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**FOLKLORE IN FASHION: A SYSTEMATIC DESIGN
LED APPROACH IN BRINGING LIFE TO FOLKLORE
OF KUWENI THROUGH FASHION PRODUCTS**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis/dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any other University or Institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

Signature:

Date: 01/09/2025

The above candidate has carried out research for the ~~PhD/MPhil/Masters~~ thesis/~~dissertation~~ under my supervision. I confirm that the declaration made above by the student is true and correct.

Name of Supervisor: Dr Sumith Gopura

Signature of the Supervisor:

Date: 02/09/2025

DEDICATION

First, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the Free Education of Sri Lanka. It stands as a profound investment in human potential and continues to transform lives across generations. To every citizen whose taxes quietly contribute to education, teaching materials, fund scholarships, and light-up the path for future generations—this is a heartfelt tribute to your unseen sacrifices and your devoted belief in the power of knowledge.

Secondly, I dedicate this thesis to the Sri Lankan villagers who have preserved folklore and folk knowledge through generations, often amid hardship. They are the roots of this land, the silent guardians of intangible cultural heritage, who nurtured and safeguarded the ancestral wisdom for the future of our motherland.

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ABSTRACT

Folklore, being an oral tradition, preserves cultural beliefs, values, and experiences across generations. It shapes historical consciousness and helps define emotions, identities, and lifestyles of communities. A striking example is the Sri Lankan folklore of Kuweni, a shape-shifting queen, whose role in Prince Vijaya's conquest is steeped in cultural and symbolic meaning. This study adopts a qualitative mixed-method approach grounded in Creative Practice-Led Research (PLR) to explore how folklore can inform contemporary fashion product development. Beginning with a literature review and analysis of Sri Lankan folklore, the research identifies symbolic themes within the Kuweni narrative. Deductive and inductive thematic analyses—drawing from scientific and social scientific frameworks—lead to the development of two key methodologies: the Thematic Metaphorical Approach (TMA) and the Folklore Characteristics Onion (FCO), which capture the layered dimensions of Kuweni's story. These frameworks guided the creative process, where global fashion trends intersected with local heritage to inform design development. “Thambapanni,” a significant location in the folklore of Kuweni, inspired natural dye techniques that use regional soil and plants, aligning with the theme of localism and responsible color practices.

Through PLR, the study translated intangible themes into tangible fashion artifacts. Techniques such as manual sketching, visual research, and digital prototyping were employed to create a narrative textile, with handloom weaving technique enriching the final outcome. The final textile artifact as well as the prototypes developed by merging tradition with innovation, have been shared via academic publications, international conferences and the *Folklore in Fashion* YouTube channel. This research offers a novel model for integrating folklore into fashion design through structured phases, namely, Concept Development, Design Development, and Realization, while emphasizing the preservation of intangible cultural heritage through creative fashion practice.

Keywords: Creative Practice-Led Research, Symbolism, Fashion Movements, Folklore of Kuweni, Sri Lanka

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LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
PLR	Practice Led Research
SAR	South Asian Region
GOTS	Global Organic Textile Standard
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SA	Scientific Approach
SSA	Social Scientific Approach
UERC	University Ethics Review Committee
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
2D	Two Dimensional
3D	Three Dimensional
TMA	Thematic Metaphorical Approach
FCO	Folklore Characteristics Onion
WGSN	Worth Global Style Network
SLITA	Sri Lankan Institute of Textile and Apparel
AR	Augmented Reality
VR	Virtual Reality

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