



Preserving and sustaining culture: Traditional clothing in the UNESCO world cultural heritage site Kandy in Sri Lanka

PRIYANKAVIRAJINI MEDAGEDARA KARUNARATNE *, G. M. RANATHUNGA , S. S. V. DE SILVA

^{1, 2, 3} University of Moratuwa, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Abstract

Aim: This research aims to establish that clothing is a material cultural object with intangible heritage value because it signifies and expresses nuanced cultural values and social relationships.

Method: The study employed the ethnographic approach to research. Ethnography is the practice of using art and science to describe people and their customs. Descriptive labels were coded into the data. Codes were assigned to each activity, event, and thuppottiya-wearing technique to facilitate comparison and pattern identification. Data reliability and validity were both increased by double-checking with other published literature.

Findings: Two distinct kinds of thuppottiya have been identified. KariyaKorala was the name of the the thuppottiya used by Diyawadana Nilame, the lay guardian of the Tooth Relic and the head of the service to the relic. While the dresses were nearly identical, there were noticeable differences in the colour, fabric, embellishments, and means they accessorized.

Implications/Novel Contribution: Consumers and tourists who value collecting symbolic items have given the Thuppottiya new prominence because it is at the centre of ethnic identity. The author concludes by discussing the difficulties heritage regimes encounter in today's cultural contexts and proposing solutions for the long-term security of the diverse cultural assets under their care.

Keywords: Thuppottiya, UNESCO Cultural Heritage, Kandyan Culture, Elite Male

Received: 11 December 2018 / **Accepted:** 8 January 2019 / **Published:** 11 February 2019

INTRODUCTION

Dressing as a means of displaying one's social and cultural standing is a practice that spread across the globe over time. Scholars worldwide have found evidence linking clothing styles to social status distinctions (Farber, 2010; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1989; Kuma-Kpobee, Power, & Otieno, 2007). The desire to preserve national culture and historical heritage in Sri Lanka lacks dialogue on the traditional dress at the national level, despite the impact of the dress. Thus, immediate actions must be taken to protect traditional national dress and its meanings and significance in fostering a strong sense of cultural identity. Therefore, for Sri Lanka to adopt a holistic concept for preserving their cultural dress artifacts, they must first determine the significance of traditional dress to other cultural values.

Objective of the Study

This research aims to establish that clothing is a material cultural object with intangible heritage value because it symbolizes and expresses complex cultural values and social relationships.

* Corresponding author: PriyankaVirajini Medagedara Karunaratne

† Email: virajinik@uom.lk

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kandy World Cultural Heritage Site

Kandy was the last administrative Kingdom of Sri Lanka prevails from 14th Century AD to 1815 (De Silva, 2005). The city of Kandy was affirmed a world cultural heritage site by UNESCO in 1988. Kandy is an important center for administration, commercial and culture developed from history. The city is located in the central highland region in Sri Lanka. There were 20 district secretariats and 2987 villages in Kandy district. According to the department of Census and Statistics, 2012 is stated that the total district population is 1,279,028 and 80 percent of the population is rural, 12 percent urban and 8 percent live in the plantation sector (Daskon & Binns, 2009). Kandyan era was the last and the first era of history during both Western and Eastern foreign influences spread over the Kingdom. At the beginning from the formation of Kandyan Kingdom, South Indian influences were gradually penetrated from the Gampola Kingdom (Daskon & Binns, 2009). The Portuguese took over for 130 years, the Dutch for 163 years and last the British took over the country for almost 150 years. The Nayakkar influences brought strong social assimilation because they ruled almost 76 years. As a result of that native culture society has fast becoming westernization in outlook. By the 16th Century onward the royalty embraced western cultural values. Ultimately royal and elite dress significantly show western influences (Kabas, 2017; Ranathunga, 2018; Suharti & Pramono, 2016; Yazici, 2016). The majority of the community of Kandyan culture said to have been descended from South Indian and its structure was modified by later development (Coomaraswamy, 1956). Thus rural Kandyan communities are considered to be conventional and their dignity developed through hereditary connections, skills and traditional craftsmanship (Dewaraja, 1988; Subiyantoro, Sulisty, Yulianto, & Prameswari, 2017). Culture is a complicated concept which has peculiar features. The UNESCO defines culture as a unique system of pattern of life (World Cultural Report, 2001). Nowotny (2008) refers culture as the whole sectors of life includes scientific knowledge, traditions of food and dress, symbols, indigenous practice of taking decisions and power utilization. Culture interprets as a complex of features that includes spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional aspects that distinguish a social group or a society by the UNESCO's the Commonwealth Foundation. Verhelst (1990) further states that culture includes modes of life, value systems and traditions and beliefs. It is realized that culture in this sense is defined in the broadest sense of tangible and intangible sects include traditional values, knowledge and customs. These characteristics can be preserved and invested across socially to improve opportunities and sustainability of people's lives.

Power of Dress: Thuppottiya

Kandyan elites identified as powerful and distinguish cluster in the social strata who were tired from a high caste status at the Kings service and who possessed wealth and wielded power (Dewaraja, 1988; Yildiz, 2016). Their extravagant thuppottiya luxurious dress signified dignity, power and high social status. The costume was worn at the royal court and ceremonial occasions such as New Year festival, annual procession at the Tooth Relic and annual show at the King's court where the high status displayed. During the Kandyan era it was strictly prohibited to imitate royal and elite dress etiquettes by the rest of the common people. Dewaraja (1988) explains that it is seen that many of the elite were aristocratic by birth whose family had severed Kandyan royalty for a long period. They had direct correlation with the royalty. Thuppottiya dress was the ceremonial dress of elite show eclectic mixture of many cultural influences. The costume is consisted of an extravagant long lower draped cloth and a jacket. The dress is a hybrid form which entails western features combined with Siamese dress features. Coomaraswamy (1956) stated that items of the jacket are similar to the Western jacket with a collar, cuffs, buttons and silver button chains. As Ranathunga (2018) states that the Tuppotti dress was brought from the Kingdom of Siam during the Kandyan era when the two countries had cultural exchange in terms of establishment of higher ordination (Uppasampada a Buddhist ritual) in Sri Lanka. The dress was inspired by Javanese royal court dress. In order to the Siamese tradition, a Buddhist novice (apprentice) must wear royal regalia and tuppotti with white loose trouser before he takes oaths. It is understood that the method of wearing elite costume developed gradually during the Kandyan period. The tuppottiis consisted of three clothes. Each cloth is long 12 cubits. Occasionally tuppottiis made by attaching two 6 cubits long pieces cloth together. Historical evidences show that during the Dutch occupational era, there were especially imported fine textiles to Kandyan elite and for the royal family from countries like

Surat and Bengol (Chou, Wu, & Chou, 2017; Dewaraja, 1988). A British writer of the 19th Century Davy (1821) also explains that the quantity of cloths wrapped round their waist to achieve extraordinary size, considered as an emblem of dignity. Christopher Schwcitzer, a German (1676 A.D) who served for the Dutch East India Company recorded about early local chieftains dress as they wear piece of linen about their middle, from the navel down to their knees but they make a very great distinction of their apparel, according to their dignity and quality. According Knox (1966) records elite wore white thupottiya dress including bravely engraved short dagger which was carved out silver and a painted cane. During the time of Kirthi Sri Rajasimha (17047-1782) mural of the Madawala temple represents a chief who wears white muslin pleated jacket with short sleeves, buttoned up the front, thuppotti cloth and belt.



Figure 1. Elite of the Kandyan era wore tuppottiya or four corned hat

Dress and Service Associated with World Heritage City Kandy

The arrival of the Tooth relic was an important event in the early history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The Tooth Relic was brought from India about 805 B.E (311 AC) during the time of King Sirimeghavanna. From then, this sacred Tooth Relic considered as a national treasure of great value and a tangible sign of Sinhalese and their sacred attachment to the Buddhist doctrine. There is a common faith of Sri Lankans that of the relics of the Buddha is believed to be inseparably associated with kingship. The history provides evidences that political sovereignty was inextricably interwoven with the possession of the Tooth Relic since the 12th Century until the end of the Sinhalese Kingdom. (The Kingdom lasted almost $3\frac{1}{2}$ centuries from 1474- 1815) (Seneviratna, 1983). The relationship of King with Sangha of Buddhist monks show that how royalty and their legitimization associated with sacred symbols in culture. The sacred rituals offering to the Tooth Relic by the specific officials also representing of cultural code for the exchange of power between authoritative officials with Kings (today take up the duty of lay guardian of the temple of Tooth as Diyawadana Nilame monks, and officials such as patha male and udamalekattale) Seneviratne (1978) states that the King's role in safeguarding the ritual maintenance of the Sacred Tooth Relic was a critical component of his legitimacy. These rituals also depict the society's classified system and representation of the caste system which was stem of controlling the social strata of Kandyan society. There were three daily rituals offered to the Tooth Relic. These rituals were established based on the fact that the Tooth Relic was considered as the living Lord Buddha which was popular imagination of Sri Lankans. Offering alms to the Tooth Relic was the main customary ritual held three times every day. These rituals were originated and established from the foundation of classical worship of the Hindu gods. In the dawn ritual, the Relic was offered sacred breakfast along with scented flowers, incense and traditional sound. During the daytime alms (food as lunch) were offered and during the evening, liquids offered. These three services are known as early morning service, mid-day service, and evening service. The officers required to be ready for the service by clad with traditional costumes before the ceremony

begins. These rituals were conducted by the caste hierarchy officials who descendant from traditional families. The traditional bureaucracy was known as Ralas (masters) and attired traditional costumes show broad slots of the social hierarchy (Appadurai, 1981). There are six types of officers known as Ralas who serve offering the alms to the Tooth Relic. Kariya Korala is the head of officials who responsible for the service to the Tooth Relic. The officers who serve at the kitchen are called Muluthangerala, officers serving keys of the chamber of the tooth relic known as Vattorurala, Geparalais an officer who helps priests for the service, Kaththiyanarala (serving royal meals from kitchen to the chamber of the Tooth Relic, Pallemalerala is helping priests for the service at the lower shrine of the temple of the tooth relic. Dorakada arachchi (guarding the gate) is the guard of the entrance where the Tooth Relic placed. It was observed that these officials received specific sumptuary privileges.



Figure 2. Service retinue of the tooth relic. The Lay Guardian Embroidered tuppottiya wore colour tuppottiya, Kariya Korala



Figure 3. 6 Ralas in red colour hats, two officials wore coloured scarves, two guards in officials wore coloured scarves, two guards in red belt in white colour tuppottiya



Figure 4. Ralas in white tuppottiya & jackets bringing alms to the tooth relic



Figure 5. Kaththiyana rala in white tuppottiya & jacket

Belief Systems and Tradition associated with Dress

Literature on dress indicates that it has an important link with tradition. Tradition is a culturally constructed concept (Jirousek, 1997) tradition therefore, is a practice or custom and knowledge communicated through generations. Even with it shows slow change, tradition go through makeover and reform, which signifies consistency and continuity. Rabine (2002) says that tradition has a component of continuity. Also tradition, alteration through time and be apt to to unveil influence from other cultures. Eicher and Erekosima (1995) refers physical characteristics of dress include belief systems that outline moral and aesthetic standards for dress. He also points out that belief systems vary from society to society and between sub-groups within the same society. Hamilton and Hamilton (1989) identify that dress identities are dynamic, and change in relation to objects and belief systems that sharp aesthetics of clothing. Dress encompassing everything that concerns the body such as body beautifications include clothing and accessories. Through social association of the individuals and their dress, identities, outlooks, cultural values and canons are announced or communicated Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1995) states that significance of dress to culture is evolving with time and by changing the using of dress and is never rooted to the past. Various researchers argue that ethnicity holds the strength of group's ideas. In these way members of a group distinguishes their position from non-members of a group. These members share a collective heritage including dress, beliefs language, and the way of life. Ethnic dress signifies the common ways of dress and identify group of people who stake a common background and heritage (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1995).

METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic research model has utilized for the study. Ethnography is the art and science used to describe a group of culture. These studies encompass a full engagement of the researcher in the day-to-day lives or culture. Ethnography study can gather quantities of materials to describe people and their believes system and how they behave in routine (Roper & Shapira, 2000). By observation, interviewing and conducted archival research collected multiple data (Angrosino, 2007). Conducted series of observation son people and to their activities and inter relationships of people in the field. In order to understand the views of the individual's in relation to the restoration of traditional forms of dress, the study focused on Kandyan perceptions of dress, historic traditional dress, the relationship of dress to culture, and inquiry whether the traditional dress has a place in contemporary Kandy society. Furthermore this study seeks whether traditional dress exists, and to generate information relating to events during which traditional dress is worn or used. Constructed interviews were conducted. Archival materials were observed and recorded. Data was coded for descriptive labels. Then collected data was coded in a way to compare and identify patterns. Coded patterns of types of activities, events and methodology of wear the thuppottiya. Reliability and validity was achieved by verifying data with other literary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thuppottiya or Mulenduma traditional elite male dress of Kandy is an ensemble and sets of design which represent a segment of social community bear unique cultural behaviour. The dress holds cultural values in terms of wearing it and utilization. The dress is functioning in the Kandyan region since history as a task oriented dress. It was identified that there are two types thuppottiya. The thuppottiya utilized by the lay guardian of the Tooth Relic known as Diyawadana Nilame and head of service to the Tooth Relic was known as KariyaKoral (Kariya means duty). Their dresses were identically similar as a whole outfit; however differences seems to be appear in outer appearance as colour, material, embellishments, and the manner of accessorizing the outfit. It was identified that the evolutions of the thuppottiya dress in Sri Lanka taken place in a specific time. The costume was developed, formed during the Kandyan era. Characteristics of the costume are emphasized an extravagant body form, hybrid formation of Western and Eastern cultural dress features, task orientation, eclectic mixture of sewing and unsewn wrapping methods of dress formation (Ranathunga, 2015). This study therefore, concurs with some of the views of scholars who consider traditional dress. Also who considers dress as changing depending on times also values the group and cultural new from (Nowotny, 2008). In this manner, traditional dress is liable to undergo a process of cultural transformation. The styles adopted by people of a community is to be authenticated to the values of a particular culture or group. In the process, the traditional dress styles may be authenticated to the values of a particular culture or group.

Draping method of the thuppottiya was associated with folding, pleating, gathering and methods of knotting. This draping method is unique to Asia. Coomaraswamy (1956) states Asian dress is arranged by a large piece of cloth by knotting, pleating or folding over the body rather than tucking pins or sewing. A thuppottiya is a white cloth, eight or nine cubits long, made in two pieces of cloth neatly joined up in the middle: single widths are called paday, and measure six or seven cubits in length, and four to six spans in breadth (Coomaraswamy, 1956). The dress is started by wrapping a series of kavani (waist cloths) which are draped on the hip. The first is draped as a Basque consisting of semicircular folds over each hip. The top edge of the cloth is gathered in a tight wad of pleats at the diaphragm and anchored firmly to the waist. Folding plays a great part in arranging the dress. It is a descriptive activity, intended to smoothly and continually run with no evidence of ambiguity or interruption (Quinn, 2003). An extravagant body silhouette was formed by many knots; twisting wads of fabrics at the middle and going round the waist. The twisted knot is placed at the abdomen forming a bulky, firm knot. Finally, three knots appear at the diaphragm and those are known as mohottigeta (Knots of mohotti).



Figure 6. The process of making knots of mohotti

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Some scholars were argued that the traditional dress is unchanging. Development features on dress challenges its definitions. It was observed, some modifications of the dress features. It has been found that due to the globalization and technological advancement the community experiences economic changes and it affects losing purity and authenticity in traditional dress. Furthermore it is also revealed that the physical features of the dress are modified. It was also found that some dress may have new form awhile keeping with the traditional culture. The study revealed that traditional dress is considered as part of a dynamic culture. The dress is accountable to be pretentious by the changes that happen inside culture. Meanings and usage of traditional dress therefore change with the passage of time, reconstruction and re-packaging of ideas about culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge that the research conducted by the financial support of SRC/LT/2018/14 Research grant approved by senate research council of the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.

REFERENCES

- Angrosino, M. (2007). *Doing ethnographic and observational research*. New York, NY: Sage.
- Appadurai, A. (1981). Royal rituals and cultural change. *Reviews in Anthropology*, 8(2), 121-138. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00988157.1981.9977542>
- Chou, P. C., Wu, S. F., & Chou, Y. C. (2017). The perspective of indigenous culture: A case study of the truku tribe in East Taiwan. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(1), 67-71. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26500/jarssh-02-2017-0109>
- Coomaraswamy, A. (1956). *Mediaeval sinhalese art*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Daskon, C., & Binns, T. (2009). Culture, tradition and sustainable rural livelihoods: Exploring the culture development interface in Kandy, Sri Lanka. *Community Development Journal*, 45(4), 494-517. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsp019>
- Davy, J. (1821). *An account of the interior of Ceylon, and of its inhabitants: With travels in that island*. Harlow, UK: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown.
- De Silva, K. M. (2005). *A history of Sri Lanka (Colombo)*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications.
- Dewaraja, L. S. (1988). *The kandyan kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1707-1782*. Sydney, Australia: Lake House Investments.
- Eicher, J. B., & Erekosima, T. V. (1995). Why do they call it kalabari? Cultural authentication and the demarcation of ethnic identity. *Dress and Ethnicity*, 4(6), 139-164.
- Eicher, J. B., & Roach-Higgins, M. E. (1995). *Dress, gender and age: Dress and identity*. New York, NY: Fairchild Publications.
- Farber, L. (2010). Africanising hybridity? Toward an Afropolitan aesthetic in contemporary South African fashion design. *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural Studies*, 24(1), 128-167. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040903509234>
- Hamilton, J. A., & Hamilton, J. W. (1989). Dress as a reflection and sustainer of social reality: A cross-cultural perspective. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 7(2), 16-22. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302x8900700203>
- Jirousek, C. A. (1997). From traditional to mass fashion system dress among men in a turkish village. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 15(4), 203-215.
- Kabas, B. (2017). Today's youth subcultures: Resistance or corporatization. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(1), 54-60. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26500/jarssh-02-2017-0107>
- Knox, R. (1966). *An historical relation of ceylon*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Tisara Prakasakayo.
- Kuma-Kpobee, M., Power, J., & Otieno, R. (2007). *Utilisation of traditional dress: The case of the slit and kaba in Ghana*. Leeds, UK: University of Leeds Press.
- Nowotny, M. (2008). *Putting culture first: Commonwealth perspectives on culture and development*. London, UK: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Quinn, B. (2003). *The fashion of architecture*. New York, NY: Sage.
- Rabine, L. W. (2002). *The global circulation of African fashion*. New Delhi, India: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ranathunga, G. M. (2015). *Subject of cloth: Its manipulations and ramifications*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Ranathunga, G. M. (2018). *Cultural amalgamation: Headgears of the kings and elite of the kingdom of Kandy of Sri Lanka* (Unpublished master thesis). Faculty of Arts and Culture, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Oluvil, Sri Lanka.
- Roper, J. M., & Shapira, J. (2000). *Ethnography in nursing research*. New York, NY: Sage.
- Seneviratna, A. (1983). *An illustrated survey of ancient monuments with historical, archaeological and literary descriptions including maps of the city and its suburbs*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Central Cultural Fund, Ministry of Cultural Affairs.
- Seneviratne, H. L. (1978). *Religion and legitimacy of power in the Kandyan kingdom Sri Lanka*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Subiyantoro, S., Sulistyono, E. T., Yulianto, N., & Prameswari, N. G. (2017). A study of the level of management knowledge of woodcraft artisans in Indonesia. *Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(5),

- 238-246. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20474/jahss-3.5.1>
- Suharti, L., & Pramono, A. (2016). Cultural intelligence among Indonesian students: Role of international experiences and their impact on the development of social network and adaptive performance. *Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 182-194. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20474/jahss-2.3.6>
- Verhelst, T. G. (1990). *No life without roots: Culture and development*. London, UK: Zed Books.
- World Cultural Report. (2001). *World heritage*. Retrieved from <https://urlzs.com/wKzm> (accessed on 13 July, 2007)
- Yazici, H. (2016). The art of opera in turkey within the scope of culture-art policies. *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 2(5), 159-164. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20469/ijhss.2.20001-5>
- Yildiz, F. U. (2016). A study into the clothing features of folkloric trinket dolls characterizing Turkish culture. *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 2(6), 221-227. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20469/ijhss.2.20005-6>