

## Covering of Women in Ancient Iran

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**Abstract:** Covering of Iranian women through history has been a symbol of dignity of woman in any culture and civilization. Studying history shows that women have been having a more complete covering in east than west and this shows that men, in eastern countries and also in Iran, have a different view of women than view of western men for women. This research tends to investigate covering of women from Elamite era up to Sasanian era. Our information about coverings of Iranian women across the above-mentioned period mostly comes from investigations made on discovered statues.

**Key words:** Hijab; Covering; Cloths; Ancient Iran; Pants of women

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### 1. Introduction

Covering of women in Iran has been having a especial form and style in accordance with some terms, as follows. Investigations show that covering whole parts of body for men and women has been an undeniable fact through the history and this fact owes its nature to dignified beliefs of Iranian for their coverings because they have not been naked and this fact is certified by archeological information, obtained from engravings and statues. Covering helps human to have chastity and modesty and lets human to be adorned and good-looking. Hijab and covering have been used by Iranians in accordance with their beliefs and religions before acceptance of Islam. Pre-Islamic coverings have been followed amongst women in different religions and nations, including: Indians, Iranians and Jews and its quality was harder than its status in Islam.

### 2. History of cloth and wearing

History of cloth is a part of civilization history which investigates form and quality of cloth from the old times to the current era and it also clarifies reasons of emergence and deletion of some sorts of cloths during the history. It shows direct relation of these changes with other historical, social and daily life changes. Primary human had especial methods for their cloths. There are two ways to protect human from cold weather. One of them deals with metabolism in human body and the other one refers to use of warm coverings. Human used fur for primary cloth but trough the time, human found out how to use natural and plant flaxes and apply them in weaving industry. In order to investigate weaving industry of Iran from the ancient times, we have to start it from Elam lands, because ancient Iranian

civilization belongs to Elamites, from third millennium BC up to first millennium BC, up to entrance of last groups of Indo-Europeans to Iran (Matin, 2012).

Engraving of a noble Elamite woman is the most important masterpiece which remained from the Elamite civilization to show their covering. In this engraving on natural bitumen, there is a woman, sitting on a chair and weaving yarn (while holding a spindle in her hands). She is wearing shirt and a scarf with beautiful margin, covering her left shoulder. Her short sleeve shirt is obviously detectable from margins of her scarf. She is also wearing a hat with a band around it and her servant, in her simple cloth, is standing by her side, holding a fan. Simple cloth of servant shows their hierarchical status.

Pay attention to this principle that based on remained engravings and statues of the era, covering of women and men had no big differences in case of form and style (Zia Pour, 1968). During a long time, cloths have been forming gradually. During the reign of Medes, women also used a wide range of cloths, sometimes originated from cloths of natives. There are some similarities between coverings of Medes with Persians and other ancient times and that is the reason that researchers consider their covering as common covering of Medes and Persians and it should be noted that covering of Persian women originally differed from Medes. One of engravings, belonging to Persians, shows covering of a Persian woman including a long shirt with short sleeves and lower part of her skirt is fringed and her hairstyle is similar to Babylon women and also, there are some more strong evidences for coverings of the era including engravings of Kooh Rangan. Medes and Persians were mixed in a way that we cannot simply discrete them. Coverings of Persians were looser and more complicated, because Persian men and women, vs. Greeks of that era, shamed to show their naked

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bodies in public and they believed that showing naked body in public is a shameful act. They covered themselves with long and fringed cloths to completely cover their bodies and organs (Hamzeh 2006). Generally, Achaemenian people liked long, loose and well covering cloths. Bronze statues, discovered in Nahavand district, show that Ashkanian liked to fabricate masterpieces. These statues show Zeus and Atena with their especial hats which show their simple Greek cloths, wearing a cotton skirt without any sewing which is twisted around their bodies in a especial mode. Hijab or covering of Iranian women was complete during reign of Ashkanian, like any other eras.

After Persian era (Achaemenian era) and during reign of Ashkanian, covering of Iranians had little changes and it was very similar to covering of Medes. Remained historian works certainly certify this similarity and Part people (Ashkanian) had similar covering with Medes, as shown on engravings of Pasargad. Ashkanian wore the same shirt with Medes, including closed, fringed and long-loosed. In some cases, their shirts had two rows of bands on both sides and sometimes one row of band in middle. Type and style of Ashkanian women's covering changed through the time and they did not wear cloths like Medes and Persians. They changed their covering style. Women of the era did not follow covering style of Persians and Achaemenian, but they used their own especial fashion based on their tact.

Regarding that researchers and historians did not mention any information on women coverings in Sasanian era; we have to search for it on remained engravings on stones or dishes. Engraving of cloth of Anahita (Goddess of water) is one of the most important records for cloth of women of this era, as shown on engraving of Naghsh Rostam and Tagh Bostan and some plans on metal dishes and pots. Comparison of stone engravings of Anahita with other stone engravings show that covering of women in Sasanian era included a long-loose and fringed shirt and skirt and they fastened a band under their breasts or lower than them and they also used another cloth beneath their skirts to show fringes or they may styled their cloths in a especial form to show fringes (Zekka, 1973).

This fringed shirt had long sleeves with disordered fringes and sometimes the shirt has no sleeve. Their shirt collar was circled but in some cases they wore open collars, up to their breasts like shirt of a dancer, engraved on a pot discovered in Kelar Dasht which reminds us collar of women in Ashkanian era.

### 3. Conclusion

Investigations made on Iranian cloths and coverings through the history in times of Elamite, Medes, Achaemenian, Ashkanian and Sasanian show that Iranian highly paid attention to color, dignity and gravity of cloths. Variety of hats during reign of Medes and Achaemenian, variety of cloths of women

in Ashkanian era, variety and number of shirts during Sasanian period show tact and taste and also skills of people in making cloths and coverings. Finally, note that we cannot find any symbol of nakedness in cloths of people in above-mentioned periods and all cloths show their dignity and gravity. Considering covering their heads with hats, we can say that Hijab or covering was followed in its best form during these periods. It should be noted that Iranian women in Sasanian and Ashkanian eras used a type of veil which dates back to before emergence of Islam.

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