

An Exploration of Sri Lankan Lullabies Through Textile Weaving as an Interpretive Visual Language

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Abstract – Lullabies, a Folklore, is a verbal practice transmitted cross-generationally by “word of mouth. A lullaby also referred to as a cradle song in some cultures is a poetic stanza with repetitions a lot to create a rhyming beauty. It is a calming song, usually played or sung to children by adults. (Anzak, Aleena, & Zulfiqar, 2019). Lullabies were sung by mothers or caregivers. Mostly they were sung by women. According to Saman Panapitiya, it’s hard to find an interrelationship between the words used in lullabies and the melody. “They sang the lullaby just using the words needed to lull the baby to sleep” (Panapitiya, 2023). Sri Lankan lullabies hold a significant place in oral tradition. Sri Lankan lullabies identified as *nelavili Kavi*. According to Panapitiya (2023) Sinhala lullabies are defined as a type of soft and emotional singing. Also the melodies of these lullabies are extremely easy and peaceful.. And when singing the lullabies the lips, mouth should be utilized largely to pronounce the letters used in them. (Panapitiya, 2023). Also, textiles serve as an element that encapsulates the cultures and identity, and they also serve as a rich medium for storytelling.

This study aims to explore the intersection between the Sri Lankan lullabies, aiming to develop a methodology for converting lullabies into structured weaving patterns. By analyzing the distinct features of the Sinhala Lullabies such as singing style, tonal patterns and rhythmic patterns. This study seeks to create a framework for textile weaving based interpretation. This study contributes to understanding how intangible cultural expressions can be translated into textile-based design frameworks.

The framework designing process was started by how different designers interpreted music in different contexts such as architecture, graphic design and textile design. Then the lullabies were collected by interviewing 40 people. It’s identified that verses of lullabies contain distinct styles. After, *maatras* breakdown of the selected poems were done by referring research work about lullabies done by Scholars researched about Sri Lankan folk music. Such as research work of Prof. Saman Panapitiya (*Social and Cultural Phonetic Forms and Sources in Sri Lankan Lullabies*) and Prof. Iranga Samindani

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Weerakkodi. It was identified as that. Singing lullabies involves significant mouth utilization and these movements visually engage infants to articulate sounds and letters. The selected lullabies were video recorded to trace the mouth utilization patterns for each phonetic sound. The analyzed patterns assembled thematically according to sound variations.(a, i, e, u, o, k, n, m). During the analysis process, it was found that the same sound can exhibit multiple mouth utilizing patterns. The motif development was based on the initial shape of mouth patterns. Parallel experiments were started to develop the motif on actual loom with a Dumbara weaving artisan using the technique *mal bama*. Through these experiments on developing these motifs, it's identified how the transformation and feasibility of motifs loom. Developed motifs were inserted according to the 'maatras' breakdown of poems. The color incorporation process was done by referring to interview answers. Participants described colors they associated with specific lullabies. Each color was analyzed identifying its hues and harmonies Furthermore, The compositional framework of lullaby poems on textiles was based on the rhythmic flow of lullaby singing. Inspired by rocking movements of infant composition, analysis started making rough sketches of motifs moving rhythmically by analyzing baby rocking methods. Then relevant experiments were done on digital mode by moving motifs and physical experiments were done on frame looms.

The transformation of lullabies and their specific style to woven motifs reveals that it creates an interrelationship between lullabies and the weaving technique- *mal bama* by relying on rhythm, pause and repetition. Also, it reveals that visual gestures can become new vocabulary where sound is transformed into shape. Furthermore, this project revealed how collective memories on color work are as cultural archives.

This project contributes to understanding how intangible cultural expressions can be interpreted into textile-based design frameworks. The developed motif series can be further developed and used as the visual language for interpreting music. It can also work as an educational tool. Furthermore, this developed motif series shows the potential of evolving Dumbara weaving motifs without changing the original method of *mal bama* technique. Also, these developed textiles can be used as interior textiles to benefit the weaving community.

Keywords: *Lullabies; Textile Weaving; Intangible Cultural Expressions*

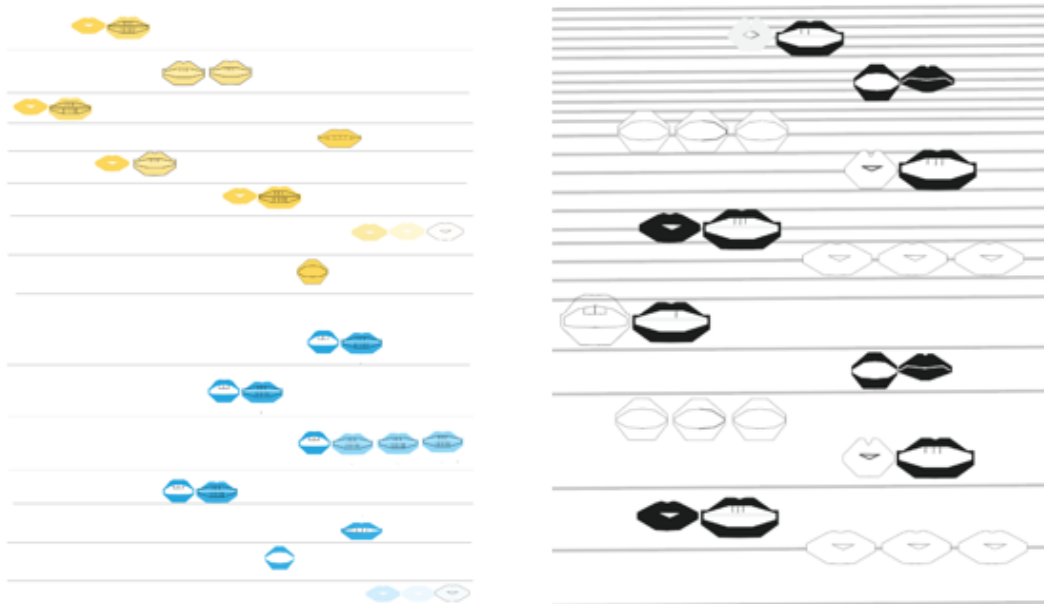
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Figure 1

Motif compositions of doi doi doiya baba and doi amma lullabies



Note. Motif compositions developed by author based on rhythmic patterns of lullaby singing

Figure 2

Final textile developed on loom by weaving artisan



Note. Textile represents the doi doi doiya baba lullaby.

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