

## Grandeur of Nizam's Textiles and Clothing at Chowmahalla Palace, Hyderabad

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### Abstract

Hyderabad is one of the most affluent princely states of India during 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century. Nizams or Nizam-UI-Mulk of Hyderabad are well known rulers from Asaf Jahi Dynasty, known for their high-end heritage and lavish lifestyle. They have had a glorious history of their ruling powers and regality. The 7<sup>th</sup> and the last Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII is one of the richest men in the world. Chowmahalla palace was the official residence of Nizams. The regal lifestyle and meticulous architecture of the palace, built in 19<sup>th</sup> century can be seen through the lens of history. The palace is split in different segments and refurbished in 2005-2010 under the patronage of Princess Esra. The resplendent beauty of the palace and the antiquities of Nizams hold the interest of visitors across the globe. The paper attempts to bring to light the collection of luxurious outfits and the offbeat draping of khada dupatta displayed in Chowmahalla palace. The prime objective of the research was to intensively observe and study the vestments showcased there, which used to be carried by the Nizams. The primary and secondary data was collected by visiting to the palace and available literatures. Visible effects of Mughal, Maratha and British clothing culture on the exhibited outfits were noticed in the study. Textile materials like paithani, fine brocades and chanderi fabrics were found in the clothing collection of palace. Besides that, the noticeable impact of British garments specifically on headgears and tailored jackets and draping of khada dupatta inspired by Maratha style saree were also be observed during the study.

### Introduction

Hyderabad, the city of Nizam is known for its amenity and supremacy, be it its glorified history of Nizams or the mesmerizing architecture of the city or the vestments and jewelry of the people. Everything seems smear in regality. *The Chowmahalla* palace near *Charminar* in the old city of Hyderabad is one such place where visitors get lost in the grandeur of royal art and culture. The first glimpse comes off disseminating pastel lime yellow (the magnificent building), azure (open sky), and green (a well-trimmed grasses) hues in the atmosphere. It seems as if the sky has itself made an azure veil to cover the palace and a lush carpet of grass lays down under its feet. The majesty of the architecture of the palace is said to the blend of Irani architecture. Also believed that the architecture of the palace is inspired by *Shah* of Iran palace in Tehran.

As the name suggests *Chowmahalla*, *chau* meaning four and *mahalla* or *mahalat* meaning palace. It was the first official palace of the Nizam's where *darbars* were held and dignitaries received and from where the administrative offices of the Nizam functioned. The palace is now shrunk to 12 acres, which earlier used to be spread in 45 acres. The palace is divided into northern and southern parts. It is further divided into four separate palaces viz. *Afzal Mahal*, *Mahtab Mahal*, *Tahniyat Mahal* and *Aftab Mahal*. Each palace separately owns antique belongings of Nizams. The main attractions of those belongings are the chandeliers of Belgium crystals, souvenir furniture, Rolls Royce silver-ghost-car, *bagghis* and the ticking clock of clock tower etc. These artifacts have been a much-talked attraction to all the visitors. Besides that, there is a hall dedicated to *zenana* (a section confined merely to females). The grandeur of this section lets the eyes open wide. The opulence of textile material and the surface ornamentation is worth eyeing.

## The Collection

The textiles and clothing collection of the *Chowmahalla* Palace, Hyderabad can be divided into the following categories for the better understanding:

### I. Textiles Material

- a. **Material and Period:** The materials found in the *Chowmahalla* palace are hand spun brocade, silk, velvet, fine cotton, mashru, himru (fabrics from Deccan region) etc. The displayed objects are mostly from mid-eighteenth to nineteenth century.
- b. **Weaving:** At the *Chowmahalla* palace mostly Hand-woven textiles materials are present. Lavishness seems to be entwined in fabric as the fabric itself interlaced with gold or silver warps/wefts
- c. **Colour:** Available fabrics and attires in *Chowmahalla* palace are in pastel shades. A few of them can be seen in darker tone as well. Purple or violet are dominant hues in the entire collection with some black and yellow shades.

### II. Surface Ornamentation:

India is known for its royal artistic competencies. During the reign of Nizams in eighteenth-nineteenth century precious metals and stones can be seen in almost each artifact, surface ornamentation of clothing is not untouched in that period. Fabrics are bejeweled with gold and silver metal wires. Meticulous embroideries and intricate works are holding the eyes of visitors.

- a. **Material:** Gold and silver metals are used in surface ornamentation. Even the weft yarns are said to be of gold and silver wire in *himru*, *mashru* and brocade fabrics. (Figure 1 and 2)
- b. **Embroidery Techniques:** *Kalabattu* work, *zardozi* work, *badla* work, gilt and cutwork etc. are majorly dominant embroidery in the entire collection. (Figure 3)
- c. **Motif:** A wide variety of floral motifs can be seen at the *Chowmahalla* palace. Some of the embroidered Urdu and Arabic calligraphy are also grabbing attention. Heterogenic placement of motifs is found such as overall layout, stripped layout, diamond layout, block repeat layout, composite repeat etc.

### III. Variety of Costumes

Distinct varieties of costumes are available in *Chowmahalla* palace including some twist of draping and tailored jackets (possibly inspired by the Europeans).

- a. **Gender:** Although a scenic depiction of *zenana* (a place merely dedicated to women) has been created in *Chowmahalla* palace with many of the womens wear but some of the menswear *sherwani* and kids wear are also displayed. (Figure 4)
- b. **Types of dresses:** *khada dupatta* or *chaughosia* is one of the most interesting draping styles to explore, having a very similar drape of a saree. Instead of ensemble with blouse, *khada dupatta* is ensemble of four different parts i:e *Choli Kalidar kurta Churidar* and a five yard long *dupatta*. Besides that, various tailored jackets are displayed there in the palace a few of them are for ladies and some of them are for kids. (Figure 5 and 6)

### IV. Accessories

Some of the accessories are also available in the palace, which is probably made in Germany such as hand-clutches and footwear's.

- a. **Headgears:** Varied styles of heavy embroidered headgears or *topis* are found in the palace. The silhouettes (height and stitching styles) of headgears are different from each other but all of them are either ornamented with heavy lace or *kalabattu* and *zardozi* work. *Topi* seems to be inspired by the Britishers' hats though some of them are reflecting Persian styles. *Topi* or *Taqiyah* (Arabic) the term is derived from Persian word *taq* meaning a "dome" or *araqchin* (Persian) is a short sculpt cap, which is mostly carrier by Muslim community. A bucket-hat inspired stitched cap is also displayed at the *Chowmahalla* palace (probably inspired by the British headgears). (Figure 7 and 8)

- b. A Fez also called *Tarboosh*, a short cylindrical peak less hat, was there with a long tassel attach at the center of its top. The fez is also known as the *Rumi Topi* (in south Asia), which means "Headdress of Rome". Another cap resembles *gumbad* (dome) style topi having a pointed top.
- c. Footwear's: Wooden footwear and German made fabric footwears are silently creating volume in the entire collection. The footwears are also heavily embellished with gilt handwork and stones. (Figure 9, 10 and 11)



Figure 1: *Himru*, a hand-woven fabric from the Deccan region. *Himru* is a traditional fabric woven with dyed cotton warp and with silk, rayon or cotton weft yarns for making motifs. The technique was introduced to



Figure 2: *Mashru*, a traditional Deccani fabric striped pattern woven from dyed yarns.  
Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 3: Women's Jacket, second half of the 18th century. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 4: Men's Sherwani Photo Courtesy: Author





Figure 5: Tailored jackets. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 6: A view of *Zenana*, mannequins draped in Khada Dupatta. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 7: Different types of hats or *topi*. Photo Courtesy: Author





Figure 8: Hand-clutch. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 9: Female footwear with gilt metal-work. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 10: Wooden sandals with shell inlay. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 11: Child footwear with gilt metal-work. Photo Courtesy: Author

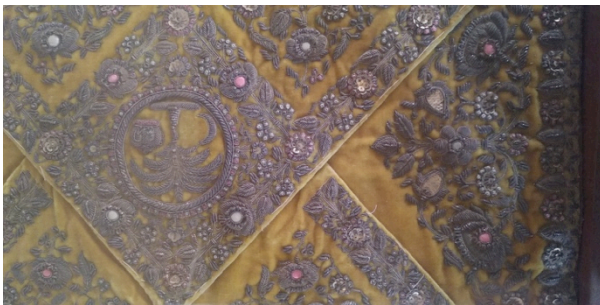


Figure 12: Juzdaan (a cover to put the holy Qura'an) with silver work. Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 13: Seeniposh (tray covers) Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 14: Toghra (wall hanging) gifted to Mir Usman Ali while he was visiting to perform Hajj. Photo Courtesy: Author

#### V. **Miscellaneous Textile Products**

Round *seeniposh* (tray cover), *Tughra* (wall hanging) and *Juzdaan* (a cover to put the holy Qura'an) are meticulously embroidered which is accentuating its beauty. (Figure 12, 13 and 14)

#### VI. **The Mahi-o-maratib**

The *mahi-o-maratib* or the Royal Fish Standard is a symbol of highest honor during the Mughal empire. It is an emblem of honor, bravery and strength given to highest dignitaries. It is composed of the face of Rohu fish with scale and teeth mounted on a large pole. Accompanied by two *Mataribs* or dignitaries comprising of finials on poles. A long piece of fabric attaches to it resembling a body of fish. When the air passes from the open mouth of the fish the attached fabric hover in the air as fish swims in the water. It would tower high above the ranks on foot as part of the royal cavalcade. The *mahi-o-matarib* present in *Chowmahalla* palace has flowing fabric of gold work attached to the metallic fish head. The pattern of fabric is inspired by the fish-scales. (Figure 15 and 16)



Figure 15: The *Mahi-o-maratib* processional standard. This *Mahi-o-matarib* was the honour bestowed on to the Asaf Jahi dynasty by the Imperial Mughal Court.  
Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 16: Woven silk brocade, floral *butas* in gold metal thread belonging to late 19th century.  
Photo Courtesy: Author

#### **Khada Dupatta**

The exquisite elegance of the royal palace is worth visiting. One of the most interesting section is undoubtedly zenana and the most interesting part is to observe the draping twist of *khada dupatta*. The attire is known as *chaugoshia*, an ensemble of four different garments:

- I. **Choli** – very similar to blouse a choli is a waist length fitted top, having embroidered basic round neckline and elbow length or three-quarter sleeve.
- II. **Kalidaar Kurta**- The kalidaar kurta has number of panels attached to it, fitted till waist and flared at the hem. The sleeveless kurta is team up with choli or blouse. Traditionally the kalidaar kurta has heavy embroidered neckline, armhole and hemline.
- III. **Churidar**- As the name suggests churidar resemble like churi/bangles at the end is a straight fitted trouser longer than the length of leg leaving gathers or churi at the ankle. **Dupatta**- The most important part of the outfit is a long six-yard dupatta, which is longer than the length of a usual dupatta. Gold or silver wires for embroidery and tissues or brocade fabrics were used to make this royal dupatta. The dupatta has three distinct layers of the heavy embroidered border; **masala**, **almas** and **dori**. The border covers entire edge of the dupatta leaving one-foot plain edge at the mid of the one side of dupatta.



The elegance lies in its draping technique for example the plain part of dupatta is tucked at the back of churidar, under the kalidaar kurta. The loose end of the right side of dupatta is placed at the left shoulder by neatly making accordion pleats. The loose end of the left side of dupatta will again be placed at the left shoulder similarly. It is draped in such a manner the all the four embroidered borders are visible. The borders are secured with brooch. A free end of dupatta at back is placed under the right shoulder crossing over the elbow. The other free end of dupatta is hanging loosely at the back.

## Conclusion

The splendid majesty of Chowmahalla palace effortlessly takes visitors back to eighteenth-nineteenth century. It creates a scenic depiction of the glory of Nizam's royal life style. Each artifact is screaming the pomp and show of that period. The architecture, furniture, royal cars collection, clothing and textile collections are the amalgamation of India's rich heritage and its artistic competencies. Clear evidences of different clothing cultures are spotted on a closure look of vestments, whether it is textile material, clothing construction or draping style. The conventional draping of khada dupatta has now been shrunked to Hyderabad only. The royal drape is practiced merely in family funtions or weddings. Accessible collection in the Chowmahalla palace is noteworthy to research and document.

## References

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## About the Authors

**Tooba Fatma** belonging to the world of clothing and textiles, having two years of teaching experience as an assistant professor in fashion design department, I Tooba Fatma is a NET qualified candidate and a research scholar in the Department of Home-Science, Faculty of Science, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj. I have completed diploma in Fashion Design & Technology, under graduation in Home-Science and post-graduation in Textiles and Apparel Designing from the university of Allahabad. I've published and presented research papers in International & National conference, seminars, workshops and webinars. Having a keen interest in dress and the story behind that dress led me to pursue my research on the topic 'The story of fashion since 1757'. I also love exploring the world of storytelling and calligraphy. Besides that, I work as a freelance designer in my leisure.

Prof. (Dr.) Sangita Srivastava is the hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of the University of Allahabad. She has been the former Vice-Chancellor of Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiya) University, Prayagraj, prior to that she was the Head, Department of Home-science and Department of Anthropology, University of Allahabad. During her prolific career of 31 years in research and teaching, she has been a part of numerous administrative activities. She has also been the chairperson of admission committee and CCASH in the University of Allahabad. Prof. S Srivastava has presented various papers and has published more than 45 papers in international, national conference. She has also delivered several keynote addresses in conference. She is the author of four books Natural and Manmade Fibers, Fiber, Fabric & Fashion, Basics of Fashion Technology and Vastra Vigyan ka Parichay. She has three patents on her name and a project. She has adopted five villages to teach health, hygiene and sanitation to rural women and children through street play.