

A Synopsis Study of Dress & Ornaments of the Rana Dynasty of Nepal

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Abstract - The paper on the Ranas of Nepal's dress and ornaments has used the 'Photo Exploratory' method, in which old photographs were studied and analyzed. The results show that there was Muslim influence during the Malla and the beginning of the Shah period. But, after Shri Tin Junga Bhadur's return from his official tour to England and France; the Neo-classical influences filtered in, however, the indigenous touch was maintained, until the end of the Rana

Keywords: Rana, Dress , Ornaments, Nepal.

Brief Historical Background: Balnarsingh Kunwar was born on February 2, 1783, and his son Bir Singh Kunwar, later known as Junga Bhadur, was born on June 18, 1817. Later, his brothers were born: 1819, Bambahdur, 1821, Badrinarasingsh, 1823, Krishna Kunwar, 1825, Ranaudip Kunwar, and 1827, Jagat Shumsher. Junga Bhadur was appointed as Crown Prince Surendra Bir Bikram Shah's ADC in 1841. The court was in disarray, and on September 14, 1846, Gagan Singh was assassinated. The death of Mathbar Singh Thapa on September 15, 1846, resulted in Kot-Parva and Junga Bhadur becoming prime ministers, and King Rajendra Bikram being deposed. On May 5, 1848, King Surendra Bikram issued a Lal Mohar granting Junga Bhadur and his brothers the title of "RANA." until then, all Ranas bore the surname 'Kunwar.'. Junga Bahadur travelled to the United Kingdom for an "Official Visit" on January 15, 1850, and upon his return, significant changes occurred.

Brief History of Influences: Mallas came under Mugal influence in the early 15th century, after Barbar defeated Sultan Abhram Lodi at Panipath in 1526, seized Samarkand, and invaded India in 1556. Akbar's reign began in 1600, and he was followed by Janagir, Sahah Jahan, and Aurangazeb. After the Mutiny of 1857, the Mugal rule came to an end. (Welch, 1963, pp.15-16). Muslim influence can be seen on Malla rulers' clothing, which continued into the Shah period; however, British influence began to filter in 1765 and increased after the 18th century, when Junga Bhadur returned to Nepal after his official visit to Europe in 1850. Following that, Nepal underwent numerous changes. Changes were made to the clothing and ornaments.

Symbolism behind Jewels: Since ancient times, it has been believed that jewels possessed magical or mystic powers, denoting power, wealth, status, and are regarded as an individual's best friend in times of need.

The Navaratna (Brunel, 1972, Pp.5.) has great astrological significance and placement.

1. Ruby is in the center because it represents the Sun that is the giver of light and life.
2. Diamond is Vajra representing Venus that is placed in the East.
3. Sapphire is Indranila for Saturn that is placed in the West.
4. Cat's Eye is Vaidunya for Ketu and is placed in the North.
5. Coral is Muga for Mars, it is placed in the South
6. Emerald is Maukitkam for Mercury, it is placed in North East
7. Pearl is Maukitkam for Moon and is placed in South East
8. Jacinth is Gomedaka for Rahu placed in South West.
9. Topaz is Puspharaga for Jupiter and is placed in North West.



Fig 1 a

These are the settings for Navaratna. The Navaratna is supposed to protect, safeguard, and bring good fortune to people. Ganga and Jamuna are the names given to gold and silver, respectively. Gold represented the sacred Ganges water, while silver represented the sacred Jamuna's silvery water. (Brunei, 1972, pp. 5 -7).

The Rana Dynasty Men: European influences replaced Mughal influences. The Rana men were dressed in the formal attire of a British military chief. The focus was drawn to the medals they were wearing, which gleamed against their red outfits. Those who were entitled to wear the 'sirpench' or crown did so.

The 'sirpench' was adorned with rare and precious stones, as well as a plume of feathers from the bird of paradise found only in New Zealand. Daura Suruwal, was Nepal's former national dress. This outfit gained popularity after Prime Minister Bir Shumser wore it during a visit to the United Kingdom. Sri Tin Jung Bahadur Rana topped off the look with a coat. According to legend, he introduced coats to Nepal after being given one by the Queen of England during his official tour to England.

The Rana Dynasty Women: The Rana women were dressed much more opulently than the Rana men. They were experts at draping sarees to look like Victorian ball gowns. Layers of cotton pantaloons were followed by draping's of embroidered chiffon and silk sarees. The dresses worn by Rana women were heavily influenced by European fashion. This was also due to Jung Bahadur Rana being one of the first rulers from South Asia to travel to England. Travelling across the oceans was thought to be a bad omen. As a result, most Rana women were married off to smaller ruling estates in India. It was Jung Bahadur Rana's official visit to London, where he was inspired by the English Royalties attire.

The Rana women were frequently seen wearing Victorian silk gowns adorned with heavy precious gems such as emeralds, pearls, embroidered with gold threads. They also wore saris, but, they were draped very differently from the Indian style, it was pleated at the back and the border or the *Paloo* was pinned as a stole. This was named as the '*Parasi Poshak*'.

The Rana Royalties & Beautification : The Rana Royalties had their own beautification materials. The *Khalanga* (staff members' residential area) was made up of workers divided into different categories. The Ranas had a well-organized system of labor division. The Queens and concubines had their own staff of 5 to 10 *Didis* (working sisters), who were classified into various categories, such as *Talimes* were in charge of dancing and singing; they were further subdivided into upper and lower status *Talimes*; *Baithakis* were in charge of welcoming guests and looking after the *Baithak* area (Drawing-room); *Bubu* (Governess) who looked after the children and sometimes even breast-fed them. *Bhancha Bhahun & Bhahunis* (Head cooks of the kitchen) were in charge of the kitchen areas. There were *Mukhya Hajuriyas* (personal maids) of the Queens, under them were the *Didis*, whose task was to obey orders and were in charge of cleaning and other activities. They worked under the supervision of *Mukhya Hajuriya*.

There were *Mukhya Hajuriyas* (personal maids) who were close to the Queens, there were the *didis*, who worked

under their supervision and were in charge of cleaning and other activities. There were personnel in charge of the *Shringar* (beautification). The duties of each staff were specified.

Those in charge of *Shringar* or beautifying were involved in the collection of raw materials for beautification. The attendees collected rose petals and made rose water from them. Besan (gram flour), a little mustard powder, and a few drops of almond oil were combined with rose water to make a facial pack that was applied to the face for 10 to 15 minutes before being scrubbed off. Rana Royalties never used soap. Soap was introduced much later. In those days rose water with drop of glycine or drop of almond oil was applied to the face, then powder was applied with '*Fah*' soft cotton puff. Homemade powder was made from sandal wood with addition of dried and powdered Jasmin flowers and red rose petals for fragrance. It was time-consuming and laborious task. (such hand-made powder was commonly used by royalties until English beauty creams and powders were imported from England.

Eye brows were plucked and dark '*Kajal*' (Kohl) was applied, as was customary among the Royals of the time. Arched brows were not fashionable at the time. According to interviews with elderly attendees who once worked in Rana palaces, as well as word of mouth from our grandmothers, the Queens applied '*Kajal*' or Kohl with porcupine quills. Later, cotton '*Kos*' (cotton buds) were used to apply.

Every Royalty, including Queens, concubines, and other aristocratic ladies, possessed a "*Shringar Kantoor*: similar to today's Vanity Beauty Box." The head Hajuriya was in charge of its upkeep, which included making sure that all beauty materials such as '*Lalima*' (rouge), Lali (lipstick), and Kajal or Kohl, and powder, were in good condition. The Kantoor had combs, hair pins, precious and semi-precious hair clips, pins embossed with precious stones, and other accessories necessary for beautifications. It was later that Royalties and other elites began importing make-up materials from England.

Hairstyles: The hairstyles of the servers, attendants, Queens, and concubines differed. The hairstyles of the Queens and concubines were designed to complement their facial features. Their hairstyles were extremely detailed at first, with very small braids piled up as a '*chignon*' on top of the head. Hair pins and hair clips adorned with precious diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and pearls were pinned into the '*chignon*,' giving the look of grace and sophistication of a Royalties.

Junga Bhadur's daughter Lalita Rajeshwori's photo Trilokya, who was married to Crown Prince Trilokya, is depicted with a one-of-a-kind that was an unusual hairstyle. The raised hairstyle has been adorned with flowery patterned round hairpins and broaches have dancing peacocks on both sides. It flows down the left side as flower and butterflies reaching up to her shoulder as it surpasses

in beauty and style.



Fig 1b

The Jewellery of the Ranas: Rana jewelry traces the history of the Rana crown, showing how it evolved and was embossed with gems and diamonds over the course of 104 years (only to be sold to a Parisian jeweller in the mid-1950s). Many of these gems, precious stones, and ornaments were either taken from Lucknow during the Mutiny of 1857, or were brought by Indian royalty fleeing from Mughal invasions.

Women Jewellery: Jewelry was an important way to demonstrate wealth and success. Each Rana wife and daughter had custom-made tiaras and necklaces made just for them. Tiaras were encrusted with diamonds, and necklaces were made up of nine strands of pearls and gems. Because these were emblems of their ancestral royal houses, star and moon pins were popular motifs among the Ranas.

Tiaras were typically handcrafted in Calcutta, whereas necklaces, rings, bracelets, and pins were typically purchased in Europe, either during travel or by mail order. Their favorite stores were Van Cleef & Arpels, Harry Winston, and Cartier.

Male Jewellery: Rana men prefer to dress in a formal military uniform like that of a British Army personals complete with medals and braids. Sirpech, their official attire was distinguished by a distinctive headgear. The sirpech was adorned with three leaf-shaped ornaments set with diamonds and emeralds, as well as a plume made of feathers taken from a bird of paradise found only in New Zealand.

The very famous and mysterious 'Naulakha Haar,' meaning the necklace worth Rs 9 lakh, which happened to be a large sum in the early nineteenth century, was a necklace made of the finest emeralds, pearls, and diamonds. The famous Peshwa Baji Rao purchased this necklace for a hefty sum of Rs 9 lakh. This jewelry was later sold to former Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana. for a pittance in comparison to the original price It was in the early twentieth century that Prime Minister Dhir Shumshere sold it to Maharaja Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga, who was said to have one of the best jewelry collections in the world. This was done because Prime Minister Dhir Shumshere desperately needed money for his political

campaign. (Urvashi Singh Khimsar,2020)

The Ranas of Nepal lead life of sophistication and style, that later became matter of criticism to others. Yet, it is a style that has been cherished and secretly admired by many to this day.

The Rana Regime

Janga Bahadur Born 1817, 1841 became ADC. The sketch of Junga Bhadur in the British Embassy's Collection depicts him wearing a different crown than that of the Shah Rulers It is a mango shaped *Sirpech* (crown embossed with pearls, diamonds with emerald droplets. (Fig-1) He is shown wearing several strands of the **Fig-2 'Ekavali'** necklace. (single strand of pearls). Later, he is shown wearing a different crown with a circular design having emerald droplets.



Fig-2

He is also shown wearing a long three rows of pearl necklace having emerald in between with large diamond and pearls embossed on the circular pendant. Fig-1, reveals him with an Englishmen like attire. with a long frock like a coat Fig-2 with decorations. At the waist, he ties a *Patuka* held by an ornamented buckle

The Headdress of Maharani of Junga Bahadur:

The historical research reveals that Junga Bahadur had at least 17 wives and possible as many as 25 concubines.

Hiranyagarba Kumari: Was his principal senior wife, sister of Fateh Jung and Mother of Lalit Kumari who married crown Prince Trailokya who was the grandmother of King Prithivi Bir Bikram Shah. She is depicted with ornamented unique headdress embossed with pearls, diamonds, rubies and emeralds. The headdress along the ear was shaped into grape bunches of emeralds that fell down the ears and looked like earrings.



Fig-3

Apparel: Long embroidered brocade 'frilled' into bouncing frock similar to the European royalties made up of yards and yards of fine cloths, flounced by placing wire. The costly cloak with frilled edges was used in covering the upper body. His other wives Siddhi Gajendra Laxmi, Puttli Maharani, Minna Maharani, Him Kumari all of them are shown with distinctive hair ornaments made up of precious stones. The ornamented headdresses worn on their head varied. **Fig 4** as per their choice



Bada-maharani Bisnu Kumari Putali Maharani Daughter of Junga Sati wives of Junga

Dambar Kumari



Fig 4 a

Junga Bhadurs daughter from his unwed wife Meena Maharani alias Dakhchowke Maharani. Shri Damabar Kumari, the sister of Dambar Jung. She is credited with promoting the Dambar Kumari block print of textile, which has left an indelible mark on Nepal's handicraft industry and can now be defined as our very own national brand. History goes on to say she escaped to Varanasi and did not wish to return. Junga Bahadur sent Dhir Shumsher to bring her back. Through his spies he came to know that she was using 'brothel women's' in block printing Putali Maharani, favourite of Junga Bhadur wrote a personal letter requesting her to return to Nepal and promised to

provide her funding to continue her hobby which later turned into Cottage industries. It is said she wanted to remain in good books of Putali Maharani, so she returned. Dhaka cloth became famous among the Rana ladies of the court.



Fig 4 b

She was a trend setter of her era. as a result of her influence. The fabric was known as "Dambar Kumari Dhaka." Women all over the Kathmandu Valley began to use this fabric for their clothes, and it became known simply as 'Dambar Kumari ' to this day.



Fig-5

The Umbrella Bearer "Chate" are women holding the umbrella. One of the pictures of Junga Bahadur with his Queen & two daughters with "Chate's" or "Umbrella bearers". These working women are depicted with "Circular Head ornament" Similar to Gurung community women who wear such ornament on their head during special occasions such as marriages. These women were shown wearing simple apparel made of yards and yards of cloth flounced like those of Queen by placing wires. It seems that the materials and the quality differed. All of them used 'Nepali Kasto' or a shawl to cover their upper body.

Balnarsingh Kunwar:



Fig – 6

Whose descendants were to rule Nepal was depicted with an army like cap adorned with plump feathers, pearls and

other precious stones, with emerald droplets falling on his forehead. He wears an 'Ekavali' large pearl necklaces and. "Dwie Lari" long - pearl necklace known as 'Lambanam'

Rana Ranuuddip Narshima (1877 - 1885)

wears a crown-like that of Janga Bahadur. It seems that he added a bunch of pearls (like the grape- bunches) falling on the right side of his head thus enhancing its beauty. He is shown with 'Ekavali' around his throat



Fig-7

Apparel: He is depicted with Red coat with decorations reaching up to his knee and a trouser. He is shown with his two Queens **Hari Priya Devi** and **Kanchi Maharani** junior wife.

Hari Priya Devi was the main queen of Ranauddip She is depicted with an ornamented headdress that has plums falling off, with three rows of pearls and emeralds. The Queen wears a similar dress like Hiranyagarba Devi Queen of Janga Bahadur and other royalties.



Fig-8

While Kanchi Maharani of Ranauddip has been shown wearing an ornamented headdress with pearls hanging on either side in numerous rows. She is wearing a large earring with numerous pearls reaching up to her shoulder. Her necklace is of gold embossed with precious stones. On her wrist, she wears a gold bracelet.

Apparel: her apparel is very much similar to the apparel worn by the eldest queen with few more frills and a brocade shawl that is adorned in a cape-like manner above her shoulder.

Dhoj Narasingha Rana – the second son of Badri Narsingh and adopted son of Premier Ranauddip Narsingh is depicted with crescent-shaped Sirpech (crown) with pearls, emerald, rubies and plum gracefully flowing out. It is believed to be the feathers of the birds of paradise. The coat he wears is like those of an army personal with

decoration. The coat reaches up to the knee and is tied at the waist with an ornamented belt. The sleeves and collar are beautifully embroidered with gold. The trouser is similar to the style of British Commander's clothing worn in British India. Such influence was common, as Nepal was close to India. The infiltration of British influence in Nepal seems to have been much in favour since Junga Bahadur's visit to Great Britain as he was highly impressed by the 'British Royalties' splendour. Thereinafter, he had his Darvar built-in shape of Buckingham palace of England; with it began the Neo-Classical architectural constructions in Nepal.

Bir Shumsher (1885 - 1901)



Fig -9

He is depicted with a crown similar to that worn by Maharaja Shree Tin Ranauddip Narashima Rana with bunches of emerald hanging on the right. He is shown wearing embroidered coat falling up to his hip, held by embroidered belt A cape with numerous decorations including "Trishaktipath" and Gorkhadakshin Bhau.

Even today such decorations are awarded to important people by the Head of the State. Bir Shumsher is shown wearing "Dwie Lari" or double rowed necklace of pearls and emeralds. The "Panchalahar necklace" or five rows necklace were worn by royalties, since Junga Bhadur returned from his official tour.

The *Panchalarhar* necklace made up of pearl was similar to those worn by Indian contemporary Kings & Queens of the 19th century.

In 1899 Bir Shumsher's second wife is shown with a different headdress. The hair has been pleated or braided and raised high, and ornamented with diamond, gold, pearl and emeralds and designed in the shape of hair clips and set in a "tiara" fashion. She wears a long sleeves blouse, like the women of her period, above it she wears an embossed armlet of gold. She wears lots of jewellery on her neck. "ekavali", "Panchahara" (Five stringed pearls, emerald necklaces) as well as "lambanam" long pearl necklace reaching up to the waist with flowery and crescent designs. It perhaps could be "Chandra hara" simple droplets for ears.

Apparel is well designed and flounced like a frock worn by European ladies of England. The only difference between the European ladies and the Nepali Queens was that here the ladies used yards and yards of sari material designed

and flounced by wires. This shows that European influence had filtered and had, had a great influence on Nepal

Chandra Shumsher J. B. Rana (1901 - 1929)



Fig-10/11

shown with a similar crown as worn by Dev Shumsher with decorations befitting a Prime minister and a cape Over his embroidered coat he wore many decorations. Below he was shown with a white trouser held within a boot reaching up to his knee. The Portrait of Maharani Bal Kumari (1917). Second queen of Chandra Shumsher is depicted with raised hair-dress ornamented with diamond, emerald, pearl and crescent moon. Besides other necklaces, she is also shown wearing a “Bikaniri necklace”; ornamented with diamond and pearls Queen also wears a long pearl necklace. She wears a sari worn in a different style. It known as “*Parasi Poshak*” in those days.

Queen Laxmi Divyeshwari (Mother of Queen Tribhuvan)



Fig12

is graciously dressed with raised hair-dress shaped like “*Mauli*” or turban ornamented with pearls, rubies and emerald (Alkazi, 1982, p. 125) etc. On her neck she wears an ‘*ekavali*’ (single pearl- necklace) and ‘hara’ of pearls with a pendant. (Alkazi, 1982, p.126) The wearing of “*Mauli*” like headdress existed even in India. Similar to the Royal Bodhisattvas of Mathura. Its *Mukuta* or crown shaped as tiers in a very decorative style (Kushan Period). The ornaments worn too are of the designs belonging to 185 A.D. This provides evidence that that “Fashion can never be termed old, Fashions simply disappears and reappears as new trend”. As the saying goes, “Everyone laugh at the old fashion but religiously follows the new one”.

Bhim Shumsher (1929 - 1932): Is shown wearing a crown like Janga Bahadur Rana with all decorations. He is shown with an embroidered coat and white trouser held within a

boot that reaches up to his knee.

Maharaja Bhim Shumsher’s Senior Wife (1890): is shown with lovely ornamented hair-dress (crown) with flowery designs with flowers made of gold and precious stones shaped as creepers, leaves and flowers falling down to her neck. She is also depicted wearing a necklace with a flowery leaf at the center. The dress cannot be seen except for an ornamented cape with lovely flowery broaches in the shape of flowers, leaf and butterflies.



Fig-13

Padma Shumsher (1945 – 48): Maharaj Padma Shumsher was known as people’s premier His crown is very much similar to his brothers before him, with emerald droplets. The only difference in his dress-up is his light blue cloak with white ribbons and decorations. This is unique, because all other premiers are seen wearing red coats.



Fig 14

Mohan Shumsher (1948 – 1951): Mohan Shumsher is the last premier.



After him the Rana dynasty came to an end with it came an end of an era. His crown is very similar to that of Padma

Shumsher with emerald droplets. His coat is red as earlier premiers of his period. It shows European Influence, unlike his brother Padma Shumsher he does not wear/a cloak.

Beautification & Makeup : It will incomplete to conclude without mentioning about the makeup materials used and prepared by the ladies of the Khalanga (Working staff area) who were responsible for such tasks.

Conclusion: The British influence on dress and ornaments continued till the rule of the last premier Mohan Shumsher. Then the Rana dynasty came to an end and with it was the end of the British influence that began with Shri Tin Maharaja Junga Bhadur's visit to Europe.

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