

## Identification of body adornment concepts in Sinhalese jewellery

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### Abstract

*Adornment is a beautification and embellishment, and an addition to the pleasantness and attractiveness, a decoration that is added to relieve plainness. The human form has been subjected to adornment from the past to the present and towards the future in many different methods and techniques making it the foreground for jewellery. The jewellery industry today has developed so much internationally that the trends and fashion of body adornment are shared beyond the cultures and the traditions. Certain practices of adornment have found places internationally so that present practices of adornment have become timeless concepts merging with the trends of the world. The art of jewellery, in the tradition seem to interestingly combine with principles of design that showcases the skill of material handling, relationship made with human form, from the view point of the aesthetics. The inspiration that has been derived for such creations from various sources and the unique originality that has marked in the Sinhalese jewellery will be identified, based on the principles of art and design. In the method of study, the relationships jewellery has made with human body form, and the aesthetical patterns that have created along the traditions had made, visible connections with the cultural patterns will be brought into topical discussions. In the conclusion it has been found out that ancient concepts that were deeply rooted in the traditional practices consists of ultra modern techniques that can be renewed for the use of the present day practices that they are concepts of timelessness.*

**Keywords:** *body adornment, concepts, Sinhalese jewellery, tradition, culture*

### 1.0 Literature review

The adornment in many cultural languages carry the meaning of furnishing or rather equipped with, that also is essential for the validity. For example Coomaraswamy (1981) gives examples for adornment as anything which enhances the effect such as the mind by learning, elephants by mast, rivers by water, night by moon etc., In the Vedic grammar and texts adornment carries the meaning of 'abundantly furnished with', (Karkala 1971) a thing that corresponds to the sense of increasement and strength. In many cultures and civilizations, ornaments had never been identified as wasteful things or vain productions of human effort, but as a rather an empowerment of their beliefs and practices. In meaning, it carries a broader definition, making jewellery, a significant element in ornamentation among many other. Jewellery, evidently stand for a defined and specific need in ornamentation, clearly defining the purpose.

Research conducted by Johnson, Schofield and Yurchisin (2002) indicates first impressions are created by clothing, body modifications and body attachments. The study stated that form impressions or opinions are created on the basis of appearance of adornment and dress. According to Ross (2008) by appearance an individual announces their identity, shows their value, expresses their mood or process their attitude. As a summary it can be stated that adornment and clothing give a personal recognition about the wearer such as the social status, occupation, wealth, power, culture and religion among many other. According to Eicher (2008) each culture or society has an ideal image of what the male and female body should look like. It has been stated that these ideals shift with time and different trends. On a social level, bodies are used to identify individuals within a larger cultural and historical context. (Kaiser 1997, p97). According to Shusterman (2006) additional evidence for the importance for considering the body can be found in the field of somaesthetics, or the study of how we create performance through perception, cognition, action, aesthetic expression and ethical self fashioning-in essence, the relationship between body, mind and culture. It is observed that, the jewellery concepts of the Indian influences carry the emphasis on the shape and form of the human figure and its responses to climate, that it is believed that the origins of the body adoration seem to have had a longer history than the cloth on the body. (Untracht 1982) The interwoven links that had with the religious beliefs, the beliefs set with the unforeseen forces of the universe and planetary effects seem to have had strengthened the body adornment concepts emphasizing on human form. (Untracht 1982) According to the literature survey conducted most of the studies relate to the skin marking with systems of body modifications that the research conducted on the body adornment concepts and discourses on their aesthetics could not be found.

### 2.0 Objectives of the study

One of the objectives of the study is to understand the structured typology that can be identified from simple earrings to elaborate head gear which will be presented along a detailed description of their art and design components. The

study would emphasize the body adornment practices particularly the developments occurred during the early period taking evidence from literature, sculpture and temple paintings. One of the most important objectives is to study about the timelessness of these concepts which can be brought in to renewed concepts of the modern day practices continuing the tradition.

### 3.0 Introduction

It can be observed that embellishment had always been an indication of a rich culture. It is understood that, the careful thoughts and synthesis made upon creating jewellery, unfold greater values and deep set roots of the culture. The intelligence, freedom of imagination and wisdom, nourished by the availability of resources and technological expertise are considered as the most important concerns, from which stem the valuable crafting of jewellery. Rudimentary stages of body adornment runs back to more than 200,000years ago to the times of the Homo Sapiens according to Thomas (1937). Curiosity and inquisitiveness and the observation qualities of man, for touching objects, collecting them and wearing them for various purposes had led to such practices of body adornment. It is important to observe that the natural quality and the built form of the human body has led to many of the creative development of body adornment that had evolved during the long stood traditions. The upright quality has helped man to do many things according to his wishes. Most importantly the independence of hands had given him accessibility, to reach out for things, assemble things, collect things, and to be craftier using the hands and fingers at the same time allowing the evolution of rings for fingers and bangles for hands. The upright formation has opened up to a greater typology in body adornment. Human body is significantly divided into several sections on the upright structure, as head, torso and the limbs. Particularly face is identified as an attractive feature around which much jewellery are worn. A closer study of human form reveals much complicatedness in the structure of the human anatomy including the sophisticated and delicate bone structure which allows a firm grip on the body. The ancient sculpture, indicate to us, a series of interesting concepts of body adornment of both, male and female forms. The perfect shape of the male and female forms adorned with jewellery that run along the surfaces of the human body dignifying the body shape to a greater extent. This paper focuses of such practices that had evolved during the early period of Sinhalese jewellery tradition examined on the basis of design and aesthetics.

### 4.0 Male adornment concepts

The various different Malaya, (neck ornament), girdles (hip Ornament), armlets and bangles indicate the in depth thought processes that go into the design of such ornament. Certain ornaments seem to be very prominent than the rest, placed in a higher supremacy. Such are the head ornament details which are distinctively different. Neck ornament and many other take place according to the beauty of the form. As indicated in the figure, certain neck ornament becomes very prominent than the others, indicating distinctive form and shape. With reference to the evidence gathered, certain ornaments like the 'ekavali' (the valuable string of pearls) is placed on the male chest that hangs from the neck, above all the other. The placement of the 'Udarabhanda' clearly defines the neck ornament and the hip ornament at the upper and lower levels of the human form.

#### Characteristics of male ornament in line with male body contour

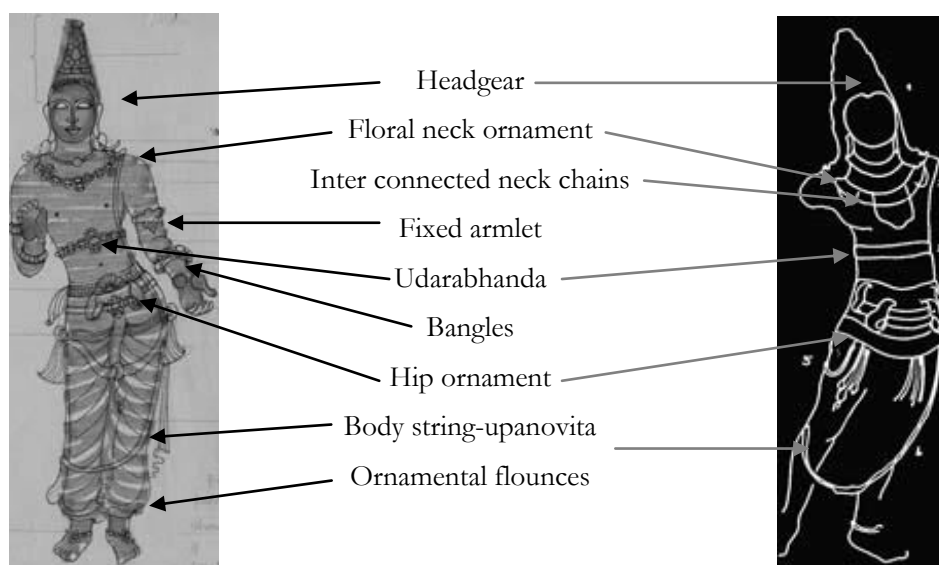


Fig -01 Illustrations from stone sculpture. Source - Author

### 5.0 Design concepts adopted for neck ornament design

Certain necklaces adorn the shoulder area as girdles with connection made with the tassels. The order is found as the throatlet, Malaya and the chain at the lowest level. Chain is sometimes found connected to 'channavira', the chest ornament. Particularly in the male adornment concepts the lowest chain has been identified as a thick band that connects and passed through creating a broad entwined collar like effect that has found to be unique in the Sinhalese neck ornament concepts, particularly in the male jewellery. (Coomaraswamy 1956)

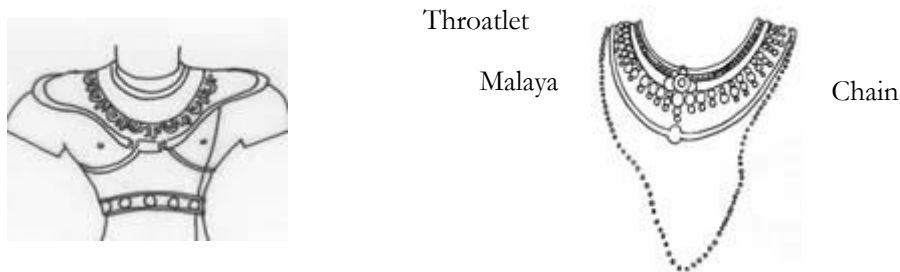


Fig -03 Neck ornament details from Polonnaruwa  
Source – Author

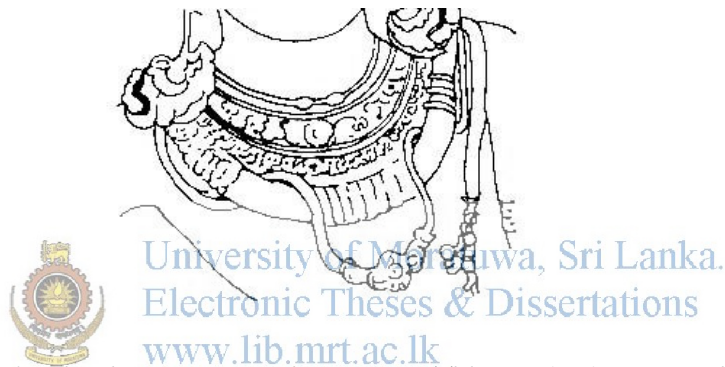


Fig -02 a & b Princely ornament sculpture. From Tiriya 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> C. Anuradhapura  
Source – Author

The narrow waist of the male form is elegantly wrapped in different sequences of hip ornament, at different levels, identified as 'katibhanda', 'bandana' (bands), and 'mekhala' (girdles). The inner faces are connected with a net work of ornament that is defined to have detailed with dangling bells at different intervals. These net works of ornament, that define the male hip area, seem to fall down to the knee level in falling strings that may have created pleasing motions with the body movement. Some of the most dignified characteristics have been identified in hip ornament in the Sinhalese tradition. There are 03 basic kinds of hip ornament, namely identified above, as 'Katisutra', 'Bhandana', and 'Mekhaladhama'. 'Katisutra' bears the characteristics of a tightly fixed ornament, tied round the hip. 'Bhandana' has the motif incorporated, to avert the evil eye. Generally face of 'kubera', and dragon face etc. 'Mekhaladhama' contain long tassels with chain, pearls hanging in tiers and folds from the main band.

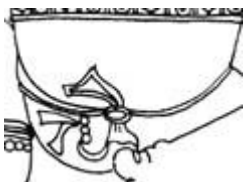


Fig -04 'Katisutra' depicted on a guard stone. Worn at the navel.



Fig -05 Pearl tassels found at the hip ornament



Fig -06 Tightly worn hip bands with 'Kubera' face to avert the evil eye



Fig -07 In the Sinhalese ornament the tassels and folds are indicated in decorative bands falling over the thighs in loose motions



Fig – 08 Details from Polonnaruwa sculpture. Source - Author

Various kinds of hip ornament are shown with falling tassels made out of fabric or chains. Such variations are shown in the diagrams below, in Sinhalese practice.

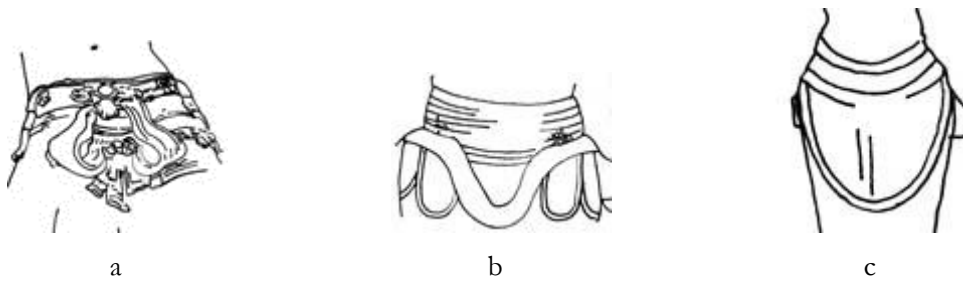


Fig -09 a,b,c - Examples from Polonnaruwa sculpture. Source – Author

### 6.0 Concepts of female body adoration with jewellery, in early tradition

The earliest Sinhalese sculpture signifying ‘Yakshi’ and ‘Nagini’ figures denote the higher standards achieved in the art of creating beauty in female sculpture. The lines denote a classical simplicity, highlighting a form of the female figure. Lines of neck, shoulders, upper arms and lines of the breast and hip area is highlighted with soft curves.



Fig -10 The early most wooden sculpture, early Anuradhapura period  
Source – Schroeder 1990



Fig -11 Nagini sculpture  
Source – Schroeder 1990

The earliest records indicate to us, the wearing of the elaborate hip ornament identified as ‘Mekhala’ in literature that had been a popular practice from the early traditions, of the Sinhalese ornament. Such ornamental details as expressed in the Sinhalese sculpture vary with degrees in exaggeration depicted in different sculpture. Particularly the Indian female figurative details indicate to us, the exaggerations of hip ornament detail, deviating from the classical simplicity of the Early Sinhalese practices depicted in the sculpture.



The 'Mekhala' (hip ornament) in Indian and Sri Lankan sculpture



Fig -12 Example from Sanchi, North Indian sculpture. Source Chauley 1998



Fig -13 GajaLaksmi at Vahalkadapillar. Source Schroeder 1990



Fig -14 Stucco figurine of North Indian origin found from Anuradhapura source Schroeder 1990



Fig -15 Kubera figurines from Anuradhapura Source Schroeder 1990

7.0 Aesthetics of jewellery worn to decorate the chest and shoulders

According to many evidences the perfect form of the female figure depicted with high breast, narrow hip and dignified formation of the female form denoted with classical lines has been continued in the Sinhalese tradition from the early Anuradhapura period in the past history. The upper areas of the female form that includes the neck, shoulders and the breast is adorned with ornament from tightly fitted choker ornament to the hanging pendants that rest on the mid plane of the breast, accompanied by the fitted armbands on either side of the arms. Various expressive details from the elaborate Sinhalese literature work can be taken as examples on the narration of the beauty of the female figure in ornament. Particularly the breast is compared with a couple of swans, and the stately arms to the well formed trunk of an elephant. A number of necklaces that adorn the neck area at different levels are a commonly marked feature in the female ornament. The mid plane that forms from the neck, Shoulders, upper arms and the breast has been the foreground for the adoration with necklaces that is well expressed, particularly in the Sigiriya jewellery.



a



b

Fig -16 a,b - Examples from Sigiriya paintings 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D Source – Chutiwongs 1990

## Breast Ornament detail

Gracefulness and beauty highlighted with jewellery on the female breast in various different ways can be a feature identified in jewellery.

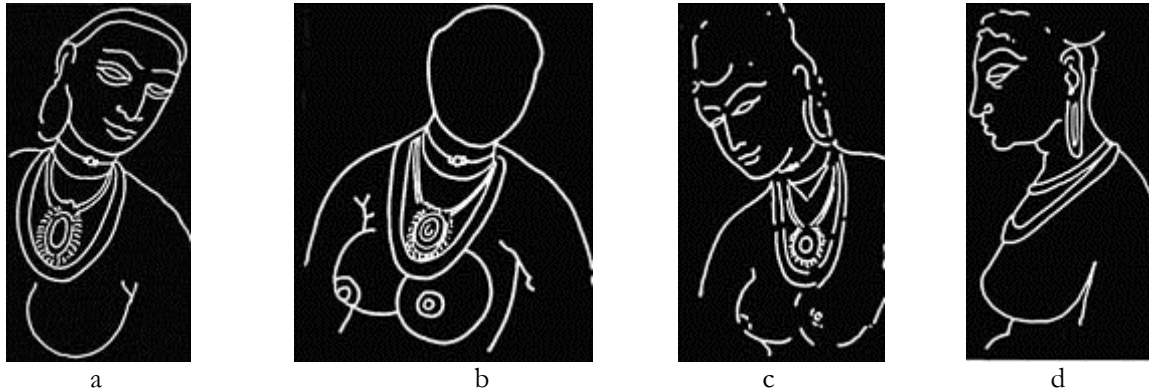


Fig - 17 a,b,c,d - Sketches & illustrations from Sigiriya paintings by author

The gem studded pendants and golden strings of jewellery that encircle the soft curves of the female chest, is particularly highlighted in the damsel paintings of Sigiriya, marking a classical advancement of art in the Sinhalese tradition.



Fig -18 Shakti sculpture from Abayagiriya  
source 'Sanskritipuranaya', April – June 1999



Fig -19 Sculpture from Sigiriya  
Source 'Serendib' Sept – Dec 1988

## 8.0 Head Dress as supreme of all jewellery

The arrangement of jewellery as head ornaments had evidently been a unique tradition that is shared by the cultures of the Indian origin. It is evident that this had resulted with the culmination of philosophical and environmental conditions. The anatomical characteristics too have governed as a decisive factor in this process. Anatomically human head demands the attention and attractive feature on human form. This has been absorbed in to the philosophy of life of man making it an important part in the individual as well as social life concepts. Most interestingly the hair is generally arranged high up, away from the face neatly combed back for health and comfort reasons. As a result this has been identified as a regular practice in the tradition.

Use of natural coil forms of hair with gem studded jewellery.

Particularly in the Sigiriya jewellery, the high up arrangement of hair of the damsel figures in coil forms done up on the head using natural flowers, supported by forehead ornaments, and studded gem structures on high up on the head. Some of the decorated flowers seem to fall down on the back, creating elegant natural forms that give originality to early Sinhalese aesthetics of arranging the hair.

Jewelled crowns supported by 'Jatava'

It is observed that clothed jatava is used, on the head gear as the pedestal on which the ornamental structures are fixed in the hair arrangement, bordered by a thick ornamental band of metal. The figure indicates such arrangement indicated in the Sigiriya figures that are part of the classical arrangement in the body adornment concepts.



Fig -20 Bodhisatva sculpture  
source – Schroeder



Fig -21 Ornamental head gear  
Source –Chutiwongs 1990

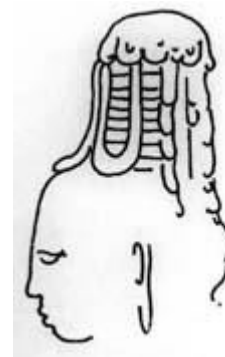


Fig -22 Head gear with Coil forms.  
source Schroeder 1990

Heavy ornamental work with foliage patterns, and gem studded structures

One can come across unique traditions in the Polonnaruwa period where one experiences tall structures of enormous patterns and detail that had originated from the South Indian traditions but developed a language on their own. Enormous amount of organic shapes are incorporated in these structures and that their style differ from those of the classical types found in the Anuradhapura period with evidences.



a



b

Leaves, flowers, foliage and  
gems used in headgear.

Fig – 23 a,b - Illustrations from Sigiriya and PolonnaruwaThivanka image house.  
Source - author

## 9.0 Ear ornament design

It is identified that, certain principles had been adopted in the ear ornament design in the tradition taking in to consideration the physical features, the anatomical placement of the ear. Ear had been given much prominence using its anatomical flexibility as an advantage in the development of the ear ornament. Certain primary forms of jewellery had been used in the tradition as a result, of this unique development.

### Anatomical placement of the ear, on human form

It is important to note that the physical build up of the ear, had naturally given rise to the adornment concepts from the developments occurred in the early beginnings of man. Particularly the ears that are at either side of the head had enabled the framing of the face. Also certain anatomical features have led to the adorning of the ear in many ways.

The elongated ear formation as a tradition in practice had been most clearly identified in the Indus valley practices. Certain examples where the deformation takes place by wearing jewellery with weight can be experienced even today among the traditional practices of India. Particularly in the Indian practices, the ear is pierced at several places along the lobe and cartilage structure to insert ornament in them.



Fig -24 Elongated ear with weight devoid of ornament  
From Sigiriya paintings. Source – Author

### Elongated ear ornament with weight

It is noted that in the early traditions, the ear ornaments were in heavy forms and shapes, that were worn along the stretched ear lobe. Several of these shapes were believed to have made with amulets. Evidence is obtained from early temple paintings, sculpture and archaeological excavated objects.



Fig -25 a,b,c -Illustrations from 'Thivanka' image house, Polonnaruwa,  
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.  
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### Coiled Forms

Coil form fitted perfectly into the enlarged ear lobe had been a marked tradition in Sinhalese design. Single, double, triple stripes of form is coiled and had been made as earrings. Also found are the natural coils of conch shell, ivory spirals, calc spirals in different forms. Particularly spirals are artistically depicted in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa sculpture.

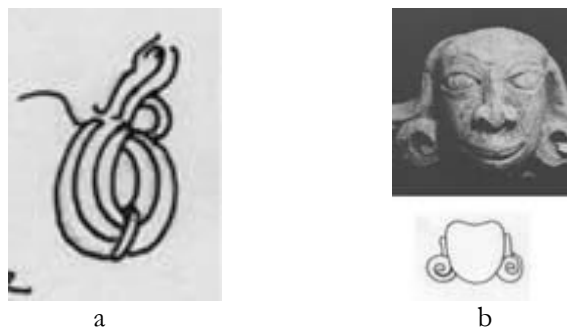


Fig -26 a,b -Coil forms from Polonnaruwa sculpture and temple paintings  
Source Schroeder 1990

### Discal earrings

Large circles as discs had been in the tradition from early periods of Sinhalese ear ornament. One of the most classical discal ornaments can be found from Sigiriya, paintings and sculpture. These large circular ornaments depicting a rim is believed to be derived from, the practices of Orissan culture according to Sivarama a. y, (1981), which had evidently



continued to later Chola developments. They are believed to have been made with gold foil, also identified as 'patrakundala' which are either made from 'palm leaf', 'dantapatra'/ivory, or in thin sheets of gold.

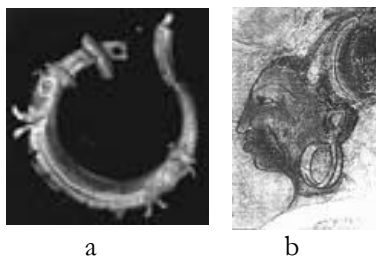


Fig -27 a,b - Discal earrings from Sigiriya Source-Chutiwongs 1990

## 10.0 Adornment of the hands with Jewellery

### Human anatomy of the hand

In the chronological order, the bangle jewellery has an important place in the early tradition, considering the adornment of the hand. Bangle jewellery has been considered as one of the early forms signified with movement of the hands. Hand as a prominent feature in the human body, having movement and dynamism indicated with fingers, the slender muscle formations has given both male and female jewellery, a significant place. Traditionally bangles are known as 'valaya' meaning an 'encircle'.

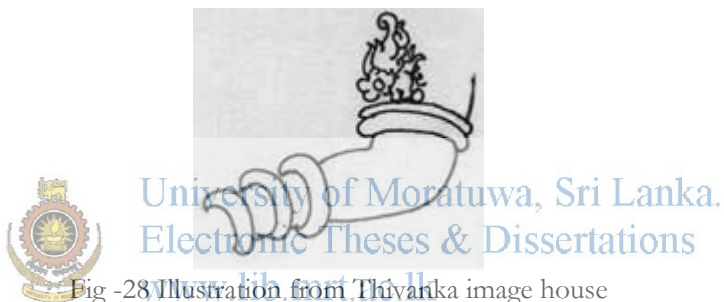


Fig -28 Illustration from Thivanka image house

### Connected bangles

Some are found as a series of singular bangles connected into one form, made out of metal, and studded with gems or decorated with foliage design. Given below are some of these bangles found from Anuradhapura.

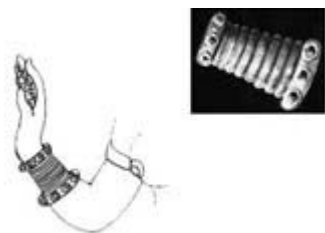


Fig -29 Illustration from Sigiriya paintings

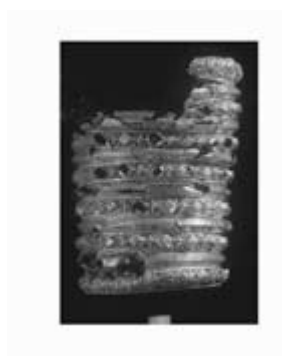


Fig – 30 Supreme classical example for bangle Jewellery, found from Abayagiriya, Anuradhapura Source 'Sanskritikapuranaya', 1996 April June

## Bangles

Various intricate foliage patterns are carved in the bangles, found in different forms and shapes.

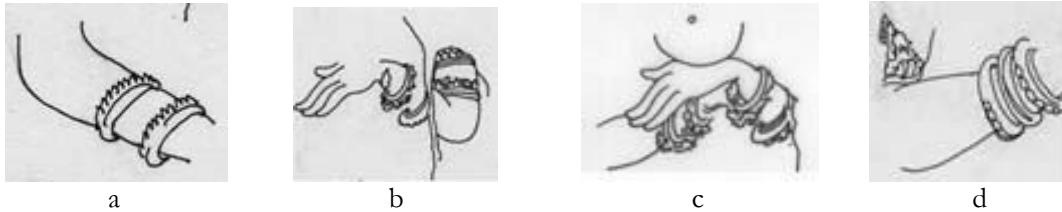


Fig -31 a,b,c,d - Examples from Polonnaruwa, Tivanka image house .Source -author

## Conclusion

Jewellery, undoubtedly seem to have materialized out of the human love for beauty and self adornment. The underlying causes of jewellery seem to relate to the apparent complexities of human nature. Human body evidently becomes a foreground for jewellery, because of its genuine characteristics. Man had gone to extensive detailing using his imagination to give beauty, comfort and function to the things that are created as body adornment. The manner of orderly arrangement in the evolution of jewellery, particularly in the early periods of Sinhalese tradition, during the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods can be depicted with the evidence gathered from various different sources. The orderly manner that is indicated in these arrangements depicting a clear hierarchy of jewellery for the particular segments of the human form, most interestingly combines with the relative social norms, rituals and functions of the human life. The chronological order, indicate a distinction of the development of jewellery, and its achievement of advancement in creativity. Some forms of practices have been repeated absorbing in to a traditional practice up to the present day. This has been achieved by giving a hierarchy, defining a specific area, order of placement in a variety of ornament on the human form. Interesting series of concepts and principles are found from the traditions, in the practices of jewellery, worn on the human body. These associations had been made as part of recognition, identity, design and beauty. In the Sri Lankan history, we come across early period traditions where much of the Indian influences had prevailed in body adornment. The body was adorned with jewellery having placed carefully and artfully, jewellery along the contours of the human form in the most pleasing manners. Particularly the change of adornment concepts that binds the human form have evidently changed due to the beliefs prevailed in different time periods. The natural environment conditions, the availability of materials, the beliefs and the functional aspects have given rise to interesting developments in the history of jewellery, in the traditions that is centered on the human body form.

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