



Clothing in Elizabethan Era

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INTRODUCTION

Elizabethan Era was the most important era for the development and progress of the England under the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the era is also called as the golden age of the English history. Elizabeth was appointed as the Queen of England on November 17, 1558 until her death on March 24, 1603. During her reign, England became a strong nation with many discoveries in the scientific field, with its sea voyages and the defeat of Spanish Armada.

Sumptuary laws: To understand the fashion and clothing of the time, we have to understand the Elizabethan Law which was called, ‘Sumptuary Laws,’ which was enforced by the queen herself in 1574. This law was passed to maintain the social classes of the time and to curb the expenditure of the common class. This law applied to various items from clothing, jewelry, food, furniture to beverages. It was necessary to follow the law, as the consequences of breaking the law were harsh, one could get executed for breaking the law. Now let’s understand why the needs of the Sumptuary Laws were felt. During the middle Ages, the society was dominated by Feudal system; everyone could easily distinguish between the upper class and the lower class. Due to the Bubonic Plague, around 40% of the population were wiped out, which resulted in the rising of the new merchant class and destroying the Feudal system from the England. This new social class of merchants was rich, and could easily afford the luxuries of the nobility. To separate the upper class of merchants from the nobility was necessary, hence the law was formed. Clothing not only dictated wealth of the wearer but also the status of the person. The law even provided the colors and style of the clothing for the people.

Law of Clothing for Women in Elizabethan Era:

- a) Only duchesses, marquises and countesses were allowed to have clothes of gold, silver, tinsel, satin, silk, tissues, and fur of sables in their gowns, kirtles, and sleeves.
- b) Viscountesses and the women of the level of viscountesses were allowed to have all the above materials in their kirtles and sleeves only.
- c) The wives of knights of the Garter and the Privy Council, the ladies and the gentlewomen of the privy chamber and bedchamber, maids of honor were allowed to have velvets, furs and laces of gold and silver.
- d) Except the degrees above mentioned, only wives of Baron's sons or of knights, no one allowed to have velvet and furs in their gowns.
- e) The above degrees mentioned and the baronesses were allowed to have the cowls, sleeves, partlets, and linings of gold and silver.
- f) The wives of the sons and the heirs of knights were allowed to wear the gowns made up of silk grosgrain, camlet, and taffeta.
- g) The peasant women were allowed to wear clothes made up of cotton and any cheap material.

Elizabethan Gowns: The different layers of the Elizabethan gowns, which were worn by



the every sections of the society were discussed. During that time, the cost of the gown ranged from ten, twenty to forty shillings per meter. Laces and ribbons were also heavily used for the gowns.

Smock or Shift: Smock was the

innermost layer of the clothing, and basically an undergarment. It was made up of linen.

Stocking: Stockings were for foot. During that time, they used to be just above the knee. The materials used for the stockings were wool yarn, silk yarn, etc.

Corset: They were used for the slim waist, which were quite trendy that time. Corset was a close fitting bodice stiffened with whalebone and reed. Corset made waist look slim and the front line of the body flat.

Farthingale: Next was farthingale. Farthingale was a hoop skirt and it was made up of the taffeta and stiffened with rows of rope or willow bents.

Bum roll: Bum rolls were a padded crescents which were worn around the hips to give the skirt more flare.

Petticoat: After wearing all the above items, women used to wear petticoats, which were made up of cheap or expensive materials along with the embroidery or the decorative trim around the bottom.

Kirtle and forepart: Kirtles were separate skirt which were worn above the petticoats, and forepart was a cloth which were worn on the kirtle but it covered only the front part of the body. Foreparts were embroidered in gold or silver.

Partlet: Partlet was a kind of shirt.

Sleeves: During that time, sleeves weren't attached to the shirts, they were worn separately. Sleeves used to match with the forepart.

Gowns: Lastly the gowns were worn above all the items mentioned above.

Cloak: cloaks were also called safeguard, it was used to protect the gown from the rain or mud.

Ruffs: These were the frilled collar which was used by the both men and women. These were made of different kinds of linen, like Holland, lawn, and came rick.

Hair accessories: Hats, coif, veil and coil were the most common accessories worn by the Elizabethan ladies. The coif was for children made of linen; it was a close fitting

cap. Caul was the hair net. Veil was to cover the face, which was made of netted fabric. Hats were used to cover their head.

CONCLUSION

During the Elizabethan Era clothing, accessories, and cosmetics were all a part of daily life. In this period, there were a set of

rules controlling which classes could wear which clothing called the Sumptuary Laws. The Sumptuary Laws controlled the colors and types of clothing a person could wear. The ranks and position of Elizabethan would be immediately recognized by the color and material of the clothes. Thus, people only wore clothes that they were allowed to wear-by law.