



ETIQUETTE AND GROOMING IN THE NOVEL UMRAO JAAN ADA

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ABSTRACT

The different genres of 'Islamicate' films show a variety of clothing that is regarded as appropriate for muslims to wear in the Mughal court, in the Courtesans 'Kotah'. The Courtesans have a 'tehzeeb' (etiquette) to follow and are well groomed to entertain the customers. while the historical drew on historical documents and both drew on art, chromolithography and theatre.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim men often wear unremarkable clothes such as western style outfits or Kurta-Pyjamas, but may be shown wearing clothing that marks them as Muslims. Some muslim men , like Hindu holy men, intellectuals, baddies and Sikhs wear beards and they may wear small muslim caps as one of the friends in salim langde pe mat ro (1989, dir. Saeed Mirza), who wears a cap and a kurta while the other muslims wear western clothes. For formal occasions, in particular in historical films, Muslim men wear Sherwanis and loose or tight Pyjamas. This was the dress adopted by Nehru and is often regarded as the formal dress in India, as it adapted from court dress, although the Nehru cap is not a Muslim item. Pathans wear a particular style of turban and embroidered waistcoats, as 'Pran' in Zanjeer (1973, dir. Prakash Mehra), While Punjabi Muslims wear a type of salwar kameez. Sometimes clothing is specifically Muslim, even though it would not be realistic. For example, the students wear fezzes in phool (1942, dir. K. Asif), which may have been worn by supporters of the

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caliphate, but which now are mostly for comedy as worn by Shammi Kapoor in Dil deke dekho (1958, dir. Nasir Hussain) or Rishi Kapoor in Amar, Akbar, Antony (1977, dir. Manmohan Desai) as these are no longer worn but mark Muslim –ness.

The Courtesans wear long shirt like ‘anarkali’ dress and a veil ‘dupatta’ which covers their head. This is a kind of dress code followed in ‘kotahs’. The courtesans are well groomed in music, dance ‘katak’ and poetry. The character ‘Umrao’ in the novel is well groomed to write poetry and learn music. ‘Umrao’ becomes ‘Umrao Jaan’ which means she has become a Courtesan. Apart from other skills ‘Umrao’ is groomed well in dance music and art, being a Courtesan she has to follow an etiquette trained by a teacher called ‘Maulvi Saab’.

Muslim women clothing is somewhat more realistic as they are shown wearing Muslim garments such as the Salwar Khameez or Punjabi suit, originally a Muslim dress which became popular in north west India, and has also become a national and even international dress. The suit comprises trousers along shirt and a scarf. The stylistic variations are endless, the scarf alone carrying a range of meanings according to whether it is used to cover the head, the breasts or worn like a western scarf. In some films, muslim women wear the ‘sherara’ usually now for weddings, though for everyday in older films.

While many Hindu women veil themselves in the presence of older men by covering their heads and sometimes their faces, the veil is largely associated with Islam. This is also true in the films, and it plays important roles in some genres, such as the Muslim social and in the courtesan films.

In the Muslim social, the hero catches a glimpse of the heroine, but her veil often leads to a tragedy of mistaken identity in films such as Chaudhvin Ka Chand (1960, dir. M.Sadiq). the removal of the burqa can be a sign of transition in films such as Bombay (1995, dir. Mani Ratnam) when Shaila Bano’s burqa flies off in the wind as she runs to meet Shekhar, signifying that she has abandoned her traditional modesty. In the courtesan film, the heroine may wear a veil, but her honour is not that of wider society. In Pakeezah (1971, dir. Kamal Amrohi), the heroine clings on to her honour and accuses men of trying to rob her of it by removing her veil in her famous song ‘Inhe Logon ko’ . the veil is erotically charged by the idea of concealing and revealing and numerous songs in Hindi films are about veils, even if the heroine no longer wears on herself. To sum up traditions of language, literature, music and clothing which have their roots in the north Indian Muslim world are transformed in to a cosmopolitan, Islamicate aesthetic, in Bombay, initially in theatre and then in cinema, that pervades the whole of Indian public culture through the twentieth century and in to the present. I now turn to the particular genres of films that are closely associated with Muslims and which can be loosely described as ‘Islamicate’ genres.

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