

# Curating Kandyan Traditional Clothing in the UNESCO world cultural heritage in Digital Paradigm

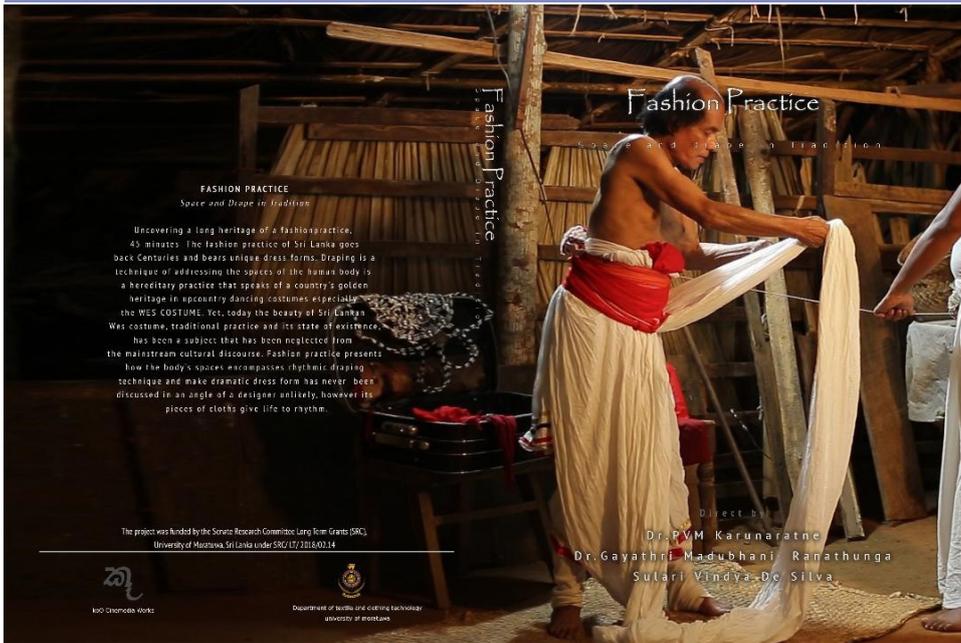
Historical notions of cultural values in the heritage sector have been identified by holders of curatorial expertise based at institutions with large collections of artifacts. However, the rise of new digital technologies has facilitated not only active two-way engagement with heritage, but also a broadening of what we mean by heritage and how it can be accessed, through the co-production of exhibitions, oral histories, and other forms of display and archive based on personal remembrance, recollection and interactivity.

Costume history collections are critical for preserving and understanding past and present costume diversity because they reveal the structure of historical costume communities and how they have changed through time. Yet, noticing a lack of research on preservation of traditional costumes, the research team at the Fashion Design & Product Development Degree Course came forward with the 3 video documentaries to bridge the gap. The research outcome was producing three documentaries based on the research project of preservation of the Kandyan traditional dress through digital media. These video collections provide us with an insight into past and present draping clothes on the human body, acting as snapshots of unique dress forms of Sri Lankan culture. These videos can be used to inform future conservation of varieties of unique dress forms and diversity as we know it today.

These documentaries help researchers to see how communities have reacted to previous cultural occurrences, providing significant insight into future outcomes and ensuring that costume diversity is protected. There is a probability to assume that these videos may be integrated into the global visual costume databases. The researchers attempt to visualize the selected costumes discussed in an angle of a designer, signifying technicality of the unique draping technique of our culture enabling to improve sustainable design concepts for fashion designers in order to allow them to understand how its pieces of yards of cloth give life to the rhythm of the human body. The costumes that are interpreted in the videos provide important teaching material, expand opportunities for researchers and improves understanding of diversity of cultural costume.

Documentaries





**FASHION PRACTICE**  
**Space and Drape in Tradition**  
**FASHION PRACTICE:** Uncovering a long heritage of a fashion practice, 2 hrs and 28 minutes. Fashion practice presents especially the WES COSTUME and how the body's spaces encompass rhythmic draping technique and make dramatic dress form has never been discussed in an angle of a designer, however its pieces of cloth give life to rhythm.

Figure 1. Cover pages of Video Documentary 1 : Fashion practice

### Recording the past

Kandyan dress has been up to now preserved and carried ahead by traditional Kandyan elites as well as the dancers and drummers of the commoners or lower service castes who were bound for the traditional professions under the feudal system that ended with the colonial rule. The changing socio-economic forces in the country bring about the rapid disappearance of these caste-based professions and this transformation affects the prevalence of traditional families and rajakarya system [1] (compulsory service and a duty to the King based on feudal tenure system) that transmit the Kandyan traditional dress from generation to generation.

Since the introduction of the open market economic system to the country in the 1970s this situation has aggravated and the descendants of these people and families do not adhere to their traditions any more. On the contrary, some dress forms have now been either shortened or filled with innovations since the traditional forms have wholly disappeared, there are no any initiatives for conservation of traditional clothing from both museum and visual documentation intervention in the country [2]. The need for conservation of this traditional dress form in video format is necessary for future generations of the country to witness the current tradition faced with the risk of extinction.

In this context, preservation of traditional Kandyan dress has to be undertaken very soon as the present generation is undoubtedly the last generation of practitioners. The need for preservation of this traditional dress in video format is necessary for future generations and its visual exploration is very much critical before the tradition and contexts fade away along with the immense treasure of the cultural heritage. This type of video documentation can be considered as a practice of visual ethnography to construct understanding of the world based on visuals, processes and experiences rather than on abstract knowledge thought induced or language-based [3]. As highlighted by Kalay[4] preservation of cultural heritage through video documentation is a 'new approach for the pedagogical attributes in documentation and management, representation techniques, dissemination of knowledge and awareness generation' In this study these attributes are tested and accomplished through gaining an understanding of the problems and concerns associated with planning and conducting such an ethnographic video documentation as this hands-on approach always creates unpredictable conditions and situations.

### The notion of the research: Ethnographic Video Method

The strategies of collecting, sorting, categorizing, analyzing, retrieving and presenting information



Figure 2. Cover pages of Video Documentary 2 : Dignified bodies



**DIGNIFIED BODIES**

Extravagant Volume and Wrapping Techniques in Kandyan Elite Costume  
**DIGNIFIED BODIES:** brings to light a heritage of the incomparable beauty of the country's upper class dressing up style, 2 hrs and 28 minutes. **DIGNIFIED BODIES** cast the system of elite dressing styles and admit its dress forms and etiquettes are subjected to established social stratification, yet to preserve cultural heritage. This is an attempt to preserve the dress tradition of Sri Lanka which continues to this day.



Figure 3. Cover pages of Video Documentary 3 : Ceremonial bodies



**CEREMONIAL BODIES**

Cloth Wrapping and Draping systems in Tradition  
**CEREMONIAL BODIES:** cast insights of social contribution of artisans and officials who served in the Temple of the Tooth Relic where the prerogative powers, and obligation visible through a distinct form of official costumes which prevails hereditary during feudal system in Kandyan era 2 hrs and 28.

through ethnographic video methods are very much complex. The whole process of the research cannot be undertaken by a single person. It is time consuming and expensive more than any other content medium or method, but it is often the most effective. The cost however depends on the type of video, the location, subject to be video graphed, production crew, equipment, post production etc. This method always requires complex technology and expert crew to produce artistic and archival video documentation. Final outcome, the rendered work of a video documentary should be in an artifact form to create a lasting presence of cultural heritage for what would otherwise be ephemeral. It will become central in visual cultures' investigation of memory and history. Through this study, the video archives will conserve records of the full process and the paraphernalia involved in the Kandyan traditional dress forms such as accompanying rituals, accessories and decor used and the process of making and wearing the dress. It then becomes a mode of a portrayal of people's lives in a historical perspective to preserve facts and artifacts of a cultural heritage. This is a

tremendous task of situation oriented and ethically challenging. The outcome of this can entirely depend on the researcher's knowledge and perception but affects the whole subjects of the study.

#### Findings of the cultural dress today: A philosophical viewpoint

The research found that the traditional dress is subjected to concurrent socio-political factors. Development features on dress challenge its definitions. It was observed, some modifications of the dress features. It has been found that due to 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 dresses are modified. It was also found that some dresses may have new forms while 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 and reconstruction and re-packaging of ideas about culture.

**Research paper publications:** The researchers of this study have presented 2 two papers in 5th International Conference on Emerging Trends in Academic Research (ETAR) Bali, Indonesia in 2018 signifying the importance of preserving traditional dress in the context of faith and beliefs of Sri Lanka.[5][6]. There is another research paper published in refereed journal informing the relevance and need of preserve the cultural heritage in videography.[7]

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