

Pockets in Indian Garments: Historical Perspective

Abstract

Present study was conducted to trace the history of pockets in Indian garments. The study was conducted in Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Information was gathered through museums, tailors, elderly people and print sources. Different words used for pockets and their varied usages were compiled. Socio- cultural factors related to pockets were studied. Different types of pockets and their usual contents were also recorded.

Keywords: Pockets, Indian garments, History, Fashion, Dress

Introduction

Human beings always have had a need to carry stuff. Therefore, every outfit ought to have a pocket somewhere. Shirts, trousers, skirts and especially jackets and coats all need pockets. If for any reason a pocket does not suit the outer design of a dress and it is felt that it would spoil the style, then less visible pocket can be designed, this is certainly better than no pocket. Pockets are one of the most visible signs of a garment's overall quality. The origin of the pocket in garments is lost in the great draperies of time. Information regarding history of pockets in western garments is relatively easy to find but it is difficult to trace the history of pockets in Indian garments. The present study was an effort in this direction.

Methodology

The information regarding history of garment pockets in India was gathered through intensive study of available literature in print form and on internet. City Palace Museum, Jaipur Albert Hall Museum, Jaipur and Dharohar Museum, Kurukshetra were visited for study of pockets on historic costumes. Tailors and elderly people of rural and urban areas of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh also provided information regarding pockets of the past. The information was arranged in a logical and systematic form.

Result and Discussion

Pocket is a small piece of material sewn into or onto a garment and forming a small bag for carrying things in. The pocket was not originally sewn into garments as it is today. In fact, the first pocket was actually a small pouch that hung from the belt where one could carry valuables and coins. With passage of time these pockets developed into variety of sew- on pockets of the present day.

Indian Words Used For Pocket

In Arabic language the word 'Jaib' is used for 'Girebaan' or collar. Earlier the money bag was stitched near collar. That bag was later called 'jeb', the Hindi word for pocket. Now the 'jeb' has shifted away from collar to back hip on trouser and many other locations. Another word used in India for pocket 'Kheesa', another word for pocket, (Arabic- Keesa) also means bag or purse (Malhotra,2004). This word is used in Gujarati and Marathi languages also. Word Tent is also used for Kheesa or a cloth pouch with a string closure. It was pushed inside garments like Dhoti or was tied around waist. Later the word was used for pocket also. The word 'Goj' is used in the state of Haryana. Word 'Paakit' is used in Marathi language. 'Anti' is another word used for pocket. The word Batua originated from the Sanskrit word Vant which means section, part or division. Marathi word is Batwa and Gujarati is Batvo. In the period of Baadshahs and Nawabs the word Khareeta was used for pocket. Broader meaning of Khareeta was an envelope or a bag used to carry documents. Khareeta was a silk bag of large size in which gold or silver coins were also filled.

Similar Words in Other Languages

In Arabic language jib, al jeb and jib stand for purse. Jubah is a Sherwani like Arabic garment. In Hebrew juba word means money and

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Gev word means pocket. Pocket is Zep in Albanese, Jheb in Bulgarian, Dzep in Serbian, Sep in Turkish and Tsepi in Greek. Words similar to Kheesa are Kiss in Hebrew, Kesa in Syrian and Kise in Persian.

Related Words

The words pocket and Jeb have been used in many ways. Several other words originated from this word.

1. Jebkharch- Pocket money
2. Jebkatra, Jebtarash, Paakitmaar - Pick pocket
3. Paakit Maarna, Jeb Kaatna, Jeb Se Uda Lena- Picking someone's pocket
4. Chor jeb- Hidden pocket

Idioms Using the Word Pocket

Use of the word Jeb is common in many Hindi idioms.

1. Jeb Garm Karna- To bribe someone
2. Jeben Tatolna – Checking someone's pockets.
3. Jeb Ka Jayza Lena –To assess one's paying capacity
4. Jeb Bacha Kar Rakhna – Preventing expenditure
5. Jeben Dheeli Karna- Allowing expenditure from one's pocket
6. Jeb Bhaari Hai – The pocket is rich
7. Jeb Par Bhaari- Heavy on pocket, Inflation, Costly things
8. Khaali Jeb- Popper person
9. Jeb Tang- Tight hand, tight monetary situation
10. Kafan Me Jeb Nahin Hoti: It is said '*Bachcha jab paida hota hai uske vastron me jeb nahin hoti aur jab manushya marta hai to uske kafan me bhi jeb nahin hoti. Jeb to janam maran ke beech me aati hai*'. It may be translated as 'When a baby is born no pockets are there in the newborn's garments and when a person dies the shroud also does not have any pocket. The pocket comes in between the birth and the death'. These lines indicate that a man comes empty handed in the world and goes empty handed from the world.

Gender Differences

Pockets are expressive of gender roles and social status. There has always been a difference in the number and position of pockets customarily provided for men, women and children.

Possible reasons for not incorporating pockets in women's traditional garments like Saree, Salwar Kameez and Ghagra Choli.

1. Pockets indicate our authority, ownership or control. Dominating males have been considered better owners or controllers. Women have been physically and mentally delicate and hence more submissive.
2. Women used to take care of the household and men handled the outside works so they needed pockets more than women did.
3. When women had to go outside home they were escorted by men and men's pocket served the pair's need of carrying money and other small belongings.

Social and Cultural Factors

Pockets reveal a wealth of social and cultural information.

1. Pockets were considered a private space. Whether the contents of pockets were utilitarian or precious, for daily use or private consumption,

keeping them in one's pocket was an efficient way of ensuring they were easily reached and safe.

2. Pockets tell us of the lives and actions of the persons who wore them. Woven, sewn, crocheted and embroidered pockets made by women were a way of expressing creativity through pockets.
3. Pockets could also be a means of expressing individuality. A neatly worked pocket indicated the good hand and taste of a woman.
4. Pocket made of finer material might identify its wearer as a wealthy woman while a simply constructed plain one made from low cost material would show that the owner was from a more ordinary world.

Usual Contents of pockets

The pockets show a plenty of evidence about the kind of things used by people in that time. A pocket was a handy place to keep everyday utilities. It gave a sense of comfort and independence, by removing the necessity of borrowing. There were no mobile phones, car keys or credit cards earlier. Nevertheless, people kept a wide variety of objects in their pockets.

1. Rural Men- Tobacco for Hukka, money, matchbox, Bidi, bicycle key
2. Rural women- snuffbox, jaggery piece, safety pin
3. Children- Toffees, groundnuts, marbles, pebbles
4. Urban men- cigarette, pen, diary, comb, spectacles, handkerchief, two wheeler keys
5. Criminals-Pistol, Knife, Blade
6. Objects specially made for pockets: Pocket calendar, pocket knife, pocket books, pocket dictionary
7. Modern addition to pockets- Mobile phones, Car keys, ATM cards, Credit cards, Visiting cards

Urmi Krishn wrote in the article titled 'Dadaji Ki Bandi' (Grandpa's vest) ' Many things are kept in the pocket of the Bandi such as pen, pencil, paper, pin, Sutli, rope, Nara, Gur Ki Dali, keys of trunk boxes, house keys, sparrow feed and eatables for children. The Sutli will be handy in joining the broken slippers, bag handles and the like. Being inner garment children and thieves can't reach the pocket'.

Written sources such as dictionaries, blogs, articles, stories, movies and books revealed about the pockets and what is contained in them.

Types of Pockets

Like other fashion details pockets have also been sensitive to fashion changes. Both men and women fashions have tried to maintain smooth outlines of their garment whilst carrying things in the pockets. Changes in the type and number pockets derive both from fashion and from the need to accommodate different kinds of things, ranging from a women's snuffbox of the 18th century to car keys in more recent times.

Knots Used as Pockets

There is a proverb in Hindi- Aankh Ka Andha, Gaanth Ka Poora. Its literal meaning is – A blind person having a full knot. Its real meaning is - An idiot person having a full pocket. A rich and idiot person, who can be easily cheated. Here the word knot has been used for pocket. Before the use of

stitched garments Indians draped unstitched lengths of cloth like Dhoti or Saree. These garments did not have pockets, therefore people used to tie small utilities in the knot at the corner of the garment. The Gaanth word was continued to be used for pocket also.

Separate Pouch Pockets

Different types of purses or separate pockets have been exhibited in the art and craft section of Dharohar Museum situated in Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana. Information recorded from the museum is as follows.

1. *Batua* was a small bag or pocket used for keeping money. Having a single pocket, it was simple in construction. It was told by a person on duty that a Potli like small *Batua* with single pocket used in old times had string on the opening that could be drawn to open and close it. Some women decorated that *Batua* with mirrors or embroidery.
2. In older times *Batua* with an extended panel that had pointed edge was also in use. This panel had a string to wrap and tie around the *Batua*. This *Batua* was made with woven or crocheted fabric. The one side extended to overlap or cover the other side for fastening could be rectangular shaped. Press buttons, as they became available, were used for fastening in place of the string. Now-a-days women in villages make purses with satin fabric and embellish with bead work.
3. Pothia was the men's purse, larger than the women's *Batua*. It was a cloth wallet brought by the brides as a part of dowry and was presented to her father in law or brother in law. Its construction was like an envelope. Three corners of a square fabric piece were brought to centre point and were fixed there by stitching the adjacent edges together by hands stitching. This process made the bag part. To the fourth loose corner a string was attached to wrap and tie round the bag part. The name Pothia probably came from the word Pothi (book) or Pothia, (booklet).
4. Nyoli was another kind of *Batua* used to carry large amount of currency, specially silver coins, while travelling. It was a tubular bag having string/straps at both the ends so that it could be tied around waist like a belt. It was made by weaving or crocheting.
5. Tambakoo Ki Kothli or tobacco pocket was used to contain tobacco for smoking a hubble- bubble. It was a longer pouch and looked like the side seam pocket of a Kurta, one panel longer and pointed having a string to wrap around the Kothali. The literal meaning of Kothali in Hindi is a small bag or a long bag used to keep money by tying at waist.

In-built Pockets

A historical record of Indian clothing is difficult to trace. While there is an abundance of sculpture and literature dating from the earliest periods of civilization in the Indus Valley around 2500 B.C., scholars have had difficulty in dating the

changes in clothing styles and naming the variations on certain styles over time.

The oldest type of Indian clothing was shaped out of yards of unstitched fabric that were then wound around the body in a variety of ways to create different, distinct garments. Some of the most popular wrapped garments are women's sari, men's dhoti, turban, and a variety of scarves. These styles of garments have been popular in India since the beginning of its civilization and continue to be worn in the twenty-first century. These unstitched garments never had pockets.

Changes in the styles worn by Indians reflected their contact with people from other countries who invaded or entered India for trade or to live. Indians knew how to sew long before the sixteenth century when the Mugals invaded and they had long adorned their wrapped garments with elaborate embroidery stitches. But when the Moguls took power over the region, the Mugals' style of stitched clothing became popular among Indians. Sewn jackets and trousers were among the styles popularized by the Mogul leaders (Anonymous, 2013d). These garments could have pockets sewn on them.

Maharana Bhupal Singh (1930-1966) used to wear a short coat known as Jodhpur coat or band gale ka coat. It was worn over Angarkhi especially during summer. There was three pockets on the coat, one was on the left side in front at chest level, between second and third buttons. The two pockets which were patch pockets were sewn below the waist length on the right and left side of the front (Mathur, 1994).

In Rajasthan community upper garment known as the Kurta probably began in the 19th century and it is, at present, a popular garment among men of Rajasthan. The Kurtas mostly have a side pocket. A shorter variation of the Kurta is the Jhulki. Both the men and women of the Garasia community wear it. It is a half sleeved garment that has three buttons on the front. It has a pocket stitched on the left side of the bodice (Bhandari, 2004).

The Sherwani is the most classic of Indian garments. It is extra long in length (around 110 centimeters) and has collar band of 3-4 centimeters. Two inseam pockets and giant side slits are a must for this garment.

In built pockets in males' garments displayed in City Palace Museum, Jaipur are described below.

A Dhoti (17th century) was exhibited on Albert hall museum in Jaipur. This garment had a pouch pocket on the waist belt for trimming purpose. Embroidery was done on the pouch pocket.

Billiard dress (1835-1880) of Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh 2nd of Jaipur was displayed, consisting an outer garment, inner garment and trouser. The outer garment had three patch pockets with flap. Two patch pockets were situated on both sides of chest and one patch pocket was stitched on waist area. Zardozi work applied on all three pocket flap for trimming purpose. Gathers were incorporated in both the chest pockets. The inner garment had two patch pockets, with round shape bottom, on both side of the waist area. Dabka work decorated the mouth of both the pockets. The

trouser had two front hip inseam pockets. Embroidery was done around the inseam pocket. One inner pocket was there at the waist portion as a hidden pocket.

White colour quilted Sadri (1850) cotton embroidered in Sujani style had two welt pockets, of moon shape mouth, on both sides of chest and two welt pockets of square shape mouth on both sides of the waist area. Cotton padded Sadri (1900) block printed with floral and paisley motif had one welt pocket on chest and another on waist area.

Sina band (1878), an upper garment of a boy had two welt pockets on both sides of chest portion. Piping was done all around the pocket.

Blue colour, woollen Polo dress for Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh 2nd (1850) had two patch pockets with flap on both sides of waist portion. Pocket was embellished with Salma Sitara work.

Angrakhi (1835-1880), an outer garment, of Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh 2nd had two patch pockets stitched at the chest area on both sides of the centre front opening. Brocade work adorned the pocket openings.

An inner garment (1836- 1880) for Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh 2nd had two welt pockets stitched on center front portion.

Polo dress (1922-1970) of Maharaja Sawai Maan Singh 2nd had two front hip inseam pockets in the trouser. The pocket mouth had a scalloped shape.

Conclusion

Study of the history of pockets revealed that when Indians wore unstitched garments the pockets were also in the form of pouches separate from clothes. As the stitching of garments started the pockets were also incorporated in the garments. Earlier only men needed pockets as they did all the outside works and handled all the money. Later pockets became a part of females' garments also. Pocket vocabulary gradually developed with the influence of different regions. Pocket designs also evolved with the changing garment designs, needs of the users and development of sewing techniques.

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