

THE MUGHAL COSTUMES: THREADS OF ELEGANCE IN AN EMPIRE OF OPULENCE

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explored the rich and opulent world of Mughal costumes, delving into their origins, materials, styles, and its significance. Mughal attire was a fusion of indigenous Indian, Persian, and Central Asian influences, characterized by luxurious fabrics, intricate embroidery, and elaborate embellishments. From the royal courts of Delhi and Agra to the bustling streets of Lahore and Bengal, each region contributed to the diverse cultural landscape of the Mughal Empire. The paper is divided into three parts. Analysis of Mughal costumes has been discussed in its first part. Second part discussed the comparative study of costumes based on cultural, regional and social class, highlighting the elaborate attire of royalty and nobility compared to the simpler garments of commoners. Significance of colors has been studied in its third part. The findings suggested that festive costumes, adorned with vibrant colors, intricate embroidery, and symbolic motifs, symbolized joy, prosperity, and cultural heritage during festivals and special occasions. Throughout history, Mughal costumes have remained an enduring symbol of elegance, sophistication, and cultural richness, inspiring fascination and admiration for their timeless beauty and craftsmanship.

Keywords: Costumes, Attires, Mughals, Headwear's, Embroidery.

INTRODUCTION

The term "Mughal attire" refers to clothes created by the Mughals in the Indian subcontinent throughout the 16th to 18th centuries. The origin of Mughal costumes can be traced back to the early 16th century, when the Mughal Empire emerged as a dominant force in the Indian subcontinent. The Mughals were descendants of Central Asian nomads, particularly the Timurids and Mongols, who brought with them a rich cultural heritage that influenced various aspects of life, including fashion and attire. The costumes of the Mughal period were a fusion of indigenous Indian, Persian, and Central Asian styles, reflecting

the diverse cultural influences that shaped the empire. It was fashioned with muslin, silk, velvet, and brocade and had opulent designs. The Mughals were great patrons of the arts and encouraged the

exchange of ideas and traditions among different communities, leading to the development of a unique and distinctive fashion aesthetic. One of the key influences on Mughal costumes was Persian culture, which had a profound impact on the ruling elite. The Mughal emperors and nobles were fascinated by Persian art, literature, fashion, and sought to emulate the sophistication and elegance of Persian courtly attire. Persian motifs and designs, such as intricate floral patterns and arabesques, were incorporated into Mughal garments, adding a touch of refinement and luxury. Central Asian influences also played a significant role in shaping Mughal costumes, particularly in terms of silhouette and style. The loose, flowing garments favored by the Mughals were reminiscent of the traditional attire worn by

Central Asian nomads, which allowed for freedom of movement and comfort in the hot and arid climate of the region. Elements such as wide sleeves, voluminous skirts, and draped fabrics were characteristic of Central Asian dress and were adopted by the Mughals to create a distinctive and elegant look. Indigenous Indian traditions also left their mark on Mughal costumes, particularly in terms of textiles and craftsmanship. India has a rich tradition of textile production, with skilled artisans producing exquisite fabrics such as silk, cotton, and muslin using traditional techniques passed down through generations. The Mughals were quick to recognize the quality and beauty of Indian textiles and became avid patrons of the textile industry, commissioning elaborate garments adorned with intricate embroidery, embellishments, and fine weaving. In addition to their cultural significance, Mughal costumes also served practical purposes, reflecting the social status, rank, and identity of the wearer. Overall, Mughal costumes were a reflection of the empire's cultural diversity, blending influences from various regions to create a unique and timeless style that continues to captivate and inspire to this day. From the opulent fabrics and intricate embroidery to the elegant silhouettes and elaborate accessories, Mughal attire embodied the grandeur, sophistication, and refinement of one of the greatest empires in history. Throughout history, Mughal costumes have left an indelible mark on the world of fashion and design. Their exquisite craftsmanship, intricate detailing, and timeless elegance continue to inspire designers, artists, and enthusiasts alike. The legacy of Mughal attire lives on in the vibrant textiles of South Asia, the ornate embroidery of haute couture, and the enduring fascination with the rich cultural heritage of the Indian subcontinent (Dey, G. (2015).

Analysis of Mughal Costumes.

The number of different pieces of costume, worn by the Mughals, was about eighteen. A large variety of material, cotton, silk and brocade, rich and costly was used to suit the clothing of the emperors. The number of garments for the upper part of the body was seventeen. The most favored apparel of the Mughals before Akbar's reign was the *Jama*, a long, flowing robe worn by men. It had a fitted bodice and wide sleeves, often reaching down to the ankles. It was

made from luxurious fabrics such as silk or brocade and was typically embellished with intricate embroidery or embellishments (Fig 1). Men would pair their *jama* with either *churidar* pants or a *dhoti*. *Churidar* pants were tightly fitted trousers with gathers at the ankles, while a *dhoti* was a long piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and legs, creating a loose, skirt-like garment. During the time of Akbar period, these costumes commonly depicted in Mughal painting that was inspired from Rajput court. Around the waist of the *Jama*, a long piece of fine fabric was tied like a sash. This was the *Patka*, from which a jeweled sword could be suspended. *Patkas* were hand-woven with complex designs, or embroidered, or hand-painted or printed. Many made for royalty showed textile craftsmanship. Men would often wear elaborate turbans, known as *pagris*, as part of their attire (Figure 2). Turbans varied in style, color, and ornamentation depending on the wearer's status, region, and occasion. Headwear was an essential component of Mughal attire, with both men and women adorning themselves with elaborate headdresses. Men typically wore turbans or '*pagris*' which varied in style and color depending on their status and region. The turban was not just a fashion statement but also a symbol of dignity and honor with different styles denoting various ranks and affiliations. Women, on the other hand, adorned their heads with '*dupattas*' (scarves) or '*odhnis*' often embroidered or embellished to match their outfits. These head coverings added a touch of elegance and sophistication to their attire, completing the overall look (Houghteling, S. W. (2017).

Women typically wore the *anarkali* or *peshwaz*, which were long, flowing dresses with fitted bodices and voluminous skirts. These dresses were often made from luxurious fabrics such as silk or velvet and were adorned with intricate embroidery, beads, and gemstones. Each of these components played a crucial role in completing the Mughal attire, reflecting the empire's wealth, status, and cultural sophistication. The Mughal Empire was renowned for its opulent and luxurious textiles, with a wide array of materials used in the creation of their exquisite costumes. Silk was one of the most prized and luxurious fabrics used in Mughal costumes. Known for its softness, sheen, and drape, silk was favored by the elite and nobility for its richness and elegance. It was often used in the creation of

elaborate garments such as '*jamās*' (robes), '*anarkalis*' (dresses), and '*dupattas*' (scarves), as well as in intricate embroidery and embellishments. Brocade was a highly decorative fabric woven with intricate patterns in gold or silver threads. It was favored for its richness and texture, making it ideal for ceremonial and formal attire worn by the Mughal aristocracy. Brocade was often used in the creation of royal robes, courtly garments, and ceremonial draperies, adding a touch of luxury and grandeur to Mughal costumes. Velvet was a plush and sumptuous fabric with a soft pile surface, prized for its luxurious feel and rich appearance. It was commonly used in the creation of Mughal garments such as '*jamās*', '*peshwaz*' (dresses), and '*anrakhas*' (coats), particularly for formal and ceremonial occasions. Velvet was often adorned with intricate embroidery, beads, and precious stones, enhancing its beauty and elegance. Muslin was a lightweight and breathable cotton fabric, known for its fine weave and soft texture. It was commonly used in everyday attire worn by both men and women, providing comfort and ease of movement in the hot and humid climate

of the Indian subcontinent. Muslin was often dyed in vibrant colors and adorned with delicate embroidery or block prints, making it a versatile and popular choice for Mughal clothing. Cotton was a staple fabric used in Mughal attire, valued for its affordability, durability, and versatility. It was commonly used in the creation of everyday garments such as '*kurtas*' (tunics), '*dhotis*' (loincloths), and '*lungis*' (skirts), as well as in undergarments and linings. Cotton fabrics were often dyed in a wide range of colors and decorated with block prints, embroidery, and embellishments, making them accessible to people of all social classes. Gold and silver threads were used extensively in Mughal embroidery, adding shimmer and opulence to garments. Known as '*zari*' and '*kasab*' these metallic threads were woven into intricate patterns and motifs, creating stunning designs that reflected the wealth and status of the wearer. Gold and silver threads were often used in combination with other materials such as silk, velvet, and brocade, enhancing the beauty and luxury of Mughal costumes (Chakraborty, S. S. (2022).



Figure 1: Mughal Male Jamas

(Source: <https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/costumes-of-mughal-era>)



Figure 2: Mughal Male Costume

(Source: <https://thegracefulflare.wordpress.com/2018/09/02/mughal-period-1526-to-1671/>)



Figure 3: Mughal Turbans or Pagris

(Source: <https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/costumes-of-mughal-era>)



Figure 4: Mughal Turbans or Pagris

(Source: <https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/costumes-of-mughal-era>)



Figure 5: Women Anarkali or Peshwaz

(Source: <https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/costumes-of-mughal-era>)

Cultural and Regional Variation in Mughal Costumes.

The various regions of the Mughal Empire had distinctive cultural identities that were reflected in their costumes. The costumes of Delhi, being the capital, often represented the imperial court's style and sophistication. Delhite attire tended to be opulent and intricately embroidered, reflecting the wealth and status of the nobility. Men would wear elaborate '*jamās*' (long tunics) with richly embroidered '*shawls*' (long scarves) draped over their shoulders. Women in Delhi would adorn themselves in luxurious '*anarkalis*' (long dresses) with intricate '*dupattas*' (scarves), often embellished with gold or silver threads. Agra's costumes were influenced by the city's role as a major center of craftsmanship and trade. Agra was known for its fine textiles, particularly silk and brocade, which were favored by both men and women. Men in Agra would often wear elaborate turbans adorned with jewels, reflecting the city's status as a center of luxury and opulence. Women's attire in Agra was characterized by vibrant colors and intricate embroidery, with '*lahengas*' (long skirts) and '*cholis*' (blouses) being popular choices. Lahore costumes reflected the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse influences, including Persian and Central Asian. Lahore was known for its intricate '*gota*' work (appliqué), which adorned both men's and women's garments. Men in Lahore favored long, flowing '*kurtas*' (tunics) paired with '*churidar*'

pants and embroidered '*jamawars*' (shawls). Women's attire in Lahore was characterized by colorful '*ghararas*' (wide-legged trousers) paired with '*kurtas*' and '*dupattas*', often embellished with intricate '*zardozi*' (metallic thread embroidery). Bengal's costumes were influenced by the region's vibrant textile industry and maritime trade. Bengal was known for its fine muslin and silk fabrics, which were favored by both men and women. Men in Bengal would often wear lightweight cotton '*panjabi*' (tunics) paired with '*dhotis*' (loincloths) or '*lungis*' (skirts). Women's attire in Bengal was characterized by the '*sari*', a long piece of fabric draped elegantly around the body, often in vibrant colors and intricate patterns. The costumes of the Deccan reflected the region's diverse cultural heritage, blending influences from Persia, Central Asia, and South India. Deccani attire was characterized by its use of bold colors, geometric patterns, and intricate embellishments. Men in the Deccan would often wear '*sherwanis*' (long coats) with '*churidar*' pants, adorned with elaborate embroidery and embellishments. Women's attire in the Deccan featured vibrant '*salwar kameez*' (tunics and trousers) and '*dupattas*', often embellished with '*zari*' (metallic thread) work and mirror work. The costumes of Rajasthan were influenced by the region's desert climate and Rajput warrior culture. Rajput attire was characterized by its use of bright colors, bold patterns, and heavy embellishments.

Men in Rajasthan would often wear '*anrakha*' (long coats) paired with '*churidar*' pants and intricately tied turbans. Women's attire in Rajasthan featured colorful '*ghagras*' (long skirts) paired with '*cholis*' (blouses) and '*odhnis*' (scarves), often adorned with mirror work, embroidery, and appliqué. These regional differences in costumes reflected the diverse cultural landscapes of the Mughal Empire, showcasing the richness and diversity of its people and traditions. Each region contributed its unique flair to Mughal attire, from the elaborate courtly ensembles of Delhi and Agra to the vibrant textiles of Bengal and the ornate embroidery of Lahore. Social class played a significant role in shaping Mughal costumes, with royalty and nobility donning the most lavish and opulent attire, while commoners adorned themselves in simpler garments suited to their everyday lives (Chopra, P. N, 1952).

Variations in Costumes According to Social Class.

In the Mughal Empire, costumes varied significantly according to social class, reflecting the wearer's status, wealth, and occupation. Different styles of dress were associated with specific roles and occasions, with variations in color, fabric, and embellishment signaling the wearer's status and affiliations within the imperial court. Emperors and nobles would wear garments made from the finest materials, adorned with elaborate embroidery and jewels, while commoners would dress in simpler attire made from more affordable fabrics. Members of the royal family and nobility wore the most lavish and ornate costumes, made from the finest fabrics and embellished with intricate embroidery, gold and silver threads, pearls, and precious stones. Men belonging to this class would often wear elaborately embroidered '*jamas*' (long robes) paired with luxurious '*churidar*' pants or 'dhotis', accessorized with ornate turbans. Women of royalty and nobility would don richly embroidered '*anarkalis*' or '*peshwaz*', often adorned with precious jewels and pearls, paired with equally luxurious '*dupattas*' (scarves) and elaborate hairstyles. Courtiers and officials in the Mughal court would also dress in elaborate attire, albeit slightly less extravagant than that of the royal family. Their costumes would feature intricate embroidery and fine fabrics but might not be as heavily adorned with jewels and precious metals. Courtiers would often wear similar

styles of '*jamas*', turbans, and jewelry as the royalty, but with less ostentation. Members of the military and administrative class wore costumes that were practical yet distinguished them from the common populace. Artisans and craftsmen belonged to a lower social class but still took pride in their attire, often showcasing their skills through intricate embroidery and craftsmanship. Their costumes would be made from more affordable fabrics such as cotton or muslin, but they would often incorporate elaborate designs and patterns. Artisans might wear simpler versions of the '*jama*' or '*anarkali*', adorned with decorative motifs and embroidery that showcased their craftsmanship. Commoners in the Mughal Empire typically wore simpler and more practical attire suited to their daily activities and occupations. Men would wear plain '*kurtas*' (tunics) paired with 'dhotis' or '*lungis*', while women would wear 'saris' or simple '*ghagras*' (skirts) with '*cholis*' (blouses). Commoners' attire would be less ornate and made from more affordable fabrics, with minimal embellishments and jewelry (Das, S., & Gupta, I. (2020). Overall, the costumes of the Mughal Empire reflected the intricate social hierarchy and cultural diversity of the time, with each class having its distinct style and aesthetic preferences. Military officials would often wear uniforms or distinctive attire that denoted their rank and affiliation, typically made from sturdy fabrics such as cotton or wool. Administrative officials might dress similarly to courtiers but with less embellishment, focusing more on functionality and comfort. During festivals, the Mughals adorned themselves in attire that reflected the grandeur and significance of the occasion. Festive attire for both men and women was crafted from luxurious fabrics such as silk, velvet, and brocade. These materials were chosen for their opulence and elegance, adding a regal touch to the wearer's ensemble. Festivals were celebrated with an explosion of colors, and Mughal costumes were no exception. Bright and vibrant hues such as red, green, blue, and gold were favored, symbolizing joy, prosperity, and auspiciousness. Festive garments were often embellished with intricate embroidery, showcasing the exquisite craftsmanship of Mughal artisans. Gold and silver threads, pearls, and precious stones were used to create elaborate patterns and motifs, adding to the richness and beauty of the attire. Turbans (*pagris*) for

men and ornate headscarves (*dupattas*) for women were essential components of festive attire. These head coverings were often adorned with jewels, pearls, and feathers, adding to the wearer's grandeur and sophistication. Festive costumes were accessorized with elaborate jewelry, including necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and rings. These ornaments were crafted from gold, silver, and precious stones, enhancing the wearer's beauty and elegance. While the styles of festive attire varied depending on the region and occasion, traditional silhouettes such as '*jamans*' for men and '*anarkalis*' or '*peshwaz*' for women were commonly worn. These garments featured fitted bodices, voluminous skirts, and flowing sleeves, creating a sense of grace and refinement. Festive attire often featured symbolic motifs and designs that held cultural and religious significance. Floral patterns, geometric shapes, and religious symbols were incorporated into the embroidery and embellishments, reflecting the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Mughal Empire (Nasir, E., & Kilinc, N. 2023).

Colors Significance of Mughal Costumes.

Colors used in Mughal costumes were rich, vibrant, and held significant symbolic meaning. Red was one of the most prominent colors in Mughal costumes symbolizing love, passion, and prosperity. It was associated with auspicious occasions such as weddings and festivals and was favored by both men and women of all social classes. Green represented fertility, renewal, and the natural world. It was often associated with springtime and growth and was worn on festive occasions such as Eid and other religious celebrations. Blue was another popular color in Mughal attire, symbolizing royalty, power, and divinity. Shades of blue, such as turquoise and azure, were commonly used in royal garments and courtly attire, reflecting the wearer's status and prestige. Gold was synonymous with wealth, prosperity, and luxury in Mughal culture. It was often used in embroidery, thread work, and embellishments, adding a touch of opulence and grandeur to garments worn by the elite and nobility. White symbolized purity, simplicity, and spirituality in Mughal attire. It was often worn during religious ceremonies and rituals, as well as by members of the Sufi orders who sought spiritual enlightenment and detachment from worldly desires. Purple was a color associated with

royalty, nobility, and prestige. It was often reserved for the highest-ranking members of society, including the emperor and his immediate family, as well as courtiers and officials of high status. Yellow represented happiness, prosperity, and auspiciousness in Mughal culture. It was often worn during festive occasions and celebrations, symbolizing the joy and abundance of life. Pink symbolized romance, femininity, and tenderness. It was a popular choice for women's attire, particularly for bridal wear and festive ensembles, where it added a touch of grace and elegance. These colors were not only chosen for their aesthetic appeal but also for their cultural and symbolic significance, reflecting the values, beliefs, and traditions of the Mughal society. Colors held symbolic significance in Mughal clothing, with certain hues reserved for specific occasions or ranks. Rich jewel tones such as ruby red, emerald green, sapphire blue, and golden yellow were favored by the elite, symbolizing wealth, power, and prosperity. The choice of colors also reflected cultural influences, with Persian and Central Asian motifs often incorporating vibrant hues and intricate patterns (Sharma, K. D).

Conclusion

Mughal costumes stand as a testament to the grandeur and opulence of the Mughal Empire, which flourished in the Indian subcontinent from the early 16th to the mid-19th centuries. The attire of the Mughal era was a fusion of indigenous Indian, Persian, and Central Asian influences, resulting in a distinctive and elegant style that reflected the empire's rich cultural heritage. Mughal costumes were a reflection of the empire's wealth, power, and cultural sophistication. They blended influences from various regions to create a unique and timeless style that continues to inspire fashion designers and enthusiasts to this day. From the luxurious fabrics and intricate embroidery to the elaborate headwear and exquisite jewelry, every aspect of Mughal attire spoke of elegance, refinement, and opulence, leaving an indelible mark on the annals of fashion history. Mughal clothing used the exquisite craftsmanship and luxurious materials in its creation. The costumes of the Mughal era were more than mere garments; they were expressions of wealth, status, and cultural identity. Fabrics such as silk, brocade, and velvet, adorned with intricate embroidery, gold and silver

threads, and precious stones, showcased the empire's wealth and sophistication. From the grandeur of imperial courts to the simplicity of everyday life, Mughal attire captured the essence of an era marked by cultural diversity, artistic expression, and timeless elegance. In an ever-changing world, the allure of Mughal costumes endures as a testament to the enduring power of art, culture, and creativity to transcend time and space.

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