



Upanah, paduka, juta, juti:

THE TRADITION OF FOOT COVERING IN INDIAN CULTURE

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Upanah, paduka (in Sanskrit), *kharawan* (in Hindi) or 'sandal' is one of the popular forms of foot covering in Indian culture right from the Vedic period. *Juta* and *juti* (in Urdu), *chappal* or *morjari* (in Hindi) or 'slipper' and shoes are the few other types, which got plenty of references in classical Sanskrit literature and Buddhist, Jain and Sangam literature (literature from South India in Tamil). Apart from literary references foot covering are beautifully depicted in Indian art too. In addition to literature and art, shoe got the highest reward of its importance during Epic (in Ramayana) and Tamil culture, which has no parallel in any other culture of the world. The rich Indian classical and folk literature provides the fine details of types of foot covering, material and colour used for making the shoes, when to use and other related customs. On the other hand numerous miniature paintings show the variety of shoes and its users. So far, actual shoes of the museums and private collections are less reported¹. Therefore an attempt has been made

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¹ Bata shoe museum, Canada has published an illustrated catalogue, which discussed few important shoe collections of the world.

to discuss the shoe collection of National museum of New Delhi. Before discussing the actual objects in detail, it will not be out of context to give the brief history of shoe tradition in Indian literature, art and its symbolic meaning.

Shoe tradition in literature

The '*Upanah*' or '*Upanat*' is the term used for "sandal or shoe" in the Vedic literature. This word has been referred in Yajur Veda Samhita², the Atherva Veda³, the Brahmanas⁴ and Panini grammar⁵, which gives the impression that *Upanah* were probably the most common type of foot wear used by the lay man in ancient India. Such foot wear were worn even during the ritual ceremonies and by mendicants in that period⁶. The skin of antelope or boar was used for making such foot wears⁷.

Upanat is denoted for shoe, while *paduka* or *padu* denotes a "sandal' or 'the toe knob sandal' from the time of the Mahabharata⁸. *Paduka*, also known as *kharawan*, is one of the simplest forms of foot covering.

Buddhist literature provides the plenty of information regarding the shoe prevalent in those days. During the Buddhist period layman were using sandals made of several kind of material such as; gold, silver, jewel, crystal, bronze, glass, tin, copper, *hintal* wood and *munja* grass. The Buddhist text *Mahavagga* reveals that sandals made of above mentioned materials were prohibited for monks and nuns. Buddhist and Jain monks and nuns were not allowed to wear fancy attire or shoes. They were only permitted to wear single soled shoes, while they were allowed to wear gifted old shoes. About the types of shoes it further mentions four types of shoe: *putabaddha*, shoes that covered the ankles; *padigunthima*, full boots, *tulapunnika*, shoes padded with cotton wool, *tittirapattika*, those shaped like the wings of partridge or decorated with horns of a ram or a goat. Shoes with served points like a scorpion's string or decorated with peacock feathers, etc. were in great demand in ancient times and because of their elaborate decoration, it was forbidden for Buddhist monks⁹.

Jain sources inform that the leather shoes were in common use for making shoes. While describing them, it also discusses the type of material used for shoe, colour, material and style of shoes. *Brihat-Kalpa-Sutra-Bhasya* mentions the comprehensive guidelines for attire and foot wear of monks and nuns. It mentions that for making shoes, different type of leather is used, which can be obtained from the hide of cows, buffaloes, goat, sheep and wild animals. Shoes are made of colored leather and available in four different type; *sakala-krtsna*, *pramana-krtsna*, *varna-krtsna* and *bandhana-krtsna*. *Sakala-krtsna*, the single soled shoes, known as *eka-putam* or *ekatalam* and also known as *talika*, were allowed to be worn by Jain monks to protect them from thrones when walking at night.

² Taittiriya Samhita, V.4.4.4.

³ Atherva Veda. XX.133.4.

⁴ Satapata Brahmana. V.4.3.19.

⁵ Jutta, J. N., Feet & Footwear in Indian Culture, Canada, 2000, p-83.

⁶ Chandra, M., Costumes, Textiles costumes and Coiffure in Ancient and Mediaeval India, Delhi, 1973, p-10.

⁷ Satapata Brahmana, V. 4.3.19.

⁸ Jutta, Ibid, p-83.

⁹ Mahavagga, V.8. 3.

Pramana-krtsna shoes had two, three or more soles, *Ardh-khallaka* or half shoes covered half the leg and *khallaka* (*samasta-khallaka*) or full shoes covered the whole leg¹⁰.

Bana, the court poet of Emperor Harshvardana of Kannauj (present district of Western Uttar Pradesh) of 6th-7th century describes the detail of His patron and various kinds of activity in his writings. In one of his work, *Harshacharita*, the poet describes attire of Hindu mendicant, who wore a lion cloth of cotton, a scarf over his shoulders and *paduka* on his feet¹¹.

During the period of Ala-ud-din-Khilji (in around thirteenth century) another poet Amir Khusrau mentions *kafsh*, which were supposed to be "high heeled slippers shod with iron"¹². In the Gujarati and Hindi literature of fifteenth century, Islamic rulers have been mentioned wearing long attire and full boots, which were known as *khalyai pajjara*. The *Ain-i-Akbari* written by Abul Fazl Allami describes the life of Emperor Akbar's court and detail information about activities prevalent in every aspect of life. While describing the "Sringara or Ornaments of Dress" chapter he writes that men's and women's costumes are complete with twelve and sixteen things and sandals or shoes are one of them¹³. Sir Thomas Roe, who visited India during the Jahangir court, writes about Emperor's shoes, "On his feet a pair of buskins embroidered with pearls, the toes sharp and turning up"¹⁴. It is believed that from then onwards the upturned toes shoes became fashionable and it was named after Salim, son of Jahangir, and were known as Salim Shahi shoes¹⁵.

The custom of wearing boots was prevalent in the south also. Varthema, a Portuguese traveller to India, observed that kings of Vijaynagar wore beautiful dress, but nothing on their feet. The similar custom, by the king Krishna Deva Raya, of barefoot is mentioned by another traveler Domingo Paes who visited South India in the starting of sixteenth century. Actually anybody approaching to king also had to be barefoot which is a mark of paying respect and honour¹⁶. With these few literary references it became evident that shoe tradition existed in India from the Vedic period and it provides the plenty of variety.

Sandal or shoe in Indian art

One of the earliest known surviving examples of footwear is from the Indian sub-continent found from excavation at Chandraketugarh, West Bengal is dated circa 200 B.C¹⁷. This wooden (29.3 x 12.2 cm) sandal has platform for the left foot, which is wide from the front and tapered towards the back. Holes on either side allowed for straps to fasten the sandal to the wear's foot. The surface of this sandal is beautifully decorated with two circular floral patterns done with etching on the toe and heel. Front and back of the sandal has slightly raised heel.

¹⁰ Brihat-Kalpa-Sutra-Bhasya, IV, 3847.

¹¹ Chandra, 1973, 62: *Harshacharita*-265.

¹² Jutta, *Ibid*, p-97.

¹³ Abul Fazl Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Blockman, 1978, p-342-3,

¹⁴ Sir Thomas Roe, 1990, 283-4

¹⁵ Jutta, *Ibid*, p-105.

¹⁶ Tradition of being barefoot is not restricted to emperors, but also it is practiced at the time of visit to temple or home shrine and performing the classical Indian dance.

¹⁷ Jutta, *Ibid*, p-82, pl-80.

Most of the museums have sixteenth-seventeenth century actual shoe collection, which are made of leather or iron. However much examples are not known in between, but one can easily found example of sandal, shoes, boot and slippers in terracotta, stone and bronze sculptures and miniature paintings.

A small terracotta sculpture has been found from Chandraketugarh¹⁸, which is dated circa first century BCE. The small broken plaque depicts just the feet wearing the beautiful sandal or *chappal*. It is strapped in 'v' shape, appears to be double, in between from the toe and second finger. The fascinating part of this sculpture is that sole is in the shape of lotus leaf. The pointed raised knob like depiction around the edge indicates that it has been stitched beautifully.

A small terracotta plaque, of 1st century BCE, is yet another example of foot covering¹⁹. This broken plaque has only lower portion, which depicts the legs of male figure in move. The side view of strapped sandal has beautiful knotting on the front and slight raised back covering.

Around third fourth centuries it is evident from several Buddhist stone sculptures from the Gandhara region that it was quite common to wear strapped sandals²⁰. These are of the simplest type with a sole and a strap passing across the instep and another through the gap between the toe and second finger. Kushana and Gupta coins also depict the Emperor wearing long robe and full boot. The most important evidence is of God Surya from the very beginning. He has been always portrayed with full boot, which is considered to be Saka or Central Asian influence²¹. Ajanta paintings (fourth-fifth century A.D) also depict the foreigners wearing full boot and stockings²².

Jain miniature paintings and Mughal miniature paintings from Babar, Humayan, Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan, and later Mughal emperor's paintings have been portrayed with half shoe, sandal, slipper, and boot type, half covered without back and with pointed raised back, slipper type²³.

Toe knob sandals are usually associated with the Indian *sandhu*, the ascetic, religious teacher and holy man as seen in number of miniature paintings from Datia (Madhya Pradesh), Murshidabad (West Bengal) , Pahari (Himachal Pradesh), Patna (Bihar), Rajasthan, Sikh (Punjab) school of eighteenth-nineteenth century²⁴. After the Europeans visit in India (from sixteenth century onwards) boot became fashionable, especially with royal and elite, however *kharawan*, *morjari* and slippers were used by the common man. These leather *morjaris*, half shoes were beautifully embroidered with silk thread, metallic thread sometimes with pearls and semi precious stones also like Nizams of Hyderabad used to have²⁵.

¹⁸ Housed in Indian museum, Kolkota. Bhattacharya, A.K., Terracotta of Bangal, Shunga and Kushana in Indian terracotta sculpture, the early period ed. P. Pal, Marg, Sept, 2002, VOL-54. No.1, p-65, pl-8.

¹⁹ Housed in Jhajjar museum, Gurkul, Haryana. Ahuja, N. P., Moulded terracotta from the Indo-Gangetic Divide, Sugh, Circa, 200 BCE -50 BCE, In Marg, Ibid, p-55, pl-12.

²⁰ Kim. I., The Future Buddha Maitreya, Delhi, 1997 pl-nos: 73-77;83;92-93.

²¹ Surya or Sun is the only God in Hindu pantheon, who wears the boot. Barojia.J.N., The Department of Hindu Iconography, Delhi, (4th edition) 1985, pp-433-434.

²² Behl. B. K., The Ajanta Caves, Thames & Hudson, 1998,pp-114;143;198;232.

²³ Okada. A., Imperial Mughal Painters, Paris, 1992, pp-1,16,20,21,22.

²⁴ Schimtz. B., After the Great Mughals, Marg Publication, Mumbai 2002,pp-1,2,3.

²⁵ Nizam of Hyderabad use to wear *morjari* which is fully embroidered with *zari* thread and *salma sitara*, instep ornament embellished with rubies, diamonds and emeralds set in gold is in the collection of Bata Museum, Canada.

Shoe as a symbolic representation of the Deity

The Epic Ramayana describes the most rewarding incident of sandal²⁶. Rama (prince of Ayodhya) due to some curse on his father King Dasharatha went into exile for fourteen years with his wife, Sita and younger brother, Lakshmana. Rama's another younger brother Bharata requested Him to come and rule the Kingdom, but He did not except it and asked him to rule the Kingdom. Then Bharata asked for Rama's golden sandal, which he got and from that day onwards Bharata placed it upon the throne and started worshipping it as a sign of Rama's presence. Bharata never sat on throne and ruled the Kingdom on behalf of Rama. A beautiful Chola bronze statue of Bharata is in the National Museum collection, which portrayed Him holding *paduka* on his head²⁷. Another example is a miniature painting of Pahari School, which depicts Bharata worshipping the Rama's sandal (pl.1).

At the Chencherimali temple in South India, there is a custom of carrying the leather sandal in honour of the deity Subrahmanya. According to myth the Subrahmanya deity was allowed to wear sandals of boar leather. An another South Indian temple at Valli, believed to be daughter of a hunter, has a small shrine dedicated to her at the pilgrimage center of Marudumali and Palani or Sivanmali and Chennilais, Tamil Nadu, where she is represented either in human form or by a pair of sandals. Apart from *paduka*'s worship, foot prints are also worshipped in Indian ethos²⁸.

Sandal and shoe in the National Museum collection

The decorative arts department of National Museum²⁹ has six pairs of sandals. Out of six, four are *padukas*, one is *morjari* and another one is slipper. Three *padukas* are made of ivory, one is of wood inlaid with ivory, while leather *morjari* is beautifully embroidered with metallic thread in *zardozi* technique and last pair of slippers is made of silver.

One of the earliest pieces in the collection is an ivory *paduka*, which is intricately carved in a regular shape. The upper surface is beautifully ornamented, knob at the front in between the toe and second finger and raised at the back from toe and heel side. The carving design has been worked in bud shape and it's both sides has pointed end. Floral decorated edges and circular knob adorn the *paduka*. The slightly raised pointed toes and heel is also decorated with floral and human figures. With the tight fitting costumes these human figures appears to be European, who hold the gun also, may be hunters (pl.2).

Another ivory *paduka* of the collection is almost similar in shape, like the earlier one, however it is without decoration (pl.3). The plain upper surface has only circle designs all around the edges and circular knob is in between toe and second finger. The raised

²⁶ Ramayan

²⁷ Jutta, Ibid, p-80.

²⁸ Foot prints, the scared feet, is the most scared feature of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain culture. There are *ashata-manalik-chinah* (eight symbols of Maha-purusha, holy man), and foot prints is one of them, which is being worshipped with great devotion by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, individually by all the three main cultures of India. There are number of terracotta, stone, bronze sculptures, woven, printed and embroidered textiles which depicts the foot prints.

²⁹ Apart from decorative arts department, National Museum has shoe collection in the Central Asian Antiques and Anthology department, besides some indirect references in the archeological, numismatic and painting's department.

pointed toes and heel has been carved in ridged shape, which has iron strip at the edge, possibly to give the additional strength to it. The use of good quality ivory and use of iron strip indicate that it has been especially made for some strong person to be used in rough and tuff weather.

The shape of third ivory *paduka* reminds the foot prints of divinity (pl.4). Front side of the *paduka* or toe side, has straight cut instead of bud or circular shape. The entire upper surface has been worked in fish scale motif. The stylized parrot is on the inner side of the *paduka* and pointed end tip. The back of it has checker design and slightly raised heel.

Light weight wooden *paduka*, without knob, has been skillfully inlaid with ivory (pl.5). A thin ivory sheet has been fixed on the upper surface, which is beautifully carved with floral pattern lattice work. Slightly raised toe and heel has been worked in ridged design.

Leather *morjari* is beautifully embroidered with metallic thread, which is popularly known as *zari* workmanship (pl.6). It has flat sole, pointed tip, leaf patterned projection on the front side and raised back. The outer surface of the *morjari* is decorated with circular roundels, which has been worked with *salma-sitara* (gold wire and circular disc). Inner surface of the *morjari* has red velvet and the faded heel side indicates that it has been used well by the user.

Silver slipper has covered front and reminds the boot style (pl.7). The front surface has been decorated with floral pattern done with repousse technique. Backless slipper is flat from the sole, circular shape from the back and pointed tip at the front. Such slippers were especially made for ceremonial functions.

Although actual shoe collection of the decorative arts department is small yet it is important in many ways. The use of precious material, decorated with intricacies, variety of shapes, which changes its name like; sandals, *padukas* and *morjari* makes this collection significant.



Pl. 1. Bharata in saintly outfit is shown worshipping the *Paduka* of Ram, which have been placed on throne in a tent. Guler, Pahari, Himachal Pradesh, Circa 1780. Paper. 23 x 33 cm. Acc. no. 88.529.



Pl. 2. *Paduka*. Flat upper surface in bud shape and rectangular heel on both the ends, which depicts human figures carved in low relief. Murshidabad, W. Bengal. Early 19th century. Ivory. L. 26 x W. 8 x Ht. 9.5 cm. Acc no. 55. 76/6 a-b.



Pl. 3. *Paduka*. Flat upper surface decorated with floral rounded pattern on edges and an arched shaped heel on which a metal strip has been fixed. An interesting floral band has been worked at the back. Northern India. Early 19th century. Ivory. L. 20 x W. 10.4 x Ht. 8 cm. Acc. no. 64.250/ a-b.



Pl. 4. *Paduka*. Flat upper surface with fish scale motif & check design at the back. Stylized partit and fish tail pattern has been worked on outer & inner side of the object. When both the *padukas* are placed together it forms the Vishnupad. Southern/Central India. Early 20th century. Ivory. L. 24.5 x W. 8.8 x Ht. 2 cm. Acc. no. 87.84/1-2.



Pl. 5. *Paduka*. Flat upper surface in bud shape, mica and ivory sheet has been fixed on wooden surface. Ivory sheet worked in lattice work with floral pattern. It has rectangular heel on both the ends and use of ivory nail is very interesting feature of the object. Western India. 19th century. Wood, ivory, mica. L. 24.5 x W. 9.3 x Ht. 11 cm. Acc. no. 63.788/a-b.



Pl. 6. *Juti* (half shoe) or *morjari*'s upper surface is embroidered with *zari* (metallic) thread in rosette pattern. Inner portion has red velvet lining. Front has a small pointed leather stripe, which is turned upwards and it is round. Punjab. Late 19th or early 20th century. Leather, velvet and *zari* thread. L. 23 x W. 8 x Ht. 5 cm. Acc. no.59.31/5a-b.



Pl. 7. Backless slipper's front portion is irregular shoe shape, which has been worked in floral pattern in low repoussée technique. Northern India. 20th century. Silver L. 23.5 x W. 9 x Ht. 0.2 cm. Acc. No. 90.561/1-2.