

## **Journey of Skirts**

**SANDEEP KAUR**

Assistant Professor

Department of Fashion Designing

BBK Dav College For Women, Amritsar (Punjab) India

### **ABSTRACT**

A skirt is a tube or cone shaped garment, which hangs from the waist and covers all or part of legs. Despite being the first item of clothing to be worn, skirt regrettably has been relatively neglected by students of clothing. Under the circumstances, where despite being popular, the skirt remains more or less untouched, as a topic of study, this study of skirt tries to correct the situation. This study shows how skirts were worn during the primitive times and what changes have taken place till today. The primitive men wore skirts made from animal skins. Fur skirts with rounded fronts were worn. It was found that people swathed a coarse fringed shawls round their hips, leaving behind its full width to form skirt. A study conducted through internet, libraries and books tell us about the history of skirts and give us detail of various styles. Many changes came about in skirts in different centuries. In some centuries they were short then longer in others. Not only there were variation in lengths, sometimes they were so tight that there was danger of bursting the seams as the lady sat down. Many fashionable features were used to swell the skirts of that time such as farthingale, bustle, crinoline etc. Thus we can say that skirts were worn during primitive times and are still being worn today and they will be worn in modern times to come, since these are easy to wear, comfortable, graceful and feminine. It is considered one of the most sensual dresses that can be worn with any type of upper garment.

**Key Words :** Skirts, Variation in lengths, Fashionable features, Primitive times, Modern times

### **INTRODUCTION**

Clothing though important at all ages to personality development and for directing the behaviour of the wearer holds a special significance to the adolescents. An increasing western influence is these days apparent in the way people in our society dress, more so in younger generation. While they are glamorous and typically traditional in Indian salwar and kameez and churidaar, the invasion of western dresses like jeans, skirts and middies had picked up a momentum in a remarkably short time of these. Skirts are currently the most popular wear among college going girls, since these are conventional casual wear that is fashionable as well. Skirt which is considered a dress of western origin, is in fact closest to the very first item of clothing to be worn. Skirt is known to have been worn by women of stone age and even before. But skirts have been seen number of variation since then. They have changes in styles, forms and purpose and design.

Skirts have carved a niche in the sphere of ladies fashion apparel, owing to its innovative design and consistent up gradation of styles. An imperative apparel for a women's wardrobe, skirt

has become essential for those in corporate and non corporate work environments. According to young designer, Meenakshi Daddoo, "Originally out and out western garments, the skirt has of late emerged as the latest way to add that touch of ethnicity to your look. Ethnic skirts make for a strong fashion statement. They look very smart and dressy at same time.

Skirts are made for all occasions, in long and short lengths and in variety of styles and fabrics and colours. While manufacturing skirts for women's, various points should be kept in mind are comfort, easy to care and its practicality. The different types of skirts include the straight skirt, the sarong, the gathered, the circular, the tiered, the flared, the pleated, the panelled skirt, and the over skirt and many more. At its simplest the skirt can be draped garment made of single pieces of material but more skirts are fitted to the body at the waist and fuller below, with the fullness introduced by means of darts, gores, pleats, or panels. Famous designers are found to be opulent in the use of sequin work, patch work, appliqué and nakshi and zardosi embroidery while making designer skirts in vibrant hues. Usually fabrics like cotton, georgette, silks, organza, denim, jersey, worsted or poplin are crafted into wearable skirts. According to the designer Meenakshi Dadoo, "sequin work on skirts is finding a lot favour with my clients. In shades of brown, black, and red they make perfect for the party wear. The ones with tribal prints, laces and zari work on them make for good evening wear". Designer Agnimitra Paul is all for corduroy and suede skirts done up in a very Indian way. While the fabrics are western, introducing a panel with heavy embroidery goes a long heavy in adding that touch of ethnicity. Even pencil, straight or knee length skirt can be given that Indian feel with some embroidery on the side slits or introducing some ornate mirror work on them," she offers. The best thing about these dressy skirts is that you can even wear them with elan to traditional functions. According to designer soyan mitra, fishtail skirt, handkerchief skirts and lehngas cut skirts easily lend themselves to Indian treatments

#### **Aims and objectives :**

- To study the origin of skirt and a brief history of skirt
- To study the spread of skirt through the western countries with time
- To study the adaptation of skirts

#### **Review of literature :**

Lower portion of women's dress, which extends from waist downwards over the hips, is the concept of term skirt, as we understood it today. It has been established without doubt that the first form of clothing to be used consisted of skins of wild animals and simply tied or wrapped around the waist. Thus skirts were the first form of clothing ever to be adorned by the human beings irrespective of their sex. Therefore, skirts which form such an integral part of women's dress today date right back to origin of clothing itself.

Skin occupied an important place in clothing due to the major demands of climate and the activities of everyday life. Women during the reindeer period wore fur skirts with rounded fronts during the rituals. The animal skin almost always kept their natural shape. The same tailed skirt worn by kogul women in the reindeer period still appeared in the crete in the ritual scenes. It shows exactly the slit line, and the appendage that hangs from it was the actual tail of the animal. Another instance of the use of the fur can be seen in the short 'Kaunakes' skirt worn in summer in pre-agadean (c.3000 BC) in which the knot at the back probably represents a survival of the animal tail.

Exceptionally excavations in Denmark founded skirts of early bronze age (2100 to 1000 BC) made of vertical cords, about eighteen inches deep and almost 5 feet in length, attached to a woven

girdle ending in fringes, carrying a circular disk in decorated metal worn on the front of the body, a dagger and horn comb was fastened to this girdle. This type of skirt disappeared completely at the beginning of the iron age.

#### **Ancient east :**

In the old representation of humans, which date from the third millennium, the skins of various wild animals, formerly worn over the shoulders, were now draped around the hips like a skirt. These garments were particularly made from long haired skins, particularly sheep skins whose texture is represented by hatched patterns, from 2900 to 2500 BC in Mesopotamia. Then towards 2500 BC, skins sewn together are represented by bands of straight and wavy stripes on representations of the skirts and cloaks worn throughout the summer. From 2700 BC and until about fourth century BC, the hides originally used for skirts were replaced by Kaunakes clothes, a textile imitating goat skin. It is possible that at the beginning of the third millennium ordinary people swathed a coarse, fringed shawl, narrower than original Indian, round their hips, either leaving its full width to form skirt, or folding it in half several times, wrapped around the body with end thrown over left shoulder.

In the second millennium BC, the loincloth skirt for men was generally adorned with fringes, tassels and bands of relief decoration. In Rekhmire tomb paintings of those times, ballon skirt is seen divided by two girdles into three tiers. Towards the 4000 BC, in egyptian civilization people dressed in scantily oldest male garment were a simple loincloth shenti, which consisted of a single strip of linen wrapped around the waist. Shenti was much finer and often pleated. This must have been developed into modern pleated skirt.

During the period 1425-1405 BC, Shenti was generally a bandana in favour of a skirt. It was made from a single rectangle and could vary in length from mid thigh to calf. The simplest was drawn tightly across the back and gathered in a single box pleat at the front. The high born on the hand gathered the surplus material at the waist in a number of carefully arranged pleats fanning out. The arrangement was held in place by a decorated belt from which was suspended a wedge shaped apron embroidered and set with precious stones. Modern skirts with pleats and belts or that with apron must have been originated from this skirt of the ancient Egyptian era.

During the Neolithic period (6000-300 BC), the Egyptian shenti was a simple loin cloth, worn by workmen and warriors as well by princess and high ranking dignitaries, varied in cut according to the material used, which could be soft cloth or a stiffer cloth was often arranged like a skirt. Exceptionally the loin cloth worn one on top of the other could form flounces and reach to the mid thigh with a double point at back and front. Before 18th century BC, women seem to have worn the loincloth common to both sexes, but they arranged it in the form of a skirt more often than did, the skirt itself is only a longer form of this garment, and probably did not become distinguished from the loincloth before the development of weaving. Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century BC, the usual costume for women included more or less decorated skirt, a bodice of varying forms. These various pieces were added new elements (pleats and flounces) or details (embroideries, multi colour decorations), which was swathed round the body.

In Crete, skirt was treated as a separate part of female costume, supported at the waist and reaching to the ground: it was always tight belted and fitted closely over the hips, but otherwise presented by varied forms. The oldest model represented on seals from early minoan is bell shaped, in broadly striped cloth: later it became narrower. Its fullness was supported on a horizontal hoop, which help to stiffen the garment. Later these embroidered bands on skirts form a cone, very wide

and stiff. Above all, there was a use of flounces to the skirt from the hips to the foot. These flounces might be of equal or of graduated depth, and might form a check board pattern in brown and light blue.

At the end of thirteen century, but especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, the jack a sort of fitted, heavily padded pour point, ending in a short skirt over the hips, had appeared in the military garments. During the fourteenth century, the open surcoat was one of the most elegant inventions whose bodice was open from armhole to hips showing the coat, a row of finely worked hooks or decorated buttons ran down the middle to the skirt. The skirt itself was very full and trailed on the ground, for certain ceremonies it could be “partie” or decorated with heraldic motif in preceding period.

Renaissance and the sixteenth century was generally a period of change in the fashion world. The ‘V’ neck of the bodice corresponds to the mirror image of the ‘V’ slashed skirts too. However skirts as compared to men’s breeches in 1600’s were far less susceptible to slashing. Skirts were ampler and more richly embroidered than earlier times. Skirts were swelled out by means of farthingale.

#### **Farthingale :**

Farthingale is a term applied to several structures used under western European women’s clothing in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to support the skirts into the desired shapes. The Spanish farthingale was a hoop skirt. The earliest image of Spanish farthingale show hoops prominently displayed on the outer surfaces of the skirt, although later they merely provided shape to the over skirts. The French farthingale is properly a crescent or sausage shaped pad stiffened with belt or whalebone tied around the waist under the skirt :the resulting silhouette is broad and rounded over the hips with the skirt hanging freely in folds. The term French farthingale is also used for the wheel or drum farthingale, a stiffened circular support for the drum shaped silhouettes worn at the English court from the 1590’s to 1620.



In the later fifties ballet length skirts, covering full petticoats, with crinoline or modified hoops appeared .

#### **Petticoat (1600-1700) :**

It is a garment of circa 1600-1700, but it can be adapted for lower classes wear until about 1820, with some adjustments. Length was first and foremost consideration. For the higher class it was to the ground a very small train for c. 1620-1680 and with longer train for court wear or for 1680-1700. The status determined the length of the train. However in 1710 an act was passed which stated that a train could be 11 feet for the queen of France, that of the royal princess it was 9 feet, more distant relations of the king had 7 feet, princesses who were not daughters of kings 5 feet, and duchesses 3 feet. This also apparently goes for court dress, at least in France, for the entire later century. All of this excess material was looped over the left arm while walking which must have been quiet heavy but at least kept it out of the way of dirt and other people’s feet. For lower class persona, women of the period seem never to have had floor length skirts. In fact, period engraving of street criers show skirts as short as a few inches above the ankles, but no longer than the shoe tops. As for the considerations imposed by the period, how pleating is done. In 1620-1630 cartridge pleat produced more right effect. By 1680, it was knife pleated, to give a narrow, vertical

line. For lower classes however, cartridge pleating was accurate as it is faster to do, as peasant woman did not have time to arrange knife pleats. The bodice and the skirt being cut separately in the 16th and 17th century, women's costume could not be termed as a gown or dress. Farthingale disappeared in the early 17th century, but skirts continued to be made from heavy of material for each. The fact characteristic skirt of the period was in fact two skirts, the over skirts being gathered up to reveal the skirt underneath. The skirts reached to ankles to completely conceal the shoes.

### **1750 - 1795 Fashion skirts :**

Fashionable women's clothing styles remained confining and cumbersome for most of the period. The hoop skirts of the 1740's were left behind, but wide panniers (holding the skirt out at the side) came into style several times, and the aesthetic of narrow inverted conical corseted torso above full skirts prevailed during most of the period. In 1780's panniers finally disappeared, and bustle pads (bum-pads or hip-pads) were worn for a time. By 1790, skirts were still somewhat full, but they were no longer obviously pushed out in any particular direction (though a slight bustle might still be worn). Dresses were generally one piece garment from 1800 through the 1840's, after that it became common for a dress to be made as a separate skirt and bodice.

### **1825-1850 :**

Women's dress continues to balloon out with ruffles, decorations and petticoat until women look like ambulatory wedding cakes. The increasing size of the skirt held out only voluminous and usually unsanitary crinoline petticoats made the weight of the skirts oppressive and movement awkward. In 1860, skirts were very tight again. By this stage though the skirt might be as wide as its wearer was tall, if crinoline had got any bigger, fashionable ladies would never have been able to go through the doors. By 1865 onwards, the huge skirts subsided and took on a new form. By 1875, the skirt was pushed out only at the back, by the famous 'bustle' below that it stretched out behind in a train. The front of the skirt hung straight down, which meant that it started to show off the shape of legs in walking. By 1880, the bustles and projections behind vanished, leaving the skirt narrow from waist to hemline. There was need for tapes to pull it tight; it was simply tight all the way round. The skirt not only prevented walking properly but it was also difficult to sit down or get up the stairs. As those styles were different they were short lived. Skirts soon relaxed and women could walk and sit again. By 1890's for almost for the first time in the century the fashion was for skirts, which were neither very full, not very tight, nor pushed out by any clever hidden mechanism. One of the major findings during the 19th century was the use of crinolines.

### **Crinoline :**

Crinoline was originally a stiff fabric with a weft of horsehair and a warp of cotton or linen thread. The fabric first appeared around 1830, but by 1850 the word had come to mean a stiffened petticoat or a rigid skirt shaped structure of steel designed to support the skirts of women's dress into the required shape. In form and function it was very similar to the early farthingale. The first crinoline were petticoats starched for extra stiffness, or made out of the new crinoline fabric, and they often had ruffles to support the skirt to the desired width. Extra rigidity was added to petticoats through rings of cord or braid running around the hem. In the 1830's women started to wear petticoats with hoops of whalebone or cone around the hem. In 1858, the American, W.S. Thomas, greatly facilitated the development of the cage crinoline by developing an eyelet fasteners to connect the steel crinoline hoops with the vertical tapes descending from a band around the wearer's waist.

Thomas was inspired by the frame style of the farthingale or the panniers. The cage crinoline was adopted with enthusiasm ; the numerous petticoats, even the stiffened or hooped ones, were heavy, bulky and generally uncomfortable. It was light -it only required one or two petticoats worn over the top to prevent the steel bands appearing as ridges in the skirt -and freed the wearer's leg from tangling petticoats. Unlike farthingale and panniers, women of every social class wore the crinoline.

Crinolines are still even worn today. They are usually part of a formal outfit, such as an evening gown or a wedding dress. The volume of the skirt is not as great as during victorian era, so modern crinolines are most often constructed of several layers of stiff net, with flounces to extend the skirt. If there is a hoop in the crinoline, it will probably be made of plastic or nylon, which are low in cost, lightweight and flexible. With the recent trend towards lavish weddings and grandiose bridal attire, the crinoline has started making a comeback.



### **Bustle :**

Another invention of the nineteenth century was use of bustle during 1881. A bustle is a type of framework used to expand the fullness or support the drapery of the back of a woman's dress, found predominantly between the mid- to late 1800s. Bustles were worn under the skirt in the back, just below the waist to keep the skirt from dragging. Thus, a woman's petticoat or crinoline skirt would lose its shape during everyday wear (from merely sitting down or moving about). The bustle later developed into a feature of fashion on its

own after the overskirt of the late 1860s was draped up towards the back and some kind of support was needed for the new draped shape. The bustle was worn in different shapes for most of the 1870s and 1880s with a short period of non-bustled, flat backed dresses from 1878 to 1882. It then survived into the 1890s and early 1900s as a skirt support was still needed and the stylish shape dictated a curve in the back of the skirt to balance the curve of the bust in front. The bustle had completely disappeared by 1905. With the onset of the 20th



century, there was a wide variety of fashions introduced to women's costumes. Tiered and harem skirts were in vogue in England. Also the high fashion skirts in the early 1900's was tight over the hips almost to the knee and then flare in a mass of flounces and frills.

Till the 20th century women participated in sports was nil; as women started taking active part in the popular sports like horse riding, tennis etc., long and full skirts were replaced by divided skirts.

In Europe and America, skirts can be worn by females of all ages as an alternative to pants. A skirt may be worn as part of suit. Skirts are the garments of choices for many women in formal situations, such as weddings. In cold climates girls and women may wear trousers, hosiery, or long

underwear for warmth and or/modesty, with a skirt or on top to mark their femininity or other reasons. In traditional societies, such as in many countries in Africa, the middle east and central and south America, it is considered inappropriate for girls and women to wear trousers rather than skirt.

### **Summary and conclusion :**

Clothing plays a significant role in an individual's life at all stages. It provides a means of self expression and aesthetic enjoyment. A certain amount of confidence and security is achieved by wearing appropriate dress. Clothes give the first impression about the person. It is equally important for all age groups. People like to follow latest trends, which is going on in the fashion world. As a result there is lot of influence of the western dresses on the minds of young people. Lower part of women's dress, which extends from waist downwards over the hips is called skirt, which has been in existence since ages. Though it is still considered a modern dress today it is infact the oldest garment known to the mankind. It originated with the origin of clothes themselves. Its history can be traced from the primitive man of stone age. The 20th century skirts are different from the counterpart of the primitive age. Nevertheless the design is very important for the success of the end product. We now have many designs in skirts like straight fit skirts, cornered handkerchief skirts, circular skirts which mostly people like to wear. Today skirts are very popular dress among the people who are fashion conscious. They feel stylish in skirts and above all skirts look glamorous and elegant.

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