ways with the intent to complete the look.

This terminology finds an underlying element of the ancient Indian lifestyle. The style was a derivative of an attempt of the 'seekers'; Every detail of living of ancient india was curated to facilitate 'seeking' and spirituality. Here it may be noted that drapes were the way of life, and infact cutting and stitching of cloth was considered 'inauspicious'.

Regional detail: Worn as Lungi by men in the state of Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu , Karnataka , and Andhara Pradesh.

'Tamba': Punjabi version of lungi worn with pleats in the front, is worn with Kurta and rumal for Bhangra by men and also worn by women for 'giddha' with kurta and chunni.

Historic Anecdote: The term *nivi* (pleats) also occurs frequently in Vedic literature. Pleats were considered a way to ward off evil during ceremonies.

KAYABANDH: The antariya was also sported with a kayabandh, a term for a waist belt, made with shells, beads, metal beads, other materials to fasten over the antariya to secure it in the waist.

PHIRAN:

Phiran is a term derived from the Persian word 'Parihan'. It is a unisex outer kurta – anti fit garment reaching traditionally upto ankles, made with wool and cotton, mixed. It is wide sleeved covering the elbow and sometimes full sleeved, that is folded in its end. Phiran does not have any side slits traditionally. The Phiran can accommodate a 'kangri', a small earthen pot heater with simmering charcoal/twigs to keep warm. It is usually worn over a white shift like tunic, that is washed and replaced regularly, while the phiran itself is not washed as often.

Interesting Fact: Kurta is a word derived from a Persian word: 'Kurtak'/ Quamis. This terminology emerges in the north western Indian subcontinent during the Mughal age which saw influence of the Greco Roman and Persian style on India. Phiran is a variation in Kurta amongst several others such as the four pointed handkerchief kurta, Angarakha, Chakkar Dar, Jama, and Choga.

Regional Detail: Phiran is worn in Jammu and Kashmir, and is a Persian influence that lingers in the region.

FINGER RINGS:

In India jewellery worn has reasons, bodily attribution to why certain ornaments are worn and which part of the body they are worn. A lot can be explained about the knowledge of the human system that has been at the root of the Indian

culture. Knowing who you are and why you are a certain way makes for a presentation of how people used to put themselves together. Finger rings were common, for not just women but men as well. Mention of jewelry in the Rig Veda shlokas testifies the prevalence of jewelry since pre Vedic time. As the culture evolved with the onset of Vedic age, the clothing and adornment of jewels became more defined and symbolic. Often they would carry symbols or sacred charm that may be associated with a region or a clan.

One such example is below – this is a ring that was only worn by the Travancore royal family- Marthandha Varma, as a mark of royalty. In 24carat gold, this was the ring worn by the last king of Travancore, who passed away in 2013. This royalty was found in 1741CE, after defeating the Dutch accession. The king carried the ritual of offering prayers to the ancient Padhnabham temple (Vishnu temple). The clan is a devotee of Lord Vishnu, therefore their royal ring symbol is the divine conch(Shankha) of the Vishnu.

This popular parrot ring finds fancy with men as well as women, was made by the royal jewelers of the Jaipur royal family, the Gem Palace in Jaipur. Embedded with small diamonds in Platinum, the bird holds a ruby in its beak.

Rings worn in thumbfinger were associated with occult practices. Rings were also worn in toes by women, as the tradition continues and sometimes by men too, as can be seen in paintings. The types of rings varies with different periods of history of India, where you see embedded with gems, but variation in style of embedding.

Terminology: 'Anguthi'- Ring usually set with a gemstone on the front and possibly enameled in the reverse.

'Arsi'- Ring set with a small round or heart shaped mirror – enameled at the back.

Jadau Necklaces:

It is very rare to come across an ancient Indian ornament that is simply decorative and devoid of any inherent symbolic value. Jewelry has been a part of iconography of physical appeal. The early references to Vedic and post Vedic text, especially the Puranas, mention the ancient Indian belief in planets, cosmic arrangements, and the impact of sun and moon. This is the derivative for the use of gemstones and later how they were set in precious metals. Most popular being the 'nav-ratna' (nine gems). Other terminologies prevailed, and were adapted by the Jain, Buddhist, and Muslims. One of the oldest terminology for neck lace is the 'mani mala', which literally means a string of precious stones. The other

detail that is important to understand is the use of geometry in gem stone cutting. This also applied to other beads and seeds, in the rural and tribal indian symbolism that were used to make jewelry. Documentation by Bharata of Natryshastra also describes exact ways of wearing particular kind of jewelry to dress up for performing in front of the temple diety. These are elaborate in comparison to the necklaces have been worn since indus valley days, and perhaps before. The terracota figurines that were excavated from Harappa sites, show the use of necklaces, mostly discoid shaped, or beaten metal, and rough stones worn in a strings.

From the 16th to the 19th centry saw a great development in Indian traditonal jewelry. The mughal jewlery decadence got deeply engrained in the indian jewelry library and it spread across the subcontinent including the south. Elaborate embedding was flourishing during the mughal era in India, however it was parallely exisiting to the traditional southern style of jewelry making.

Most popular was the Jaipur jewelery form, plain or enamaled. For the neck, popular necklaces included Ariya, Champakali, Galapattai (Gulband), Har, Lara Har, Patri Har, Hasli (hansli), Kantha, Kastsari and Tamania (three gems) necklace.

Rigid Torques: Hansuli (refereing to th ecollar bone where it rests); worn by both men and women in Rajasthan. Basic torque form in solid one piece of metal is worn throughout the gangetic plans, however, each region has a different name for it. 'Serin' in Jammu district, 'Sutya' in west bengal and Bihar, and Kanti in Andhara Pradesh. This particular piece of jewlery was worn by men as well as women.

Punjabi Jutti

It is is very popular to wear 'juttis' even today. However, the traditional Punjabi jutti itself has certain traits and characteristsics. Most popular in the northwestern indian subcontinent, pre partition, it can been seen in various avatars over Islamic indian history. The juttis are tradiotioanlly popular for their peculier styles – Pershawari/ Lahori jutti , that is a different style that the jutti of

Patiala. The jutti would not have any left or right foot, to say that the jutti will take the shape of the foot it is worn in. Very popular is a category called – ‘softy’, made with soft fine leather. For the more ornate occasions, the jutti would be done with ‘tilla’ – usually found in a silver and gold ‘look’, these days, but even today you can find them in pure gold and silver tilla – mostly coming from Pakistan.

Interesting fact: Sir Thomas Roe, who travelled to India as King James ambassador to the Mughal court (1615-19) describes Emperor Jehangir’s shoes : “On his feet a pair of buskins embroidered with pearls, the toes sharp and turning”. These were also known as ‘salim shahi’ shoes. Juttis (light shoes, often with upturned toes and sometimes with folded heels), mojaris (soft variety of footwear). Light slippers made with expensive material such as brocade, or gold embroidered leather, on which addition for often applied pearls or precious stones.

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