

## UNSTRUCTURED CLOTHES - NO CUT, NO SEW: SUSTAINABLE DRESS PRACTICES OF SRI LANKA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Unstructured draped clothes with their vast range of possibilities provide a considerable opportunity for societal sustainability for the waste oriented fashion industry. The intention of sustainable design is to eliminate negative environmental impact completely through skillful, sensitive design. The fashion designer is a responsible person to address some of the environmental and social issues that are associated with the fashion design and the design process in industry. This paper aims to explore the possibilities between innovation and sustainable fashion through an exploration of the selected dresses which were worn by the ancient Sri Lankans during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries by drawing on two main sustainable concepts viz., zero waste design and style consumption. Besides this paper posits the notion that the historical clothing wearing methodology offers a system from which a centrally located person can apply sustainable solutions conjointly with fashion innovation. Dresses of elite males like the thuppottiya, (an extravagant male lower body dress) the elite female dress ohoriya (a complete outfit made by draping similar to sari) demonstrate the sensitivity of manipulation of textiles around the human body.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Draping, Sustainable Consumption, Sustainable Fashion, Un-structured Clothes*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The objective of this study is to understand the practices and strategies of sustainable fashion concepts with regard to the historical context of Sri Lanka with a view to understanding design options which are able to execute sustainable fashion innovations.

Minimal research has been focused on historical behavior in sustainable consumption generally, inferring that more attention should be directed to sustainable consumption practices in Sri Lanka.

The study focuses on the different practices of sustainable fashion consumption that were adopted and engaged in by the elite male and females during the Kandyan period (1474-1815) (Silva, 1981), and what is involved in the practices of consuming sustainable fashion in terms of competence, materials, and meanings. The qualitative research method was adopted for the study and data were gathered from original literary texts, chronicles, travelers' records of evidences provided by eye witnesses during the Kandyan era. Furthermore, many empirical data were gathered by carrying out much

experimentation of draping exercises to create novel dress ideas which could be used in the field of fashion design. Validity of data was confirmed by cross checking literary data by comparing with gathered pictorial evidences.

The Kandyan elite female full dress the *ohoriya* and the elite male lower dress the *thuppottiya* with its 3D characteristics of dress as volume, knot, pleat, fold, and drape were observed and analyzed. The systematic pictorial analysis reveals different methods of draping and wrapping generating a scientific formation of the dress, which influenced transmission of their “context”. A sequence of in-depth observational studies was carried out with selected temple murals of the *Malagamna* temple in Kandy and *Degaldoruwa* temple in Kandy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The social theory of studying the micro practices involved in sustainable fashion consumption indicates that sustainable fashion consumption involves complex social processes that are both discursive and material. Besides, sustainable fashion consumption as is a set of doings that are routinely performed and shared among consumers in everyday life and connections with a network of social practices. Taking the perspective of day to day practice it means seeing the performance of sustainable fashion consumption as a practice that requires a series of activities, such trying on the apparel, washing, recycling of clothes and so on. Secondly, it means viewing sustainable fashion consumption as a set of meaningful practices to be executed in the fashion design field. The results of this study will provide implications for future studies on sustainable fashion consumption.

### Concepts of Endorsing Sustainable Clothing Consumption: Style Consumption

Style Consumption is a concept that promotes sustainable fashion and indicates a unique mode of tailoring of a given time, which evolves slowly, and therefore has the quality of timelessness. It is a classic design and focuses on an individual style that speaks about oneself. Through clothes individuals are expressing their identity, tastes, and individuality, thus clothing items significant in individuals’ lives (Schaefer and Crane, 2005; Marsh *et al.*, 2010, in Cho *et al.*, 2015).

King Rajasinha II (1635-87) of Kandy grew up in a Christian environment. As Marcelis Boschewer says King Rajasinha II could read, write and speak Portuguese, indeed at this time he was closely involved with foreigners (Hullugalle, 1999) He was a man of caprice and exotic taste. The King had a great taste for Europeans in captivity. It has been estimated that during his reign he had many Europeans scattered throughout the villages of the Kandyan Kingdom. According to the retrieved literary and pictorial evidences available it is obvious that the King’s dress habits were irrational. It was too personal. As Robert Knox commented on King Rajasingha II’s dress habits ‘he .not keep to one fashion, but changes as his fancy leads him’(Knox, 1966) The King was a fashion fanatic. According to Robert Knox, ‘his apparel is very strange and wonderful, not after his own country fashion, or any other, being made after his own invention. On his head he wears a cap with four corners like a Jesuits’ three tiers high, and a feather standing upright before like that in a head of a fore –horse in a team, a long band hanging down his back after the Portuguese fashion, his doublet after so strong a shape, the body of one, and the sleeves of another colour, he wears long breaches to his ankles, shoes and stockings’ (Knox, 1966)

Sustainable design requires maximizing the effectiveness of durable, quality materials: emotionally durable design: reducing consumption and waste of resources by increasing the durability of relationships between people and products, through design. This requires a process of consumption motivated by complex emotional drivers, and is far more

than just the mindless purchasing of newer and shinier things.

### Concepts of Zero Waste Design

The zero waste design concepts involve consuming one fabric for total design without realizing any waste. In this process, zero waste design identified three drapery concepts: the first one emphasize an extravagant body silhouette by wrapping wads of fabrics at the waist of the elite male. This method of manipulation fabric is used to the maximum in the dress *tuppottiya*. The Kandyan elites' costume signifies their dignity, power and status. John Davy stated that an elite costume consumed quantity of wrapped cloths which symbolized dignity.



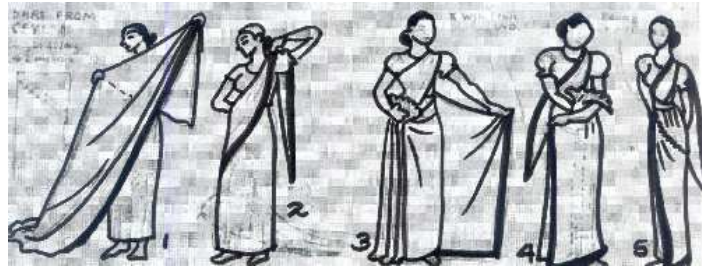
**Figure 1: An Elite Male Wore *tuppottiyadress*, *Degaldoruwa Temple in Kandy***

*Atuppottiya* is an extravagant dress includes a series of wrapped wad of fabrics. The *tuppottiya dress* composed of three different fabrics which have different names. The white colour *tuppotti* fabric is known as *Kavaniya* and is wrapped on the hips to create the foundation structure which leads to several continual wrapping. The *Kavaniya* draped around the hip while making fold on it. The second layer of the dress formed by using red *tuppotti*

Cloth which known as *pachchawadama* is six meters long and forty five inches width. *Pachchawadama* wrapped on the waist and covers the base wrap of white cloth. The final form and the shape of the *tuppottiya* dress achieved by wrapping gold embroidered muslin *somana* cloth which is known as *kasavtuppotti*. *Mohottigete* (Gete means knot) is a special knot which is used to tightened the cloth firm and steady. Even though it is a mechanism of tightening the entire cloth firm the form of the knot creates a unique appearance to the extravagant silhouette. The *Mohottigete* also signified dignity of the wearer. Besides folding and pleating incorporating throughout the formation of *tuppottiya*. These *tuppottiya* cloths are never cut by scissors and never sewn with threads. Coomaraswamy in his book the arts and crafts of India and Ceylon (1984) states that in Asia a dress is arranged by a large piece of cloth by knotting, rather than tucking pins or sewing.



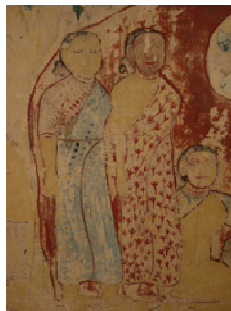
**Figure 2: The Process of Making the Knot (Ranathunga 2015)**



**Figure 3: Zero Waste Concepts Involves the Methodology of Draping Ohoriya**



**Figure 4: A Royal Lady with Ohoriya (Davy J, 1821) Kandy**



**Figure 5: Elite Ladies with Ohoriya Temple Mural, Malagamma Temple**

The queen's lower body dress comprises of many layers of fabrics creating enormous volume at the rear of the female body. *Ohoriya* is draped from one end of the fabric and is thrown over one shoulder. That part is known as the *ohoripota* and the rest of the fabric is fixed to the waist by a series of which involves making a bunch of frills from the fabric by tightly wrapping over the waist. The formation of elite females and Kandyan Queens dress incorporated many knots, pleats, frills and folds. Fold of dresses playing pivotal role in formation apparent height of the wearer. Formation of frills and placement on the hip of female body creates sensual beauty. Frilling brings to extra volume to the female silhouette. The *ohoriya* dress is a complete outfit created by six meters length and forty five inches width.

Pleats are significant dress features common to royal and elite dress. An elite dresses depicted in temple paintings show that small pleats of surface of cloth created unique texture. Vertical pleats of female long lower dress height light the height of the wearer. When the wearer is walking the vertical pleats get expand and created ease to the body movement. Further more subtle movement of these pleats created pleasing visual effect to the viewer.



**Figure 6: An Elite lady with Ohoriya (A photograph) National Museum Colombo, Sri Lanka**

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper makes a knowledge contribution by suggesting that sustainable fashion consumption is enabled, shaped, and driven by a specific configuration of competence, material artifacts and meanings. It is when these components are interconnected, that sustainable fashion consumption becomes possible. To encourage more sustainable apparel consumption, these configurations of components must be further explored. Furthermore, this extended understanding sets ground for researchers to further investigate the actual doings of participants and how two concepts that constitute a practice affects sustainable fashion consumption.

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