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UNCOVERED FROM THE PAST: WHAT CAN *CHURIDAR PAIJAMI* TELL US ABOUT ZERO-WASTE, COMPLEX CONSTRUCTION AND FASHION

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INTRODUCTION

Churidar Paijami is a type of trousers characterised by ethnographic clothing from the Indian Subcontinent, which has evolved over historical periods.[1] This garment relies on a specialised fabric orientation and arrangement technique featuring the bias grain. Instead of cutting the pattern pieces from a flat layer of fabric, the pieces are cut from an enclosed bias bag, allowing the bias grain of the woven fabric to drape smoothly around the body, thereby facilitating ease and comfort of movement. The width of the bias bag can be adjusted to accommodate different girth measurements, making it possible to utilise narrower woven fabric widths for garment construction. In contemporary terms, this garment is comparable to modern knit leggings, albeit made from woven fabric.

During the 1980s, *Churidar Paijami* was a prevalent fashion item, significantly influenced by Indian cinema, which played a key role in establishing it as a desirable style. Young women in urban areas often sought the garment to fit their legs like a second skin. Despite its widespread popularity and visual representation, textual references to its form and materiality are limited. The narrative surrounding the bias bag remains largely untold; I was fortunate to learn this technique from my mother. This research aims to explore the origins of the *Churidar Paijami* and its evolution over time, focusing primarily on the intricate arrangement of fabric that forms the bias bag and its implications for fabric usage, waste reduction, and design possibilities.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS ON THE BIFURCATED GARMENT, *CHURIDAR PAIJAMI*

This research focuses on a specific category of stitched garments from India, known as *Churidar Paijami*. The objective is to examine the evolution of this garment and to analyse the complexities involved in its construction. It is important to note that the *Churidar Paijami* is categorised as a stitched garment, in contrast to traditional Indian garments which were predominantly unstitched. As Forbes Watson[2] indicates, these unstitched garments "leave the loom, ready for wear." Ritu Kumar highlights that the earliest garments of ancient times, such as the Indian *dhoti* and sari, the African *shama*, the Roman toga, and the Greek *himation*, were formed by draping unstitched fabric around the body (Kumar, R. 1999, p.13). She emphasises that clothing styles varied significantly due to regional and climatic differences. She highlights that the migration patterns of nomadic tribes originating from Central Asia traversing through the Caucasus, Iran, Turkestan, Russia, Tibet, Mongolia, China, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, the North-West frontier region of the Indian subcontinent, and the Punjab have led to a cross-pollination of stitching styles (Kumar, R. 1999).

Stitched garments have typically manifested in simpler forms, including tunics, skirts, and trousers. Kalyan Krishna, referencing literary sources from the Vedic period,[3] discusses ancient manuscripts that detail the materials and costumes of India, noting that fitted trousers were worn by kings and soldiers (Gowsamy, 1992, p.9). Furthermore, stitched garments like tunics and trousers gained popularity among the kings of the Gupta dynasty,[4] having been adopted from the Kushan period, reflecting influences from the Western Roman Empire.

During the initial two centuries of the Christian era, the interaction between external tribes and local populations led to the introduction of new dress styles in India, resulting in a blend of fashion influences. Krishna observes that during the classical period of Indian history, our understanding of textiles and clothing was enriched by the variety of sculptures and paintings from this era, particularly those at Ajanta,[5] which provide valuable visual representations of colours, patterns, and garment styles (Goswamy, 1992, p.10). The diversity of Indian clothing saw significant expansion from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, reflecting the assimilation of these new styles by the Indian populace and the creation of hybrid forms. Numerous researchers and authors have underscored the exchange of sartorial influences across different countries and cultures. Monisha Kumari and Amita Walia note that the arrival of Arabs and the influence of Islam in Persia led to a notable transformation in women's attire, with women adopting long, drawstring trousers with fitted ankles, paired with upper garments in sheer fabrics that varied in their level of exposure of the trousers (Kumar M., et al, 2017). Kumar highlights that as the Turks and Afghans began to conquer and settle in India during the twelfth century, their women introduced clothing styles from Central Asia, including tunics, gowns, and paijamas reminiscent of men's attire. This process of design adaptation and modification persisted with the arrival of the Mughals[6] in the sixteenth century, who brought along their traditional clothing styles from their native regions.

Determining the precise date and time of the introduction of *churidar paijami* is challenging and can only be speculated upon based on the accounts of foreign travellers to India from the late 16th century onwards. One notable traveller, Thevenot, documented that the breeches worn by Indians reached mid-calf to ankle length and were primarily made from cotton. The silk breeches worn by the affluent, on the other hand, featured various coloured stripes and were of such length that they required pleating along the leg, similar to the silk stockings once worn in France (Goswamy, 1992, p.18). This pleated design of the extended breeches parallels the modern *churidar*, a term that literally means fabric 'bangle-gathered' to create pleats. It is also evident that the length of the garment and the quality of the fabric reflect the social status of the wearer.

Churidar Paijami is a variation of the traditional *salwar* and/or *paijama*. The term "Paijama" is derived from two Persian words: "Pae," meaning 'legs' or 'feet,' and "Jama," meaning 'covering.' The popularity of the *Paijama* in India can be attributed to its introduction by Islamic rulers, and it was subsequently embraced by the Rajputs for its practicality. Over time, the Paijama became widely accepted, eventually replacing the *Dhoti* as a commonly worn bifurcated garment in India. This garment is available in various silhouettes, including loose, semi-loose, and fitted styles, and is worn by both men and women, making it a gender-neutral garment.

USE OF MINIATURE PAINTINGS FROM THE MEDIEVAL TIME TO REFERENCE BIFURCATED GARMENTS

Sculptures and paintings serve as valuable visual documentation of popular garments during the medieval period. Analysing the artwork from the Sultanate and Mughal periods allows us to evaluate the various Indo-Persian garment styles that gained prominence during their respective reigns and subsequently influenced fashion trends. Mughal miniatures uniquely synthesised elements from India, Persia, and Europe, resulting in a distinctive artistic style.

Humāyūn established a workshop that employed over 100 painters, and his son Akbar dedicated a significant portion of his time to the arts. During Akbar's reign, costume designs were meticulously documented, both in written form by Abu'l Fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, and through a rich array of paintings produced during this era. The Mughal School of painting achieved notable advancements during Jahangir's reign, which included both portraiture and depictions of subjects drawn from life and nature (Tubach, 2018).

As we examine these artworks, certain pieces merit closer investigation for their representation of clothing styles. In Figure 1, the Emperor Shah Jahan is wearing a floral printed ruched *paijama* under a finely crafted cotton Jama. Notably, in the painting in Figure 2, both women are depicted wearing a ruched *paijami* under the long tunic, reminiscent of the modern-day *churidar*. Supporting the *paijami* is the short blouse in the same colour to compliment the ensemble.

Figure 1. [Left] Hashim (fl. from 1598 until 1654)The Emperor Shah Jahan standing upon a globe, Mughal dynasty, Reign of Shah Jahan, ca. 1618-19 to 1629, 1629/mid-17th century, Opaque Watercolour, ink and gold on paper, Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur Sackler Gallery.
Figure 2. [Centre] Ragini Sarang, from a *Garland of Musical Modes* (Ragamala) manuscript, Opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 1770-90, Yale University Art Gallery. https://open.theheritagelab.in/ragini-sarang-from-a-garland-of-musical-modes-ragamala-manuscript/
Figure 3. [Right] *Beauty Holding a Flower*, 1640-1660 (mid-17th Century Mughal period), Opaque watercolour, gold and ink on paper, Source Location: The Art Institute of Chicago London, https://www.rawpixel.com/image/8945643/beauty-holding-flower-mughal

In Figure 3, *Beauty Holding a Flower,* the woman is dressed in a fitted paijama beneath a transparent outer garment known as a Peshwaz. The fitted design will necessitate the inclusion of a button or hook-and-eye closure at the hem to facilitate ease of movement. Additional panels may also be incorporated into the upper section to enhance comfort and wearability,[14] the paijama depicted here is clearly cut on the straight grain. While Kumar notes the presence of bias-cut *churidar* pajamas in royal courts from indicated by the orientation of the print. Most garments that have survived and are now housed in museums, such as the Calico Museum of Ahmedabad, as well as those documented in historical records, demonstrate that pajamas were predominantly cut on the straight grain.

INFLUENCES OF INDIAN CINEMA

As I investigated the historical significance of the *churidar paijami* and its influence on contemporary fashion, it was pertinent to examine the visual culture present in cinema. Indian clothing styles have been profoundly influenced by the films produced by the Bollywood industry. A pivotal figure in shaping the latest fashion trends in India was the renowned costume designer Bhanu Athaiya, who had a prolific career spanning over fifty-four years and designed costumes for more than one hundred films.

In the 1965 film *Waqt*, she introduced the *churidar paijami* paired with a sleeveless, fitted *kurta* made from luxurious silk for the lead actress, Sadhana. This innovative design helped to define her character as a symbol of the emerging upper-class, privileged youth of that era. The body-hugging silhouette created by the fitted *paijami* teamed with the knee length shift dress represented a transformation in the Indian fashion landscape, leading to the film's widespread success.

According to the film's director, the popularity of this look resulted in tailors in Delhi becoming a primary market, as women purchased tickets to the film in order to replicate the designs for themselves (Athaiya, 2010). The *churidar paijami* gained immense popularity among women, who opted for tighter fits akin to a second skin. Consequently, this silhouette became mainstream fashion, characterised by a strong preference for *churidars* cut on the bias grain. However, it is important to note that fashion designers are aware of the fabric wastage associated with garments cut on the bias. By cutting this garment on a bias bag rather than utilising the bias grain of a single layer of fabric, the wastage of material is significantly minimised.

The Indian youth of my generation, who grew up in the early eighties, were heavily influenced by the fashion styles depicted in films from that era. As a passionate fashion enthusiast, I embraced these designs wholeheartedly. My mother, a skilled seamstress, taught me how to create tailored *churidar paijami* designs. Rather than cutting the *churidar paijami* from a single layer of fabric, she adopted a method of constructing a bias bag that was enclosed on all sides. This bag was then transformed into a tube by opening both ends. The *churidar* pattern for each leg was meticulously laid out on this bias tube in opposing directions, eliminating the need for an outer leg seam. This innovative approach resulted in a more efficient use of fabric, minimising waste.

THE PROCESS OF MAKING THE BIAS BAG

The process of creating churidar involves multiple stages. Prior to drafting the patterns, the fabric is constructed into an enclosed bias bag. This method enables the fabric length to align with the bias grain rather than the length grain. We already know that any fashion fabric is woven with the length grain placed along the fabric meterage. This is disrupted by the process of making the bias bag.

To construct the bias bag, the length of fabric is folded at the centre of its width. The two folded ends are secured with a straight stitch, while leaving the edges open. To form the bias bag, the open edge of the fabric is joined together starting from the endpoint of the true bias line, which is created from the inner corner of the stitched

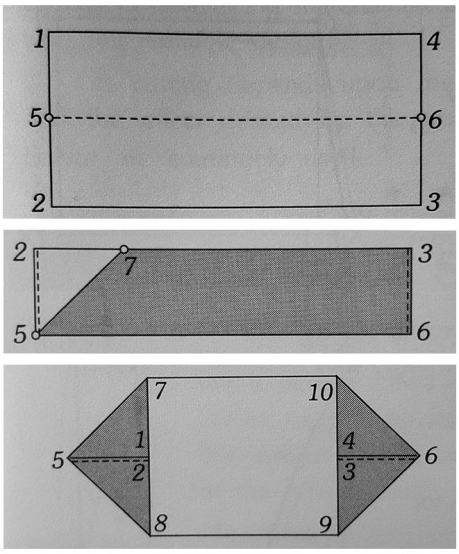

Figure 4. How to Make a Bias Bag.
Source images: collated from a patternmaking book titled "Zarapkar System of Cutting."

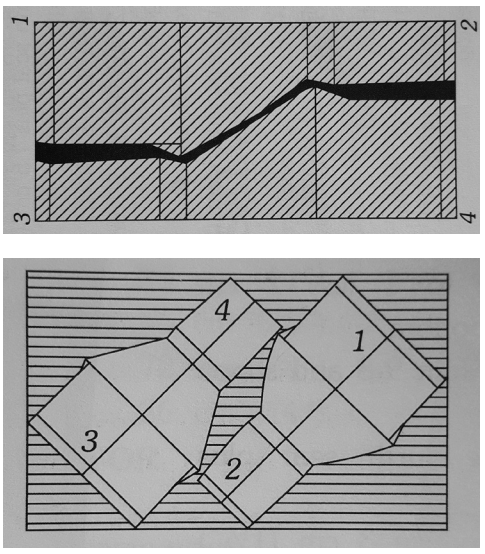

Figure 5. [Top] Lay plan for the *paijami*. Figure 6. [Bottom] Another lay plan for the *paijami*.

fabric end, in a continuous loop, as indicated by point 7 (Figure 4). The open edge 7-10-9 is sewn to the open edge 7-8-9. This sewing process along the fabric edge results in the formation of a bias bag with two ends aligned with the bias grain. Subsequently, the bag is cut along its two ends 5-7 and 9-6 along the bias grain, resulting in the creation of an open tube of fabric. While the construction of a bias bag may appear straightforward, a critical aspect of the process is ensuring that the fabric requirements for the *paijami* are accurately determined to minimise fabric waste. As a general guideline, the fabric required should be twice the full length from the waist to the floor; however, if the hip measurement exceeds the standard size, the length requirement will need to be adjusted accordingly.

Once the bias bag is constructed and transformed into a cylindrical tube, the subsequent phase involves drafting the *churidar* patterns and evaluating the available pattern layout options. The bias tube created from the fabric delineates the cutting length as depicted in Figure 5, in contrast to the singular layer of fabric presented in Figure 6. The two layout plans illustrated in Figures 5 and 6 highlight the extent of fabric wastage, clearly much more in the Figure 6 lay plan. These plans allow the designer to make meticulous and informed cutting decisions aimed at minimising fabric waste.

I have determined that by cutting this garment on a bias bag instead of utilising the bias grain of a single layer of fabric, the material wastage is significantly reduced. However, ascertaining the required dimensions in terms of width and length of the fabric poses a mathematical challenge. To illustrate this challenge, I constructed the bias bag for a quarter-sized *paijami*, utilising a rectangular fabric measuring 22 centimetres in width and 54.5 centimetres in length. I marked the length and width with distinct colours along the edges. Upon constructing the bias bag, I observed the movement of the width and lengthwise edges around the tube. Upon opening both ends of the bag along the bias grain, I was able to measure the length of the tube. The initial length and width (of the single layer fabric) underwent considerable alteration, with the original dimensions of 11 centimetres in width and 54.5 centimetres in length transforming to a width of 15 centimetres and a length of 36 centimetres (for the tube) in this experiment.

At the conclusion of this experiment, several observations were noted:

- The width of the tube increases while the length is compromised. This modification is pivotal as it influences the cutting layout and fabric wastage.
- The original length of the rectangular piece follows a diagonal path around the tube, as indicated by the colour coding.
- The width of the fabric also traverses; however, the traveling length of the fabric results in disruption.
- The cut lines (9-6, 7-5) for the enclosed bias bag correspond to the final width of the bias tube (Figure 7).
- The additional two diagonal lines, 5-8 and 9-10, are positioned in relation to the folded edge of the tube. Their relationship will indicate the degree of bias (Figure 7).
- It is crucial to carefully consider the width of the fabric, particularly if the hip measurement exceeds the standard size, necessitating that the length must also exceed twice the measurement from the waist to the floor.

Consequently, as a general principle, the length of the material required is twice the full-length measurement (from waist to the floor), while the width corresponds to the hip measurement. Furthermore, if the hip measurement increases beyond the standard size, the length should be extended beyond double the full length. There exist numerous permutations and combinations regarding the dimensions of length and width. Ideally, a mathematical solution would be beneficial for calculating and establishing the relationship among the various variables of this complex construct. This approach would be particularly advantageous in minimising fabric waste during the cutting and sewing stages of garment design.

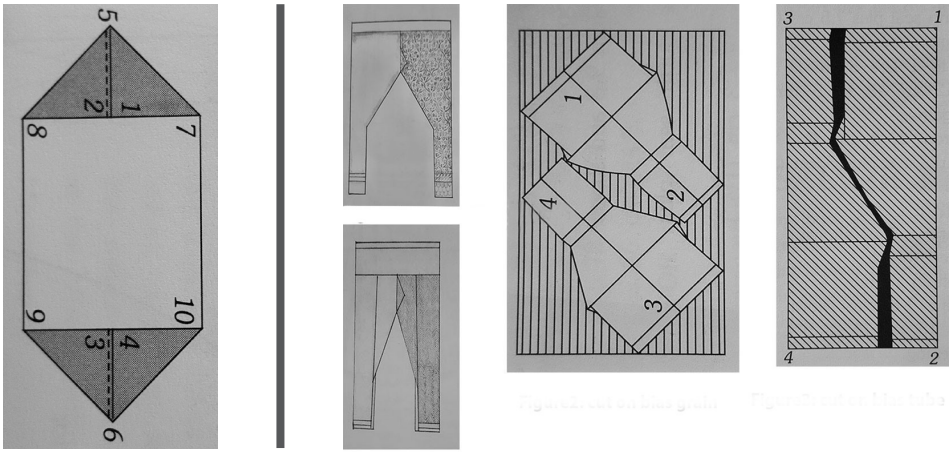

Figure 7. [Left] Bias bag in-process. Figure 8. [Right] A pictorial comparison between a straight grain and a bias grain paijami. Source image: collated from a patternmaking book titled "Zarapkar System of Cutting."

Upon examining the evolution of this garment and comparing the images presented in Figure 8, one can infer that historically, the *paijami* was constructed in its rudimentary form utilising the straight lengthwise grain. Subsequently, a bias placement of the patterns was implemented on a single layer of fabric, which consequently led to fabric wastage. This technique gradually advanced to a more intricate method of cutting *churidar* patterns from a bias tube, thereby reducing fabric waste. While these developments are challenging to delineate with precision on a timeline, they can be approximately estimated.

In the current fashion landscape in India, the allure of this garment as a fashionable item has declined, giving way to a Western-style alternative, namely knit leggings, which are a result of fast fashion production. While the *paijami* is custom fitted to an individual's body dimensions, mass-produced knit leggings are readily accessible in an array of sizes and colours in the marketplace. Nevertheless, these cannot replicate the unique charm of *churidar paijami* crafted from silk and adorned with hand embroidery.

Figure 9 and 10. Paijami designs in woven fabric by Rekha Shailaj, 2011.

CONCLUSION

The allure and design potential of this garment have afforded me the opportunity to utilise it as a design reference in my own work (Figure 9, 10). In my exploration, I have experimented with hybrid variations featuring textured and frayed overlays, as well as incorporating details reminiscent of Western-style trousers, including a fitted waistline and belt loops, styled alongside a jacket and bustier top. As I persist in my endeavours with this garment, I aim to preserve and disseminate its historical origins, intricate construction developments, and its significance within fashion discourse.

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1 *Churidar Paijami*/Paijama: The two terms are utilised interchangeably to denote the same garment. However, the term "Paijama" is employed by some authors to refer to its generic form, whereas I have specifically used it to denote the female variant of this garment. This terminology is also employed by tailors in India who possess the expertise to construct it.

2 John Forbes Watson (1827-1892), Reporter for the Products of India at the India Office, nominated by the secretary of state, conceived the idea for 'portable industrial museums'. This led to the publication of The Collections of the Textile Manufactures of India in 1866, eighteen volumes of mounted and classified samples of Indian textiles. A companion volume, The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India, published in 1866, contained explanatory text and illustrations of how the fabrics were worn as clothing in India. Retrieved from http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/i/indian-textiles-and-empire-john-forbes-watson/

3 After the dusk of Indus valley civilization, The Vedic period (1500 BCE to 500 BCE) began when the Aryans started their civilization in these areas, flourished and later travelled across the world.

4 The Gupta Empire was founded in northern India in the beginning of the 4th century CE, following a long period of turmoil during the Kushan Empire which ceased in the middle of the 3rd century CE.

5 Ajanta caves (dates from first to the seventh centuries AD), located in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra, India, contain carvings depicting the life of Buddha. Their carvings and sculptures are considered the beginning of classical Indian art.

6 Mughal Empire lasted from the 16th – 19th Century.

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