

## **Presenting traditions with practical and contemporary expression in the Royal Costume Museum of Saad Abad Cultural & Historical complex**

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### **Abstract**

The Royal Costume Museum of the Cultural and Historical Complex of Saad Abad <sup>1</sup>(1921) has over 200 examples of contemporary royal clothing. The Museum has a collection of handicrafts and decorative arts related to clothing and, in fact, it is the only exclusive clothing museum in the country. Indeed, the contemporary history of Iranian royal clothing (before the Islamic Revolution of 1978) can be divided into two periods: in the first period clothing used was mainly influenced by Western fashion trends and purchased from European companies. In the second period there is the strong use of Iranian elements and arts, especially in the clothes worn at official ceremonies. The 1960s and '70s, initiated a combination of original Persian sewing and fabric with modern designs. As a result of this trend, a number of very lavish dresses, including highly embroidered needlework, handmade textiles, and velvet flowers, are kept at this museum today. This initiative, which was actually the beginning of a movement that is still ongoing, is the revival of Persian arts and traditions in contemporary and applied forms.

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### **Introduction**

Apparel is one of the most important indices of indigenous and ethnic culture of any country, and includes numerous artistic and anthropological concepts. Iran has a multi-thousand-year history with a wide variety of textile weaving traditions, as well as unique fabric design, sewing techniques and garment design.

If we are to study the history of the tribal peoples of our land since ancient times, we must begin with the artistic achievements of this land, Elam (2700 - 539BCE). The history of Iranian civilization from three thousand to one thousand years BCE, before the demise of the Aryan

race, has been unique to Elam history. In the revelations of this period, the most important object, representing the tunic, is found in the statue of the goddess Narvandi, which has been found to have obvious similarities to the tunic of the Sumerian sculptures, and is thought to be wool. The motif is similar to that of fur. In the Mad era, as seen in the dishes and prominent figures, the clothing was often worn with linen trousers and hats. Later on, during the Achaemenid period (550 - 330BCE), weaving was introduced to the Persian people. Examples of fabrics from this period were discovered in Susa and Persepolis, some of which are similar to silk fabrics, indicating that silk clothes were very likely exported from China and turned into textiles in Iranian factories (Hamadan, Shush, etc.). Among these colored silks of various designs, there are sometimes threads and strands of gold and silver. Of course, most of the fabrics were wool, cotton, and linen in purple, orange, and brown. During the Arsacid (247BCE - 224AD) period, weaving was widespread among women, After the Sasanian period with the expansion of trade with China, the textile industry grew and textiles from that era with animal motifs (often mythical animals), hunting scenes and plant motifs were found. The quality of weaving silk, linen, wool and cotton during the Sassanid era (224 - 651AD) indicates the king's special attention to this industry. In the Islamic era, and especially in the Safavid period (1501-1736), the garment industry was very progressive, and the Safavid kings encouraged the artists. Thus, in Yazd, Kashan, Isfahan, and Kerman, important centers were created for the development of artists who evolved in design. Silk fabrics of gold and silver taro weave, and varieties of embroidery, glitter or kettle embroidery by Kerman women, whose usual roles have been preserved, as well as the velvety fabrics of this period, are very effective. Exquisite velvet fabrics were exported to many other countries and empires around the world. Then in the Zandieh era (1751-1794) the textile industry declined and many silk workshops were closed. Only workshops in Yazd continued. During the Qajar era (1796-1925), with the establishment of security throughout Iran, the textile industry once again established itself in the cities of Kerman, Yazd and Isfahan. Through trade, on the one hand, the import of foreign textiles from European countries and, on the other hand, from India, there was a change of weaving technique and decoration in the production in Iran and in the East in general (to the West's attention) which caused the creation of a proper market. Domestic production followed the path of decline and weakness while its own textile market was booming (Gheybi, 2006).

In the first Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1941) most of the workshops for weaving and velvet weaving were closed in the country and the fabric tradition was forgotten. In the Golestan<sup>2</sup> palace (1502) and in the Shams al-Amara mansion, a number of masters, under the supervision of master Habibollah Tarighi (1866- 1951) restored the brocade textile weaving school for use in royal palace all coverings and curtains used at that time. Exquisite textiles were not used in court clothing or for the nobility. Then in 1973, during the coronation and celebration of 2,500 years of monarchy, the workshop was transferred to the National Museum of Art (the current Ministry of Guidance building). (Tarighi, 2014) with an increase of more than 70 people weaving for royal family orders for fabrics used in clothing (especially Farah Diba's clothing) (1938), and for courtesy garments. The Royal Costume Museum of Saad Abad's historic cultural collection is a treasure trove of handicrafts and decorative arts related to contemporary collections of dozens of exquisite royal costumes. Located at the Palace of Shams Pahlavi (1917-1996)<sup>3</sup> in the historical and cultural complex of Saad Abad, it is the only specialized museum of clothing and apparel in the country.

## The contemporary history of the royal costume of Iran (1925-1979)



**Left: Fig. 1.** Formal dress Of Shahnaz Pahlavi (sister of the king), Christian Dior (1967), Iran, Royal Costume Museum of Saad Abad Complex. Photo by Javad Najaf Alizadeh

**Right: Fig. 2.** Label of Formal dress belonged to Shahnaz Pahlavi (sister of the king), Christian Dior (1967), Iran, Royal Costume Museum of Saad Abad Complex. Photo by Javad Najaf Alizade

In fact, the contemporary history of the royal costume of Iran (before the Islamic Revolution) can be divided into two periods with emphasis on the museum's collection. In the first period, most of the garments used by the court were European and imported products, while in the second period during the 60's and 70's the use of indigenous elements and Iranian art in formal ceremonies was considered. Especially in the formal circles, celebrations of the 2500 years of monarchy were held with the aim of reviving the glory of the monarchy in Iran. The attitude of returning to the original essence of the former monarchs was manifested in the simulation of the tunic.

The approach to indigenous arts in other arts, including visual<sup>4</sup> arts and music, was also influenced by postcolonial discourse and the predominance of postmodernism (Neo-traditionalism). A group of leading Iranian artists were fascinated by the teachings of

modernism at European universities, and studied modern artists in depth and then attempted to create work with indigenous features to integrate modernism with a new form of traditional art.



**Left: Fig. 3.** Formal Dress of Farah Pahlavi (queen), Needlecraft (Balouchi) 1971, Iran, Royal Costume Museum of Saad Abad. Photo by Javad Najaf Alizade

**Right: Fig. 4.** Formal Dress of Farah Pahlavi (queen), Brocade, 1971, Iran, Royal Costume Museum of Saad Abad. Photo by Javad Najaf Alizade

### **Post- colonial discourse in Iranian art during 60's- 70's**

Postcolonial studies are a type of critical study that emerged in reaction to the dogmatic approach of Orientalism and stereotypical ideas towards the East in the pursuit of strengthening nationalism and nativism (Rakashom, 2004). Postcolonial studies are one of the interdisciplinary fields of research whose task is to theorize issues of colonization and decolonization. It falls within the wider framework of the critical project of cultural studies. The cultural and indigenous values of the dominated territories are influenced by this attitude which is not explored by post-colonialists in post-colonial study by native scholars. Although Iran has never been directly and explicitly colonized, many Western political events and interventions have given rise to a kind of colonized cultural space. Often this approach leads to the consolidation of national aspirations and the revival of indigenous culture and traditions that foster a sense of national pride in the community.

Following the emergence of this artistic discourse and the desire to relate the glory and attributes of the monarchy to the historical past, such as the Achaemenid, Sassanid and Safavid eras, traditional weaving techniques were restored and applied, with a combination of sewing techniques, and the original Iranian textures (e.g. brocade), with a modern structure. Here modern means to depart from the traditional and predetermined structures so that sometimes there are innovations in color, design and decoration (e.g. needlework, batik printing).

These types of dresses were often designed by Keyvan Khosravani <sup>5</sup>(1939) and were produced by Mehr Monir Jahanbani (1925-2018) through his acquaintance with local tailors and weavers. Some of the finest examples in today's costume museum are those designed by Keyvan Khosravani and woven by national professors at the National Arts Workshop, quoted by Professor Mohammad Tariqi (1923), one of the same fabrics used by Farah Diba in the celebration of the 2500 years anniversary of the monarchy was woven with cotyledon technique<sup>6</sup>, and its textile took more than two years to produce.

### **Mass production of ethnic art and handcraft**

A pivotal issue in this approach is the acquisition and inclination of traditional Iranian clothing that emerged in the 1970s in a new wave of popularity. During the '70s, while using needlework and embroidery like the royal family, many of these pieces were worn by heads of state and foreign guests. There are some illustrations of their use by movie stars and celebrities. Through such clothes, after the Islamic Revolution, and in recent years, many motifs and techniques have entered everyday life and urban life. Many non-Iranian designers and brands have also incorporated them into their productions, not to mention traditional exploitation, and in fact they have taken on a new form of integration with current requirements. Many of these techniques are nowadays used in many types of clothing and accessories, both at a very high level and at cheaper levels, and are considered as options in the design of clothing as a kind of twentieth-century fashion that has been given Iranian flavor and essence.

### **The future of traditions**

In keeping with this attitude, the Royal Costume Museum is striving to preserve and apply the various traditions of weaving, designing and tailoring Iranian clothing by holding temporary events and exhibitions. This is followed up with artists by holding various workshops and exhibitions. This effort is a kind of confrontation with the phenomenon of globalization, which inevitably involves the uniformization and simulation of clothing around the world. In the continuation of the fine arts and the native traditions that are associated with it, the museum's place in the introduction and recognition of these arts is crucial. Holding circular educational events is an effective policy to promote such arts as well as foster creativity in their application. Along the way, what we are actually seeing is the preservation of traditions in order to introduce the future and to link the past values and needs to the present and the future. Museums have always been responsible for preserving cultural heritage as well as traditions, which sometimes emerge as tastes and mores. Due to the rapid development of technology, these traditions are removed from daily human life and replaced by industrial stereotypes, but the museum plays a connecting role, keeping traditions alive and finding the ways to integrate and present them to the future. This is the central role.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> - Saad Abad is a cultural and historical complex that covers an area of 80 hectares and is located at the northernmost part of Tehran. The complex contains 18 palaces that belonged to the royal families of Qajar and Pahlavi, in a unique and beautiful garden. The complex was first built and inhabited by Qajar monarchs in the 19th century. After an expansion of the compounds, Reza Shah of the Pahlavi Dynasty lived there in the 1920s, and his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, moved there in the 1970s. After the 1978 Revolution, the complex became a museum.

<sup>2</sup>- One of the oldest historic monuments in the city of Tehran, and of world heritage status the Golestan Palace belongs to a group of royal buildings that were once enclosed within the mud-thatched walls of Tehran's Arg ("citadel"). It consists of gardens, royal buildings, and collections of Iranian crafts and European presents from the 18th and 19th centuries.

<sup>3</sup> - The current building of the Royal Costume Museum is the Shams Pahlavi Summer Palace, named for the sister of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, which began construction during the reign of Reza Shah in 1935 and was completed in 1939. The palace has an area of approx. 2,600 square meters and has two floors and one underground, built to the north of Saad Abad's historic cultural complex, adjacent to the northern door of the Darband. It has a mix of European and Iranian architecture. After moving Shams Pahlavi to his private palace in Karaj in October 1963, the building was used as a place for storing objects and utensils and was named the Royal Museum of Private Gifts, which often included foreign gifts to the king. The palace also had a summer-style lounge with a porcelain wall and architectural ornamentation and a headquarters where ceremonies and performances were held, with Shams Pahlavi's parrots and birds kept in a corner. Following the victory of the glorious Islamic Revolution, the building was considered to be an anthropological museum and was inaugurated in March 1994. In February 2009, the museum changed its name and began its new activity as Contemporary History and then the Royal Garment Museum. The collection includes photographs and clothing by some members of the Pahlavi family, including Farah Diba (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Ashraf and Shahnaz Pahlavi (1940). Some decorative objects from the second Pahlavi (1941-1978) era have also been displayed at the museum.

<sup>4</sup> - The Saqqaghaneh school is the most important contemporary art movement, whose artists, inspired by indigenous and ancient motifs, create new works with modern techniques.

<sup>5</sup> - Keyvan Khosravani began his architecture studies at USC Berkeley in 1957. After returning to Iran after a year, and interested in staying at home, he received his undergraduate degree in Architecture at the University of Tehran under Houshang Seyhoun. He graduated with a two-year degree from the Fine Arts School with a French government scholarship. Keyvan Khosravani was famous among artists for designing Farah Pahlavi costumes, and according to Massoud Behnoud, he was known as Keyvan "number one" for his first boutique in Iran.

<sup>6</sup>- One of the types of brocade weaving is woven by the fingers of the weaver, this technique is very time consuming and difficult.



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