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Culture brings colours to the world

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE
RAJARATA UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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Hidden sentiments of the Students and Staff



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Culture develops through socially created knowledge, meanings, and patterns that are transmitted between people .



NOT A WALL BUT A WINDOW

S.M. Dilki Shehara Senanayake *dilkisenanayake24@gmail.com*

CULTURE



Do we actually know what culture is all about?

.What comes to our minds first when we hear the word “culture”? It is often the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the festivals we celebrate, the rituals we practise, or even the beliefs we hold. We often narrate the whole concept to these familiar expressions, giving the word a meaning that is visible and easy to recognize. But is culture really limited to these things? Jawaharlal Nehru once defined culture as “The widening of the mind and of the spirit.” I believe it is a statement that lets us look at culture from a different perspective. His words invite us to look beyond the visible and familiar aspects of culture and ask a deeper question: perhaps culture is not merely about what we practise, preserve, or inherit, but about how it shapes the way we see the world.

Why is culture a "window" and not a "wall"?

A wall sets boundaries, while a window allows us to see beyond them. Culture is not meant to be an "us vs. them" concept that sets boundaries where we are never supposed to experience or acknowledge what lies on the other side. It is meant to be something that allows us to look beyond our own practices and discover that there are many different ways of understanding and experiencing life. While it is perfectly okay to follow our unique practices, it is also natural to look at the broader picture and see how others practise their cultures.

What we practise as 'our culture' begins in childhood and is shaped by the environment we grow up in and the family that raises us. We start learning how to greet, what we eat, what we celebrate, how we show respect, and what we believe in from a very young age. We start to see what happens around us and follow the same practices. These practices don't become everyday classroom conversations at school or even family discussions. So, we never stop to question why we follow them or understand the purpose behind these practices. Over time, they simply become a part of life, and in the end, we come to a place where we start to believe that this is how everyone else lives and should live, when it's not. This is where we sometimes tend to be too obsessed with our own practices and find ourselves judging other people for doing something different or even doing the same thing in a different way. It is true that the differences that exist among these practices might seem unusual or uncomfortable at first, but I believe that this is a point where we should also question ourselves: "Which one of these is 'officially' approved?"

For example, in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese people greet someone by keeping their hands together and saying "*Ayubowan*." In Sinhala, which is the language spoken by the majority in Sri Lanka, "*Ayubowan*" is a blessing for a long life. But in many Western countries, such as Mexico and Canada, people hug each other because they believe it gives a more personal welcome and feels emotionally warm. So, which of these greetings is "right"? The answer is neither. These two ways of greeting have their own meanings. One is more like a blessing that comes with the welcome, while the other gives a warmer and more personal feeling with the welcome.

This is what I believe culture is about. Culture is not about saying, "This is the right way of doing this." It is about teaching us that, "Well, there are many ways to do the same thing, and they all have their own meanings, so let's learn them all."

This is how culture becomes a window rather than a wall. This doesn't mean that our practices are nothing or less valued. Our own culture is our first window through which we see the world. It gives us roots, a sense of belonging, and an understanding of where we come from. But when we look through other cultural windows, we discover perspectives that our own experience may never have shown us. In this way, we embrace all the positive values that every culture has given to the world, while acknowledging our own practices and continuing to follow them.

But there is another side to culture that is easy to overlook: culture is not static.

It is important to learn from the past, but should we carry all the baggage to the future also?

This is a concept that we have sometimes misunderstood. We sometimes tend to define culture as something that we inherited from past generations. In that way, some of us misunderstand culture as something that should be protected exactly as it was and passed on in exactly the same way to the next generations. But what we should realize is that culture is not a repetition of history. Even though customs and traditions connect us to those who came before us and lived before us, culture has never been frozen in time. It has always been shaped by human interaction.

For something to become a practice followed by a community, most of the time there is a reason behind it. It could be influenced by social, environmental, or even human behavioural factors. These factors change over time. What we have today is completely different from what we had 500 years ago. Therefore, these practices also need to adapt. That does not in any way mean that the rituals we have been practising for years should be replaced. Culture should be something that can adapt to the needs and circumstances of the time while preserving the values that give those practices meaning. In this sense, allowing culture to change does not mean losing our identity. Sometimes, it is simply the way culture continues to live.

This does not make a culture less authentic. Perhaps it makes it more human.
Culture grows because people grow. Each generation inherits something from the past, but it also adds something of its own. Young people reinterpret traditions. New technologies change how traditions are shared. Different communities influence one another. Some practices disappear, while others are adapted to fit a changing world.

At this point, preserving culture should not always mean keeping it untouched. Sometimes, preserving its spirit may mean allowing it to evolve.
This raises an interesting question: if culture has always changed, who gets to decide what is “pure” culture?

There is no single answer.
A culture is not a museum exhibit that can be placed behind glass and protected from change. It is something living. It exists through the people who practise it, question it, adapt it, and pass it on. Its identity may remain recognisable even as its expressions change.

And this brings us back to the idea of culture as a window. A window does not remain useful because it never changes; it remains useful because it allows us to see. Culture, too, can preserve where we come from while allowing us to see where we are going
.
Today, cultures meet more often and more closely than ever before. A person can listen to music from another country before breakfast, watch a film in a language they do not speak, learn a recipe from a different part of the world, study alongside people from different backgrounds, or form friendships with people they may never have met without the internet. The world may still be divided by borders, but culture has become increasingly difficult to contain within them.

This constant exchange can be enriching. We discover new forms of art, new ways of thinking, unfamiliar traditions, different cuisines, and perspectives that challenge what we have always assumed. Sometimes, something that once seemed strange becomes familiar. Food becomes part of our everyday meals. A word from another language enters our vocabulary. A song from another country becomes part of our memories. A tradition that was once unfamiliar becomes something we appreciate and understa before we judge.

There is a difference between encountering another culture and truly understanding it. We can admire a tradition without understanding the history behind it. We can adopt something from another culture without knowing what it means to the people from whom it comes. In a world where cultures are increasingly shared, borrowed, and blended, curiosity needs to be accompanied by respect.

The goal is not to collect pieces of other cultures as though they were souvenirs. It is to understand the people, histories, and experiences behind them.

This is especially important because cultural differences can easily become sources of division when they are viewed without context. A practice that seems unusual from the outside may have deep meaning to the people who practise it. A belief that we do not share may still deserve to be understood. Understanding does not require agreement with everything we encounter. It simply requires us to recognize that there may be a story behind what we do not immediately understand. This is one of the greatest opportunities culture gives us. It teaches us to pause before judging, to become curious before dismissing, and to ask questions before making assumptions.
The more windows we look through, the more we begin to understand that no single window shows us the whole world.





The Hidden Martial Art of Angampora Within Kandyan Dance

Chathuprabha G.J.K.N | 24/25 Batch | Faculty of Agriculture

The Hidden Martial Art of Angampora Within Kandyan Dance

The Kandyan dance, also known as *Ves* dance, is a truly powerful form of dance. It is a unique cultural treasure of Sri Lanka. Its fast footwork, strong body postures, and rhythm that flows with the music catch the eye of anyone who watches. But behind the beauty we see on the surface, there hides a martial art called *Angampora* that is more than 2000 years old. This report aims to explore the historical and technical connection between Kandyan dance and *Angampora.*

There is evidence that soldiers in the armies of ancient Sri Lankan kings practiced dance to make their bodies flexible and to prepare for war. When foreign invaders banned *Angampora*, this martial art was secretly kept alive by presenting it to society as a "*haraba*". It is a cultural version of an unarmed battle that we see today in the Kandyan dance.



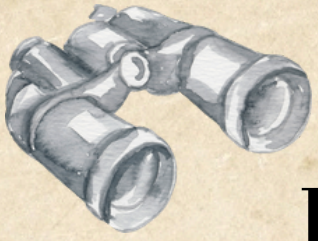
We can see features of *Angampora* in the main elements of Kandyan dance. The basic stance of Kandyan dance called "*Mandiya*" is similar to the basic fighting stance of an *Angampora* warrior. This posture helps maintain balance in the dance. At the same time, it allows the body to stay ready to strike or dodge a blow at any moment. So this is a hidden fighting posture. The foot exercises in Kandyan dance show a connection to moving around an opponent, switching feet, launching a sudden attack, and escaping from one *Angampora* fighting. The way hands are used in *Angampora* fighting has shaped the "*Godasarba*" of Kandyan dance in a very close manner. In this way, various techniques are hidden within the *Ves* dance.

The hiding of *Angampora* within Kandyan dance shows the wisdom and creativity of our ancestors. They did not let the martial art be destroyed but turned it into an art and a culture and kept it alive to this day. This is a powerful symbol of Sri Lankan identity.

The Kandyan dance is not just a dance for entertainment. It is a living heritage that binds together the courage, strength, and skill of our nation. Because the *Angampora* martial art lies hidden within this dance, a new door opens for us to understand our history and culture. So it is the duty of all of us to protect this heritage for future generations.



CULTURE IS A COMPLEX WHOLE THAT INCLUDES KNOWLEDGE, BELIEFS, ART, MORALS, LAW, CUSTOMS, AND OTHER ABILITIES AND HABITS ACQUIRED BY PEOPLE AS MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.







- E.B. TYLOR (1871) -

Dark Culture

What is heard here is the clamour of a dark culture
It shatters the sweetness of the sound
It stills the mind
When the body becomes weak
The meaning of life disappears
It shortens the range of thoughts
It makes thoughts blurry
A life that ought to be clear becomes clouded
The heart succumbs to pain
Like a virus spreading through the body
The darkness takes over everything And rules mind

Beautiful hearts
Beautiful thoughts
Are crushed and destroyed
Dark hearts dark thoughts
Take their place
The pain of others cannot be seen
Snatch away the happiness of others
It instantly makes the smile vanish
This dark culture kills thoughts
Burns pure hearts
Destroys the unconscious mind
And makes humanity silent
Ultimately, it creates a non-human entity

A man with a wounded heart
Is born
That man lives his life
With a wounded heart
Human qualities are not
Evident in him
He forgets how to smile
He has no regard for his life
Loneliness is felt

Amidst a dark culture
Feels a sense of being alone
It feels like
Life has reached its end
In the end
Life can eventually be lost
It is the dark conclusion of dark Culture



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Fresh From The Vault

"..the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."
– Antonio Gramsci

A medieval vault
Antique collection
I sensed the pride, the prestige fused with History.
A scintillating display of thousands of
Offsprings of a proud nation.



Beneath the floor I heard the voices
Of whom not I know.
Beneath the floor, a sepulcher lies
In the shadows of the red robes.

I see shrouded corpses, countlessly resting
Their mouths have been scraped off
Some were sawn, severed and crushed.
Black roses offered, each petal wilted
By the haze of religion that suffocates us all.

I ventured in, stepping into the unknown
Lord knows how much fear I own.
Saw I a dozen of tombstones
Where the pioneers of losing the game
Lie, unattended.



Oh the funeral of a nation, guarded by the pendulum of robes
Unattended by the ones who breathe.

Every death is the birth of something,
They say.
The death of a nation is the birth of a nation
Cursed by the necromency of bald men.

The birth of an avalanche!
Fresh from the vault. The monsters are born, slowly moving from Buddagaya.

Fresh from the Vault.
Lord please ravish me into your sightings.



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The concept of a culture refers to a system of shared meanings and symbols through which people understand and interpret their world.



Before Our Roots Begin to Fade…

One beautiful evening, long ago

It spoke to my heart, soft and low

Years of memories, turned into words,

From the sound of Grandmother's voice.

We sat and listened to those words,

But not because we understood

The Culture woven into them….



There were times mom's cooking,

Could pull the whole family back together.

Every recipe carried its own story.

In every familiar smell, a memory quietly lived on….

In hands of our ancestors,

Wondrous things came to life.

From stones, they curved living forms.

From clay, they shaped the things of beauty.

Skilled fingers found the power,

to turn mere thread,

Into a Culture of its own….





But somewhere between yesterday and tomorrow,

The world began to change and fast.

Conversations gave way to screens,

And the hands that once created

Grew quiet, buried under all that technology.

Even now, our ancestors

Rest beneath the earth,

Still holding onto hope,

For the days yet to come

And quietly, they try to remind us

Where our story truly began.

Culture is not something

We can lock away in a museum. It's

Like a book, waiting for the next chapter to be written.

Like a song, waiting for another voice to sing it again.

We cannot go back to the past,

But we can protect what it left

behind. We can carry its wisdom

forward.

Come together to keep our culture alive.

So let us listen to the voices of the past.

Let us hold on to the heritage they gave us.

Before the voices become whispers.

Before the whispers turn to silence.

Before our roots began to fade.

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The Osariya

Sinhalese Girl Wearing
Traditional Kandyan Saree





At the edge of dawn,
An old, wrinkled hand opens a wooden chest.
The fragrance of jasmine rises from the darkness.
A white cloth that bordered in golden threads
Unfold like a forgotten river.

Sounds of the geta bera awaken the sleeping hill.
The temple bells answer through the morning mist.
Somewhere a mother arranged a kiribath
beside the oil lamp.

An old woman counts her blessings,
With white flowers between her fingers.

Mother wraps the first folds around the girl.
Unaware of what the gold thread remembers,
She only watches the mirror
Her mother's eyes, her grandmother's smile.

A stranger slowly becoming familiar.
The girl step outside with a smile,
She does not turn around.
She carries old folds forward.

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WANDER

Global exploration encourages curiosity about humanity's rich diversity.



Prayers Written in Scars

Before I learned A,B,C
My body had already learned
The grammar of Obedience
Upon everyone's wish.

I knew the structure of Silence That of being passed to us
Like growing pestilence.
The skin of my teeth
Knew every chant
Of a still statue of The Greatest.

How to fold my tongue
To touch the roof of my mouth
As if I'm trying witchcraft
Of an unknown man
Known to the man.

I'm a crumpled paper on the floor
Holding every word of the prayer
Once passed down by the Dead.
If tradition were a river tomorrow
Every poet will be drowned
In the name of the Dead
That my tongue would mourn.

The archaeology of silence
The syntax of consent
Every linguistic turn
Is deeply sunk
Into the skin of my teeth,
Into the bone of my brain.

They drew scars of loud prayers
I bleed with pain.
But they say regardless
"It's a flood of rubies"
Blessed by the rapacious God.

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Babaru Avith

Released in 1978, Bambaru Avith is one of the most outstanding films in the history of Sri Lankan cinema. The film was directed by Dharmasena Pathiraja, who also wrote the screenplay with Malini Pathiraja. The performances of Malini Fonseka, Vijaya Kumaratunga, Joe Abeywickrema, Cyril Wickramage, Daya Thennakoon, Wimal Kumara de Costa and Amarasiri Kalansuriya give life to the central ideas of the story.

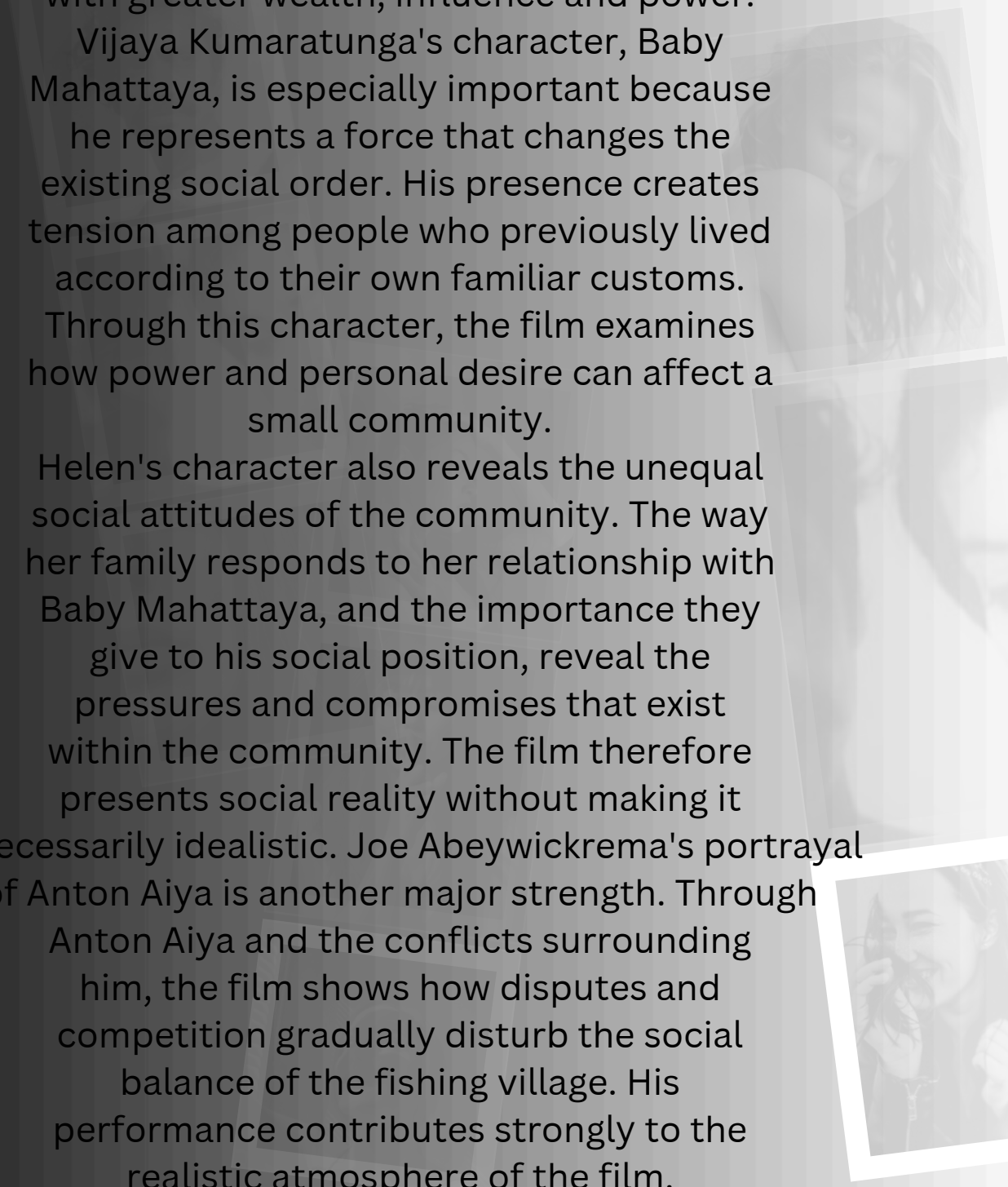
The story is set mainly in a coastal fishing community. Rather than simply using the seaside as a background, the film creates a convincing social environment and presents the culture, habits, relationships and struggles of the people who live there. The natural setting and realistic performances make the fishing village feel like a living community.

The film revolves around several important characters, with Helen and Baby Mahattaya at the centre of the story. Baby Mahattaya comes to the fishing village because his father becomes ill, and he takes over his father's work. His arrival gradually changes the peaceful rhythm of the community. Helen, who is expected to marry Cyril, develops a relationship with Baby Mahattaya. The resulting conflict spreads through the community and eventually leads to tragedy.



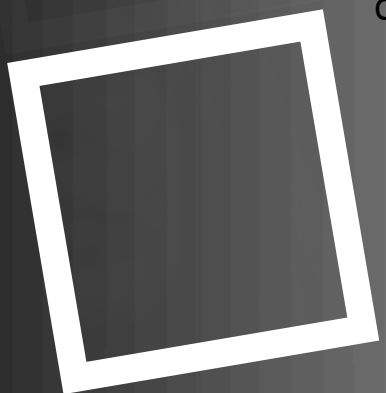
Although this may sound like a simple story of love and conflict, Bambaru Avith cannot be reduced to a simple plot summary. It explores many wider issues through its characters and social environment. The film shows how a peaceful community can be disturbed by the arrival of an outsider with greater wealth, influence and power. Vijaya Kumaratunga's character, Baby Mahattaya, is especially important because he represents a force that changes the existing social order. His presence creates tension among people who previously lived according to their own familiar customs. Through this character, the film examines how power and personal desire can affect a small community.

Helen's character also reveals the unequal social attitudes of the community. The way her family responds to her relationship with Baby Mahattaya, and the importance they give to his social position, reveal the pressures and compromises that exist within the community. The film therefore presents social reality without making it unnecessarily idealistic. Joe Abeywickrema's portrayal of Anton Aiya is another major strength. Through Anton Aiya and the conflicts surrounding him, the film shows how disputes and competition gradually disturb the social balance of the fishing village. His performance contributes strongly to the realistic atmosphere of the film.



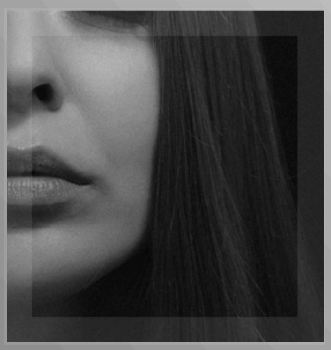
The film's visual language is particularly impressive. Dharmasena Pathiraja uses realistic locations, carefully selected shots, symbols and camera angles to communicate ideas instead of always explaining them through dialogue. The coastal environment, the fishing activities and the sea become important parts of the storytelling. The music by Premasiri Khemadasa is another remarkable feature. Instead of filling every scene with background music, the film uses music selectively. This restraint helps the audience experience the events more naturally and strengthens the realism of the film. The sound and music therefore support the atmosphere without taking attention away from the characters and their lives.

The dialogue is also powerful. The conversations reflect the language, attitudes and social relationships of the fishing community. Through ordinary speech and everyday interactions, the film reveals differences in social position, money, power and personal ambition. Symbolism is used effectively in several parts of the film. The image of a bull pulling a cart can be understood as a symbol of people being trapped within the difficult social conditions around them. It suggests the difficulty of leaving behind an established way of life and moving towards a different path.



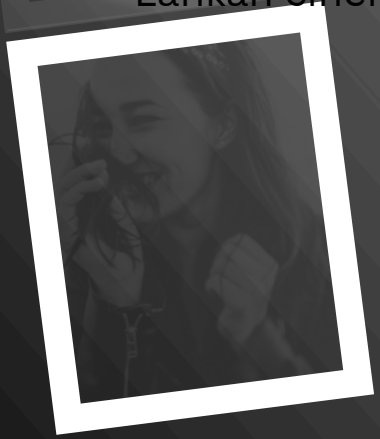
The ending is particularly meaningful. Baby Mahattaya's final interaction with Helen and his decision to leave without offering her a clear emotional answer underline the loneliness and uncertainty present in the lives of the characters. The sea and the beach also become powerful symbols of struggle. The people living beside the sea have to fight continuously to maintain their lives, and this struggle is presented with great realism.





The acting throughout the film is exceptionally natural. Joe Abeywickrema's performance is especially memorable because of the believable way he presents the emotions and behaviour of his character. The performances do not feel artificial; instead, they make the audience feel that they are watching people living within a real community.

In my opinion, Bambaru Avith is an outstanding film that can be discussed from many different perspectives. It is not only a story about relationships and conflict, but also a study of society, power, human desire, class, culture and the struggle for survival. Its realistic setting, strong performances, meaningful symbols, effective cinematography and carefully used music make it a landmark in Sri Lankan cinema.











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Art

Music

Culture

&

Culture includes the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and features of a society or social group.

THE FUTURE OF ART AND SOUND IN A DIGITAL WORLD

WHERE MUSIC BECOMES ART AND IDEAS TAKE SHAPE

-UNESCO-

Masks of the Soul
A Journey Through Sri Lankan Mask Culture.

Sri Lankan mask culture is one of the richest and most layered mask traditions in the world. While many cultures carve masks for a single purpose, Sri Lanka has shaped its masks into three distinct yet connected families — Raksha, Sanni, and Kolam — each speaking to a different truth of human life. The Raksha masks answer our need for protection against unseen forces. The Sanni masks look illness and suffering in the eye. The Kolam masks hold up a mirror to society, showing us our follies, our hierarchies, and our shared humanity. This article walks through each of these three worlds, and asks what these carved wooden faces still have to teach us about being human.

Raksha Masks — Guardians of the Threshold

The Raksha mask is one of the most striking and colourful art forms in Sri Lanka, created to shield villagers from threats they cannot see. It stands like a doorway between the human world and the world of spirits. There are traditionally around twenty-four or twenty-five kinds of Raksha masks, each with its own face and its own purpose.

The Naga Raksha, or Cobra Demon, is the most famous of them all, its face crowned with writhing cobras meant to frighten away evil spirits, while the cobra itself stands for divine knowledge and protection. The Gurulu Raksha, or Bird Demon, shows a mythical sun-bird swallowing a snake, a vivid picture of good winning over evil. The Maru Raksha, the Demon of Death, is feared and respected, tied to the demon believed to decide who lives and who dies; dancing in its honour was thought to delay death itself. The Ginidal Raksha, or Fire Demon, embodies anger through blazing colour, yet even this fiery demon serves a protective purpose. The gentler Mayura Raksha, or Peacock Demon, is believed to bring peace, wealth, and harmony, while the Gara Raksha, King of Demons, stands guard at the doorway of a new home. Raksha masks come alive in the Raksha Natuma, the Dance of the Demons, performed at festivals and processions with bold, sweeping gestures.

In the older Yakun Natima, or Devil Dance, masked performers dance beside a sick patient to trance-like rhythms, blending psychology with Ayurvedic tradition to drive illness away. Beyond performance, Raksha masks are hung in homes and shops as talismans of luck and safety, giving our very human need for security a face of its own.

Sanni Masks — The Face of Healing

Where the Raksha masks speak of protection, the Sanni masks confront something closer and harder to face: the reality of sickness and suffering. These masks lie at the heart of the Sanni Yakuma, also called Daha Ata Sanniya, a ceremony performed to cure illnesses believed to be caused by eighteen demons known as the sanni yakku. Legend traces their origin to the time of the Buddha, who eventually tamed the demons in exchange for offerings. The ritual re-enacts this story, calling the demons forward, confronting them, and sending them back to their world.

Running from dusk to dawn, the ceremony is a carefully built psychodrama tending to a patient's body, mind, and place within the community. The Yakadura, or exorcist, summons the demons while masked dancers become the illness itself, holding up an unsettling reflection of human suffering through drumming, chanting, and movement. Wild humour mixes with real fear, and through jokes and satire the demons are made to look foolish, their power draining away as the whole village gathers around the patient in support. The ceremony closes with the defeat of Maha Kola Sanniya, king of the disease demons, marking the return of balance.

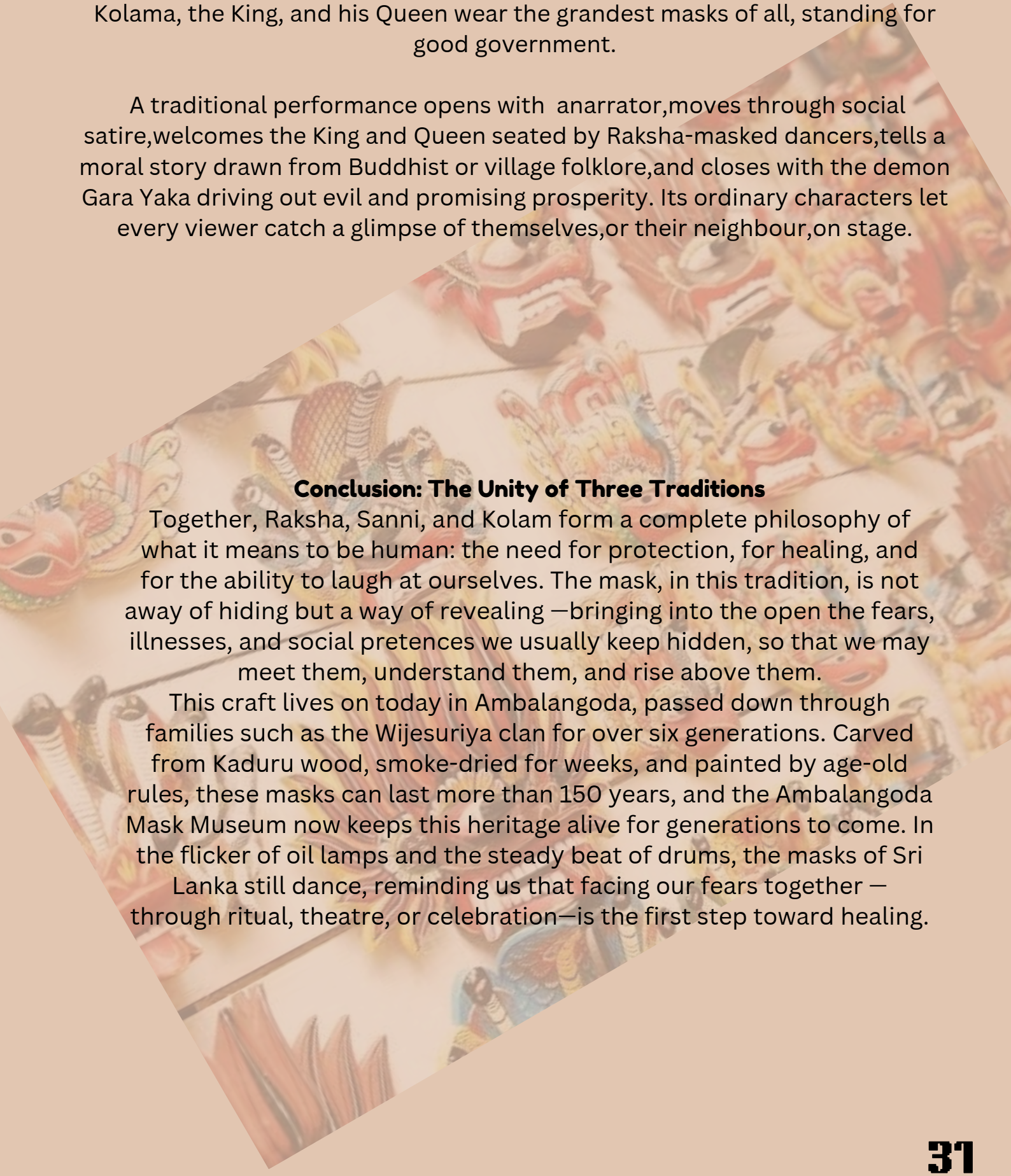
The Sanni masks carry a simple truth: illness has a language, fear has a face, and healing begins the moment we dare to look at both. Long before modern medicine, giving sickness a name and a face stripped away its mystery and made it something a person could face and overcome — psychology before textbooks, medicine before hospitals.

Kolam Masks — The Mirror of Society

Kolam offers a lighter counterpart to the solemn power of Raksha and Sanni. Here, the mask becomes a tool for laughter and gentle mockery, a way for a community to see itself — and its neighbours — clearly, and laugh at what it finds. The tradition begins with a legend of Queen Maha Sammata, whose overwhelming pregnancy craving to watch a masked dance led the god Sakra to drop a set of masks and a sacred text into the royal garden, curing the queen and giving birth to the art form.

The soul of Kolam lies in its masks, carved for caricature rather than awe. Nonchi Akka, an old village wife, harbours unladylike desires beneath her wrinkled mask. Hewa Kolama, the wounded Soldier,offers a sorrowful joke about the cost of war. Mudali Kolama satirises the vanity of local officials, while Marakkala Kolama and Kapiri Kolama reflect Sri Lanka's mixed communities and its colonial history. Raja Kolama, the King, and his Queen wear the grandest masks of all, standing for good government.

A traditional performance opens with anarrator,moves through social satire,welcomes the King and Queen seated by Raksha-masked dancers,tells a moral story drawn from Buddhist or village folklore,and closes with the demon Gara Yaka driving out evil and promising prosperity. Its ordinary characters let every viewer catch a glimpse of themselves,or their neighbour,on stage.



Conclusion: The Unity of Three Traditions

Together, Raksha, Sanni, and Kolam form a complete philosophy of what it means to be human: the need for protection, for healing, and for the ability to laugh at ourselves. The mask, in this tradition, is not away of hiding but a way of revealing —bringing into the open the fears, illnesses, and social pretences we usually keep hidden, so that we may meet them, understand them, and rise above them.

This craft lives on today in Ambalangoda, passed down through families such as the Wijesuriya clan for over six generations. Carved from Kaduru wood, smoke-dried for weeks, and painted by age-old rules, these masks can last more than 150 years, and the Ambalangoda Mask Museum now keeps this heritage alive for generations to come. In the flicker of oil lamps and the steady beat of drums, the masks of Sri Lanka still dance, reminding us that facing our fears together — through ritual, theatre, or celebration—is the first step toward healing.

Conclusion:

The Unity of Three Traditions



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Dear Forefathers of the Island

Dear forefathers,
My fingers are scarred
My lips are chapped
My eyes are swollen
Yet the birds chirping
Of your incomparable pride.

Dear forefathers,
Please forgive me,
For this letter to you
Hath zero pride in your matters.

Your scriptures
Are scintillating
But just words of control
Masked by your pestilence

Dear forefathers,
Please forgive me,
For I am ravished by my
Own knowledge
That contradicts your
Baseless voyage:
Pilgrims to the Hallow land
Whose brains are fogged?
And shortsighted eyes.

I wonder, I wonder
IfIamwriting letters Addressed
to fire,
For all I see is
The dust of a crumpled paper.
Crumpled in agony,
Signs of misery.

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Culture includes the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of a society or social group.

- UNESCO -





The Beat of Belonging: Music and Dance as Cultural Identity

Culture is the collective way of life of a community, shaped by beliefs, values, customs, and arts. Music and dance stand out as some of the strongest expressions of culture. They serve a purpose beyond entertainment. They are living libraries of history, emotion, and identity. At present, modern entertainment is rapidly replacing traditional art forms. This essay argues that preserving music and dance heritage is essential for building community bonds and keeping cultural identity alive.

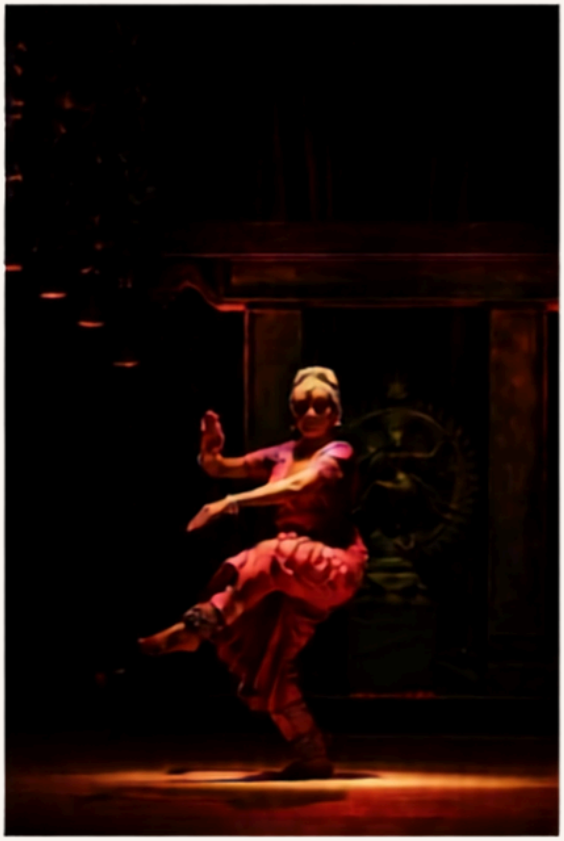
To begin with, traditional music and dance are the vessels of cultural history. In the earliest days of human society, communities used songs and movements to tell their stories. These art forms passed down the stories of heroes, celebrated victories, mourned losses, and taught moral lessons. Many indigenous cultures use specific dances to tell the story of their ancestors or to honor the spirits of nature. Folk songs often share tales of love, war, and daily life that have been passed down for centuries. For example, in Sri Lanka the Kandyan Dance began as an ancient healing ritual, while the Kummi dance of Sri Lankan Tamils tells the stories of daily life by performing in a circle with rhythmic clapping and singing.

When these songs are sung and these dances are performed, history comes alive. This history lives through movements and songs. Therefore, it is important to preserve traditional music and dance in order to preserve the living history of culture.

Moreover, music and dance bring people together in a powerful way. They create shared experiences that strengthen community bonds. In Sri Lanka, the annual Kandy Esala Perahera is a wonderful example.

This grand procession features hundreds of dancers, drummers, and decorated elephants moving through the streets of Kandy. It unites people from different communities and places. When people gather to hear these rhythms and watch these dances, they feel a sense of belonging.





This shared experience creates a deep connection. In this way, music and dance are not just artistic expressions. They act as social glue that creates bonds that reach beyond a single community.

In addition, music and dance carry a unique cultural identity that cannot be found anywhere else. Every culture has its own distinct rhythms, instruments, and movements. These reflect the values and spirit of a people. To illustrate this, Sri Lankan classical dance styles
and each represent a different cultural identity. The Kandyan Dance, oftenly performed by professional dancers, is of acrobatics. The low-copyright dances of the southern plains are ritualistic mask dances. Sabaragamuwa Dance of the mid. wances, country region has its own disciplined technique and spiritual focus. Among Sri Lankan Tamils, Bharatanatyam is a deeply spiritual art form that combines devotion, storytelling, and technical precision. These art forms are like fingerprints. They are unique to their culture. When a tradition is dance form disappears, a unique cultural identity disappears with it. Consequently, protecting these art forms means protecting cultural diversity itself.

However, some may argue that traditional music and dance are outdated and no longer relevant in the modern world. They believe that young people are more interested in global pop music and contemporary dance styles. While it is true that the world is changing and people's tastes are evolving, we do not have to choose between tradition and modernity. We can appreciate both. We can listen to pop music while also learning folk songs of our ancestors, and we

can enjoy modern dance and also participate in traditional ceremonies. In fact, many contemporary artists blend traditional and modern styles to create something new and exciting. In this way,



the problem is not embracing new forms of art. It is forgetting the old ones. As we move forward, we must ensure that our cultural heritage does not fade away in the name of progress.



In conclusion, music and dance are more than entertainment. They are the heartbeat of culture. They preserve our history, unite our communities, and express our identity. Without them, culture becomes silent and still. As a result, we all have the responsibility to protect and celebrate our traditional music and dance by teaching them to future generations, and sharing them with pride. Our culture is our identity, and by protecting its performing arts, we keep its rhythm and soul alive.

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A Face of Tradition: The Living Art of Sri Lankan Tradition

The Journey into the Heart of a Living Tradition.

For centuries, the wind along Sri Lanka's southwest coast has carried the delicate scent of seasoned wood and natural pigments. Behind the brightly painted, bulging eyes and fierce teeth of Sri Lankan masks lies an ancient art form that combines folk healing, dramatic satire, and spiritual protection.

Sri Lankan mask carving is much more than a decorative craft. It is a visual language that has developed over generations to connect the human world with the supernatural. The art also provides both community healing and entertainment.

The traditional mask-making industry in Sri Lanka is best known in Ambalangoda. In addition, the craft has been present in areas such as Bentara, Mirissa, and Raigam Korale.



The delicate process of painting a traditional Sri Lankan mask.

Vel-Kaduru & The Artisan's Craft.

The foundation of every authentic Sri Lankan mask is the light, durable wood of the Vel-Kaduru tree. Its lightness, soft fibres, and natural ability to withstand moisture and insect damage make it ideal for carving. Kaduru wood undergoes a careful preparation process before carving can begin.

1) Harvesting and Seasoning: The wood is harvested and smoked over a hearth for days or weeks to dry out moisture and prevent insect infestations.

2) Carving: Master artisans, known as gurunnansela, carve intricate facial features from individual blocks of wood using mallets and knives.

blocks of wood using chisels, mallets and knives.

3) Base Coat and Pigmentation

The carved face is coated with a mixture of chalk dust, known as Makulu, and plant glue before painting.

In ancient times, yellow came from yellow clay, red from satingam and red clay, green from leaf juice, black from lampblack, and white from kolan clay.

The Three Main Pillars of the Mask Tradition.

Sri Lankanmask culture can be divided into three mainritual and theatrical traditions: *Sanni, Kolam and Raksha.* Each has its own characters, meanings and role in traditional community life.

1) Sanni Masks: Exorcism & Ritual Healing

Sanni masks are associated with the ritualistic pacificationceremony known as *Sanni Yakuma*. Thesemasks depict 18 physical and mentalailments traditionally believed to be causedbythe *Sanni Yakshas*.

- **Kora Sanniya -** paralysis and joint disorders
- **Kana Sanniya -** blindness
- **Amukku Sanniya -** stomach
- **Bihiri Sanniya -** deafness disorders and vomiting

The main creation of this tradition is the *Maha Kola Sanniya* mask. It depicts the faces of all 18 *Sanni Yakshas* around the *Yaksha Raja* at the centre.



(A collection of colourful Sanni masks.)

2) Kolam Masks: Folk Drama & Social Satire

Originating in the southern coastal villages, Kolam is a traditional form of comic dance-drama that blends folklore, royal hierarchy and lighthearted satire. The king, queen, ministers, soldiers, villagers and mythical animal characters wear large, high-crowned and bizarre masks. Through humour and performance, Kolam reflects social life while entertaining the community.



3) Raksha Masks: Protection & Festival Pageantry

Raksha masks are among the most universally recognized masks in Sri Lanka. They were historically used in seasonal festivals, processions and rituals to ward off evil and bring good fortune.

- **Naga Raksha** (The Cobra Demon) - protects against poison and evil intent.
- **Gurulu Raksha** (The Bird Demon) - associated with Garuda, brings luck and prosperity.
- **Maru Raksha** (The Demon of Death) - believed to repel malevolent spiritual energies.



(A collection of traditional Raksha masks.)

A Tradition at Risk.

Despite its rich history, the art of mask-making in Sri Lanka faces an uncertain future. There are three main risks.

1) Health and safety hazards -:

Craftsmen face long-term respiratory damage from toxic sap and dust from raw Vel-Kaduru wood, chemical fumes from modern enamel paints, and injuries or physical stress from prolonged manual cutting.

2) Environmental and logistical risks -:

Deforestation and coastal development are depleting mature Improperly Vel-Kaduru trees. prepared softwood can also crack or decay because of wood-boring insects.

3) Cultural and economic pressures -:

Economic shifts are causing younger generations to abandon the craft, leading to the loss of ancestral knowledge. Mass-tourism commercialization can also dilute of the authentic representation traditional masks.

Keeping Masks Alive.

To keep traditional SriLankan mask art alive, several key conservation efforts are underway. Heritage museums and documentation projects preserve rare palm-leaf manuscripts, historical patterns and traditional tools. Institutions such as the Ariyapala Mask Museum in Ambalangoda

play an important role in keeping this knowledge accessible.

Apprenticeship and youth training are equally important. Local guilds and master carvers, known as *gurunnansela*, train young artisans in traditional mask-making techniques and iconography. By passing practical skills from one generation to the next, the craft can remain a living tradition rather than becoming only a museum display.

Preserving mask art is therefore not simply about saving old wooden objects. It means protecting the stories, rituals, skills and community identity carried by every carved face. Each mask is a reminder that culture survives when people continue to practise, teach and value it.



(A masked performer brings Sri Lankan ritual tradition to life.)

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Chastity as Cultural Currency

Why does female sexuality still carry social value in Sri Lanka?

I

The Economy of the Body

VIRGINITY, AS A SOCIAL CURRENCY, CAN BE

possessed | *spent* | *earned* | *lost*

In Sri Lanka, as in much of South Asia, the conceptualisation of virginity functions less as a biological factor than as a lost. It is significantly traded in the marriage market, which adds more value to the woman and her family, inspected by the family of the spouse before the nuptial planning, sometimes verified through a ritual display of a blood-stained cloth on the wedding night.

> *An important question should be addressed while delving into this issue: what role does it play in the Sri Lankan culture, especially targeting the body of women?*

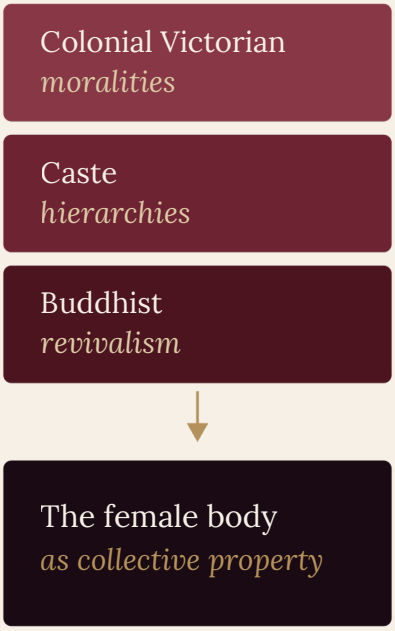
II

Purity as a Proxy of Ownership

In many patriarchal societies, including Sri Lanka, female sexuality served as proof of paternity certainty before genetic testing, historically to ensure that family properties and values stay within the family. Sri Lanka's multi-layered history that consists of colonial Victorian moralities, caste hierarchies, and Buddhist revivalism added tremendous bricks to this wall throughout the history.

All of this resulted in a rigid system where the female body is treated as a collective property rather than individual autonomy. Her 'purity' is in control of the father before the marriage and the husband after the marriage. This notion is embedded in the concept of 'purity' which cripples women in the Sri Lankan culture(s).

LAYERS OF HISTORY



WHO HOLDS HER 'PURITY'?



The father
before marriage

marriage

The husband
after marriage

III

Asymmetry in Sri Lanka

What our culture does is not valuing chastity but valuing it unequally. Gender politics decide which gender is oppressed in terms of morals in Sri Lanka. For instance, our culture tends to treat male premarital experience with a shrug, that of sometimes treated as a sign of pervading masculinity, yet female experience is viewed in the lens of moral catastrophe. It has been concurred that this asymmetry of the taboo is never about the ethics but controlling female reproductive choices and by extension, family lineage and pedigree.

> *This asymmetry of the taboo is never about the ethics but controlling female reproductive choices.*

THE SAME EXPERIENCE, TWO VERDICTS

MALE PREMARITAL EXPERIENCE

A shrug.

Sometimes treated as a sign of pervading masculinity.

FEMALE PREMARITAL EXPERIENCE

Moral catastrophe.

The female body is asked to carry lineage, honour and respectability.

IV

Final Thoughts on the Economy of the Female Body and Culture

To say that the female body is culturally conditioned is to say that individual autonomy has vanished in the haze of culture. The cultural and social value the female body possesses insinuates the fact that some cultures including Sri Lanka need the female body to protect family lineage, honour and respectability while the male body is considered not prone to vulnerability. Culture pampers this asymmetry to ensure the solidification of patriarchy and male dominance.

In a world where many cases on equal treatment, feminism in local cultures have taken place, female agency is kept at bay through linguistic tricks. The very language we use, 'losing virginity, giving it away, losing innocence' further depletes the position of women in the culture. These are not neutral or accidental linguistic choices. It is more of a cynical patriarchal decision, insidiously seeping into day-to-day speech, which in so many ways, normalised, generalised and concurrently verified through speech.

THE VERY LANGUAGE WE USE

losing virginity
giving it away
losing innocence

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DESPITE CHANGING TRADITIONS, THE DESIRE FOR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION REMAINS UNIVERSAL.

