



## LIFE OF WOMEN AS REFLECTED IN THE ART OF THE VIJAYANAGARA –NAYAKS IN TAMIL COUNTRY

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### Abstract:

*From the middle of the 16th century A.D. the Nayankara system became a prominent feature of the Vijayanagara provincial organization. Under this system the king was regarded as the owner of the soil and he distributed lands to his dependents, which were called the Nayaks. The Nayaks ruled over their territories with a great measure of freedom. In return they paid a fixed annual contribution to the imperial government and maintained a sufficient number of troops, and helped the king in his wars. In course of time, the Nayakship became hereditary, when the central control grew weak and inefficient. The Nayaks of Madurai and Thanjavur ruled as the subordinates of the Vijayanagara and soon rose to prominence. The sculpture and paintings are the main sources of information for the study of the dress pattern of the people under the Vijayanagara and the Nayaks rulers of Madurai and Thanjavur. They gave a fresh lease of life to Vijayanagara architecture. Some notable temples, mandapas, gopuras and palaces were built by them. The Nayak style as it is called is only an extension and elaboration of the Vijayanagara style in all its essentials. The final stage of South Indian sculpture and paintings during the Vijayanagara and Nayak period in the Tamil Country reveals both the continuation of long-established artistic patterns and the invention of new types. An argument is made by different scholars on the style of the Vijayanagara sculpture. The figures of the Nayak period generally look rather stiff with oval faces, wide staring eyes and deeply curving pencil line brows. Sometimes the nose looks almost like a flat triangular piece fixed on the face. The upper lip is usually narrower than the lower. Broad shoulders and sturdy legs are other noticeable features. The dress is diaphanous and often tied high at the waist. The dress pattern of the women during the Nayak period is revealed through their art. The costume portrayed in the sculpture and paintings traces out the corroborative evidences like contemporary literature, inscription and foreigners' account.*

### KEY WORDS:

Nayaks , sakachcha , visiri matippu , narsarikaiseelai, mutu salavai , salapanjikas,

Kurati.

## INTRODUCTION-

Throughout the history of the world civilization, there has been a manifest attempt to glorify women hood in all possible ways. During the Nayak period too, this tendency were found to be exists. Poets, Dramatists, Painters and Sculptors have bestowed utmost attention in highlighting the charms of women and their costumes, coiffures and personal ornaments with which they were embellished. The rationalization of costume which is observed, exemplified and described in this article dates back to the end of the Nayak period in Tamilnadu which is fully borne out by the artistic remains (sculptures and paintings) and other contemporary literature of that period.

In Indian, the uses of dress by believe to be started during the time of the Indus Valley civilization. Generally, their garments are confined to two to three separate but interrelated pieces cloths. Most of the Indian women uses 'sari' as a lower garment. The art of wearing was well developed and it is fairly certain that the sari was a long piece cloth, about five or six yards in length. For covering the upper part of the body, another piece of cloths known as *uttariyam* or *uttarasangam* was used. But the upper garment was used only on ceremonious occasions.

During the early medieval period, there occurred the first infusion of foreign sartorial habit in Indian societies. Its influence proved to be ephemeral in many aspects. In some aspects particularly as sported by royalty and nobility, foreign items were transformed in a manner, which indicated the essential genius of the people for synthesis. The costume of the Nayak period is an amalgamated one, which is influenced by the foreigners, for instance, the Muslim, the Portuguese and the Europeans.

The female figures in the contemporary sculpture and painting panels belong to the categories of dances, *chauri*-bearers, queens, hunting women, *kurati* or gypsi, mythical and divine figures etc. The female figures in the sculptures and painting panels are always covered with a piece of cloth which hangs at back, their upper part of the body is generally open, revealing in full the bosom and navel. And in search for an explanation, scholars have sometimes gone very wide of the mark and it makes the down light assertion that Indian women of all classes in the contemporary society actually appeared in public without covering the upper part their body.

Many contemporary literary works of the Nayak period such as the Tamil literatures Tiruvilayadal Puranam and Kurtralakkuravanji and the Telugu literatures Amuktamalyata and Sugasaptati mention about many varieties of women dresses. One category of dancing figures in the sculptures wears their lower garment in *sakachcha* fashion. It goes down to their ankles. On the contrary, the Indian person's talent for wearing is a loving inspiration not only to the artist but to every elegant woman in any part of the globe and of course to every dancer. The dancing women in the Nayak period were of no exception to it. The dancing girls or the prostitutes are referred to in Kantasamy Katal. Accordingly, a dancing girl wore the sari called *narsarikaiseelai* produced from gold or silver thread used as lace in a sari. The goddesses, the wives of rishis, ladies in the royal house holds like *chauri* bearers, attendant women and women musicians also wore their lower garments in the same pattern. These sculptural panels found at Krishnapuram, Tirunelveli and Pudu Mandapam are the fine examples of this kind. Some figures in the sculptural panels at Srirangam are puckered or tucked up ends of a cloth pleating in a woman's dress hanging from the right hip. Kutralakkuravanji describes it as Koysakam. In the Nayak art arrangement of pleats in fan-shaped appears

to be popular. According to the Tiruvilayadal Puranam *visiri matippu* or fan like folding is worn by a Brahmin lady. In Sukasaptati a Brahmin lady is described as arranging the pleats of her sari in the same fashion. In the figures of *chauri*-bearers and wives of sages the other end of the lower garment was turned over the left shoulder of elbow. This is prevailed in the sculptures of Pudu Mandapam at Madurai.

The sari or *putavai* is another important lower garment. Laces have put fairly wide at its lower end. A few pleats are folded breadth wise and are tied in a bunch over the skirt at the navel with the help of an ornamental string from which hangs a pair of pompons. It is called *putavai kunsam*. They did not wear any separate upper garment; instead they turned over their left shoulder to the right, sometimes vice-versa. This kind of upper garment is referred as *marappu* or the portion of a sari covering the bosom of women. There does not appear any difference in the method of wearing sari from the past to the present.

The agricultural people are found in the sculptures of the Nellaiappar Temple at Tirunelveli and Ranganathaswamy temple at Srirangam. They wore a type of sari, which is referred to in the *Mantaipal* as *kantanki* or a kind of chequered sari. Their upper garment is *kachchai* or covering material for their breast. The upper garment of the low caste people is known from the literary evidence a *mutu salavai* or *kachchai*.

Another popular upper garment is *ravikai* or tight fitting bodice or jacket. It is worn by the dancing girls, queens and prostitutes and it is referred to in Kutralakuravanji. The queen's upper garment is *sivikai* or bodice and it fully covered their shoulders. Hence, we can rule out the usage of sewn or unsewn upper garment for women during this period, though it is conspicuously absent in the contemporary sculptures and paintings. But in the literature of the period of our study, there are several references to *ravikai* and *sivikai* or bodice. During this period mostly upper part of the body appears to be quite naked. According to A.L.Basham, "The Indian artists followed the Romans and Greeks in showing the female form in state of nakedness for beauty, when this had no counterpart in real life. They had draped the women, portraying real life rather than mythology. It seems that they do so only for beauty in art."

The kurathi or gypsy is depicted in the sculptures of Venkatachalapati temple at Krishnapuram. The kurati's lower garment is described in Kutralakuravanji as *chella-seelai*. This is not a traditional garment for them and it seems to have been borrowed from high class people.

Though it is difficult to make out the material of the costumes from the sculptures and paintings, literature and foreign accounts supply us with adequate information. Barbosa refers, "the men wear certain clothes as a girdle, below wound very tightly in many folds and short white shirts of cotton or silk or coarse brocade." A person visiting the house of dancing women wore a thin Muslim 'dhoti' over his breeches. In Amuktamalyata describes that people belonging to artisan classes like weavers applied scented oil to their dresses. A low-caste vaishnava wore upper garment made of leather.

The author of Virali Vitu Tuthu mentions a kind of lower garment called *pavatai* or petti cent. Probably it is worn by the dancing girls, prostitutes and queens. They wore silk sari over *pavatai*. The Tiruvilayadal Puranam gives an account of *muntangi*" or sari stripped length wise. This is worn by wives of sages and princess.

Next variety in the female garment is a single cloth used both as upper and lower garment. Female figures in the sculptures wear a garment around the waist and the other end of the same garment is thrown over the left shoulder. According to father Joseph Wicki "as far as the dress of common people was concerned in the sixteenth century both men and women had wore only a piece of cloth around them which went from the waist up

to knee. Some women put on a longer cloth that reached lower down. But they did not cover upper portion of their body. Another kind of female costume is frilled skirt which goes down to the knees. The women who wear this dress are often represented in the crowded acrobatics and group dance scenes.

The tribal women, represented in the sculptural panels wear skirt down to their knees obviously made of leaves. Their upper garment is entirely different and novel from the lady figures represented in the sculptures of the Nayak monuments. They are called *salapanjikas* in the ancient monumental works. They wear a kind of upper garment known as *kanchukai*. It is a kind of long coat with sleeves and closed collars in front. This is worn by attendant warriors and tribal hunters.

Another figure often repeated in the gateway sculptures of Nayak monuments is of a lady who strings a bow. Her attire is a piece of cloth covering her buttock with pleats in the front.

Though it is difficult to make out the material of the costumes the contemporary literatures and foreign accounts supply with an adequate information. According to Bhasam, "customs which prescribe the wearing of best clothes or of rag illustrate the most important psychological result of the invention of clothes. The more presence or possession of articles of clothing gives the required sense of self-respect, of human dignity and sexual desirability."

During the Nayak period, silk and cotton cloths were produced. The Tiruvilayadal Puranam gives an account of some raiment of the 16th century such as *pattatai* or silk cloth. Mukkutar Pallu describes *parutiyatai* or cotton cloth, which existed during the Nayak period.

Da costa, the Jesuit Father of the 17th century mentions the dress of Brahmin sanyasi who dressed in kavi or red ochre. It is fully attested in the sculpture and paintings of the Nayak period. According to Krishna Vijayam, a Telugu literary work written by Kumara Dhurjati, the daughter of Gajapathi wore garments with *sariganchu* or a border interwoven with silver quoted zari thread and cotton thread. A Reddi caste woman referred to in Paramayogi Vilasamu, wears cotton upper cloth with a designed border.

Paes narrates that the dancing girls are dressed very rich with fine silk clothes. John Nieuhoff says, "The people of Nayak period had abundance of calico and linen weavers and great numbers of people employed in painting of calico which they do artificially. Weaving was the major industry and it is found in all parts of Tamilnadu during the 16th and 17th century. Sukasaptati describes in detail about the weaving and the colours of costumes in the Vijayanagara-Nayak period. According to it the costumes were white, black green and brick red in colour. In the same literature, kavi or brick red and *senkavi* or red colour are popular. *duvvaluva* or a thick dress made by joining two clothes was mentioned in the literature.

According to A.K.Coomaraswamy cotton thread was produced at Ayyampet in Tanjore district and Tanjore and Madurai were the great centers of dye-painting in South India. Dyeing seems to have had an important position and is still continues. The Jesuit epistolary speaks about weaving and weavers of the 17th century Tamilagam. The weaving community such as devangas, kaikolar, and pattunulkaran existed during the Nayaks period in Madurai. Queen Mangamal is said to have granted a cadjan sasanam in 1705, authorizing the pattunulkarans of Madurai to perform *upakarma*. It means the ceremony of the renewal of the sacred thread. She convened a conference of her pandits and followed their advice. The report conceded the higher status to the weaving community. It is stated that usually each sub caste woven a particular type of cloth and could seldom be induced to make any other. The Nayak rulers of Madurai, who were

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dissatisfied with the quality of cloth woven by the kaikolar, invited the weavers from Telugu region and settled them in Madurai. They have been known as pattunulkarans. They lived in a separate street. Fernao Nuniz describes about the existence of washer men during the Vijayanagara-Nayak period. The epigraphs register that in certain cases weavers were exempted from the taxes on looms as a special gesture.

During the Vijayanagara Nayak times different varieties of clothes in attractive colours, designs and borders were favoured by the people. The weavers and other artisans connected with this trade of yarn and cloth are frequently mentioned in the records. According to Amukta malyata written by Krishnadevaraya, one section of weavers was weaving cotton cloth while another section was weaving silk cloth. The Tirumalaimurugan Pallu, the contemporary literature of the Nayaks, refers to the production of cotton. During their rule, a tax called mulayam was levied on the handloom textiles".

Madurai was the centre for silk production and cloth trade during the 16th and 17th century in the Tamil country.

The records of Da costa corresponds, a captain presenting a silk shawl, embroidered with gold to the father. It is already mentioned. It announces the existence of silk production during this period. Huge quantities of such textiles were exported in the 17th and 18th centuries from the Bay of Bengal.

According to T.V.Pathy, ever since man became conscious of his personal dignity and decency, he has adopted the sartorial habit as almost his second nature. In fact it is not altogether wrong to say that the human society has been found on cloth. The human soul is said to be wearing kosas or garment (bodies) one over and above the other and the magnetic force radiating from it has to pass through from the higher of these bodies or garments. This is always taking place in the higher bodies when the force or magnetism comes to the coarsest of these bodies, the physical body; it is highly desirable that it is not frittered away into the surrounding air but it is kept circulating in the body itself. This kind of wearing seems to have existed during the Vijayanagara Nayak period.

The sculptures and paintings of the Nayaks represent all ranks, classes and sections of society, kings, queens, nobles, military officials, ascetics, hunters, gypsies, attendants and common people. The male dress as depicted in the sculptures and paintings consists of a pair of garment, *Anki*, an *upper* garment, *vetti* or *dhoti*, lower garment arranged in a variety of styles. The figures are represented with their lower and upper garments. They wore Sari, sometimes both lower and upper garments. The upper garment is referred to in the literatures as *Sivikai*, *kacchai*, *kanchukai* etc. Sometimes the upper portion of the female figures is naked in the sculptures and paintings, Altekar is of the opinion that 'breasts are the most significant symbol of motherhood and the artists of the South India probably felt that, they may be shown uncovered in the works of art, though they be normally concealed in actual life under a bodice or a portion of the Sari. According to A.L.Srivastava, nor it is correct to say that the upper garments are invariably missing in the case of females in Indian sculpture of the time.

The actual life women of the Nayak period are revealed from the sculptures and paintings which are verified by the contemporary records and the wider field of literature.

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