

EXPLORATION OF HOW SOCIAL ROLES AND STATUS INFLUENCED THE ANTHROPOMETRIC DESIGN OF WOODEN CHAIRS IN THE KANDYAN PERIOD OF SRI LANKA

SANJUKA G.T.N.¹, KULATHUNGA W.D.D.² & MENDIS M.S.^{3*}

^{1,2,3}NSBM Green University, Homagama, Sri Lanka

¹gtnsanjuka@students.nsbm.ac.lk, ²deshaja.d@nsbm.ac.lk, ³malsha.m@nsbm.ac.lk

Abstract: This study investigates the influence of social roles and status on the anthropometric design, symbolism, and material language of wooden chairs during the Kandyan period in Sri Lanka. Despite historical documentation of Kandyan furniture, empirical research on the relationship between seating dimensions and social hierarchy remains limited. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined literature review, field case studies, photographic surveys, and manual measurements of museum collections, the study identifies clear correlations between social status and chair design. Royal and monastic chairs featured elevated seat heights, wider proportions, and intricate symbolic carvings, often exceeding contemporary ergonomic standards, whereas commoners primarily used floor-level seating, reflecting spatial and social subordination. Comparative analysis with Neufert's ergonomic references reveals a deliberate prioritization of formality and symbolism over physical comfort in elite seating. The findings contribute measurable evidence to heritage furniture studies and provide insights for contemporary furniture design, ergonomic reinterpretation, and cultural heritage preservation.

Keywords: *Kandyan Period, Wooden Chairs, Social Hierarchy, Anthropometry*

1. Introduction

The Kandyan era of Sri Lanka represents a period in which furniture served not only as a utilitarian object, but as a visual and spatial marker of power, identity, and hierarchy. Wooden chairs in particular symbolised authority and were reserved almost exclusively for royalty, nobles, and clergy, while commoners relied on mats or platforms for seating. The ornate carvings, elevated seat levels, and symbolic motifs such as lions, lotuses, and makaras reinforced social rank and cultural significance, embedding status into material form.

Although these designs are widely acknowledged in historical documentation, most existing scholarship focuses on visual aesthetics, symbolism, and craftsmanship, with limited empirical assessment of dimensions, proportions, or anthropometric reasoning behind seating hierarchy. Although Kandyan furniture has been documented historically, a lack of empirical research exists on how anthropometric measurements vary according to social hierarchy. This reveals the need to explore seating not only as art or heritage, but as a measurable reflection of power and bodily presence.

To address this gap, this study investigates how physical chair proportions differed among royalty, nobles, clergy, and commoners, and evaluates how these measurements relate to contemporary ergonomic guidelines. Therefore, the research question of this study is stated as follows: "How did social roles and status influence the design and anthropometric features of wooden chairs during the Kandyan era, and how do these traditional designs compare to ergonomic standards in terms of comfort and functionality?"

By answering this question, the study contributes quantifiable insight into heritage seating design, helping designers, historians, and ergonomic researchers better understand how cultural values shaped bodily experience and how such knowledge can inform modern furniture development, conservation, and reinterpretation.

2. Literature Review

This literature review contextualizes Kandyan-era seating within social hierarchy, symbolism, craftsmanship, and anthropometric relevance. Rather than describing historical facts alone, this section critically connects past scholarship to the objectives of this study, demonstrating how each source builds the theoretical foundation for comparing status-based seating dimensions with modern ergonomic standards.

2.1. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND STATUS IN KANDYAN SOCIETY

Scholars such as Brohier and Jayasena note that chairs were historically limited to royalty, nobles, and clergy, while commoners occupied floor-level seating. This distinction is not only historical context, but a critical foundation for this research, as it establishes the relationship between furniture possession and social rank. Mendis and Jayasignhe (2018)

*Corresponding author: Tel: +94 710864040 Email Address: malsha.m@nsbm.ac.lk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31705/FARU.2025.10>

examined the non-verbal communicative aspects of verandahs in “walauwa” houses in Sri Lanka’s Uva Province, highlighting how architectural elements can convey social and cultural meanings within residential spaces. The exclusion of lower classes from formal chairs reinforces the argument that seating was a privilege symbolising power, and therefore likely differed dimensionally and ergonomically by status. This supports Objective 1 of the study and justifies why anthropometric comparison among social groups is necessary.

2.2. SYMBOLISM IN DESIGN AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION

Coomaraswamy, Bell, and Deraniyagala (as discussed in heritage-furniture literature) emphasise that Kandyan chairs often incorporated symbolic motifs — such as lions, lotuses, makaras, and solar symbols — signifying authority, purity, and spiritual legitimacy. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka the more recent work by Mendis et al. (2020) demonstrates how vernacular timber construction techniques within buildings like Ambalam effectively married traditional construction methods with bioclimatic design principles, underscoring how material, form, and symbolism function together in architectural heritage. By connecting symbolic carvings with physical form and material choices, these studies suggest that symbolism in furniture and architecture becomes a tangible, measurable design outcome rather than mere decorative ornamentation (Mendis et al., 2020).

2.3. TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Seneviratne and Brohier document how elite chairs were crafted using rare hardwoods like ebony, nadun, and satinwood, traditionally reserved for high-status individuals. The choice of material contributes to hierarchy not merely aesthetically, but structurally, allowing larger proportions, heavier forms, and more durable joinery. This supports the expectation that anthropometric variation is partly material-driven, where sturdier woods allow grander dimensions for kings and clergy. Therefore, craftsmanship literature directly contextualises why royal seating may exceed standard ergonomic measurements a hypothesis tested in this study. In their study, Mendis and Halwatura (2019) decode how vernacular timber construction practices in Sri Lanka reflect societal transitions toward environmental innovation, demonstrating how traditional wood-preservation and building techniques embody adaptive strategies suited to local climatic and cultural conditions.

2.4. ANTHROPOMETRY AND SEATING PROPORTIONS IN TRADITIONAL DESIGN

Panero & Zelnik explain that historical furniture often prioritised posture and dignity over comfort. Samarasinghe echoes this by stating that formal chairs were designed for upright seated presence — a controlled posture symbolic of authority. These observations justify why height, depth, and backrest angles may deviate from ergonomic norms in elite seating. This supports the core argument of this research: anthropometric differences were intentional expressions of discipline, authority, and social separation. The literature therefore aligns directly with the study’s analysis of proportional deviation across status. Beligatamulla, Siyambalapitiya, and Fernando (2015) argue that seating in non-secular Buddhist contexts during colonial Sri Lanka was deliberately designed to communicate social hierarchy and authority, with anthropometric variations and material choices reinforcing status and control rather than serving purely functional purposes.

2.5. ERGONOMIC STANDARDS AND MODERN ANTHROPOMETRY

Neufert’s ergonomic guidelines provide quantitative benchmarks for comfortable seating dimensions. Fernando notes that many Kandyan chairs exceed these ranges, particularly in royal furniture. This literature enables the comparative element of this study by offering measurable contrast between heritage design and modern comfort standards. The relationship between ritual power and ergonomic discomfort emerges here as a critical insight — higher chairs may have been designed not for comfort, but to elevate authority.

2.6. STATUS, SPACE, AND THE ABSENCE OF COMMONER FURNITURE

Brohier and Jayasena emphasise that no evidence of formal chairs exists for commoners — an absence that is itself meaningful anthropometric data. The lack of structured seating implies ergonomic minimalism associated with submission and simplicity. This literature supports case-based findings, confirming that hierarchy is visible not only in chair dimension but in the total absence of dimensional design for lower classes.

Collectively, these sources reveal that Kandyan furniture design was inseparable from social power, symbol, and bodily control. However, while symbolism and material culture are well documented, quantitative analysis of chair dimensions by rank remains largely unexplored. This gap validates the purpose of this study to provide empirical anthropometric evidence across hierarchy levels and evaluate how these historical proportions align or deviate from modern ergonomic comfort.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach to address the research question, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to fulfill the three main objectives.

3.1. OBJECTIVES

- To analyse how social hierarchy and status influenced the design and use of wooden chairs during the Kandyan era

This objective was fulfilled through an in-depth literature review and historical analysis of Kandyan society’s social structure, caste divisions, and cultural symbolism. Sources such as museum archives, scholarly texts, and art historical records were studied to understand how furniture reflected status. The findings show that only kings, nobles, and clergy had access to elaborately crafted chairs, while commoners used mats or platforms, highlighting the direct relationship between furniture design and social rank.

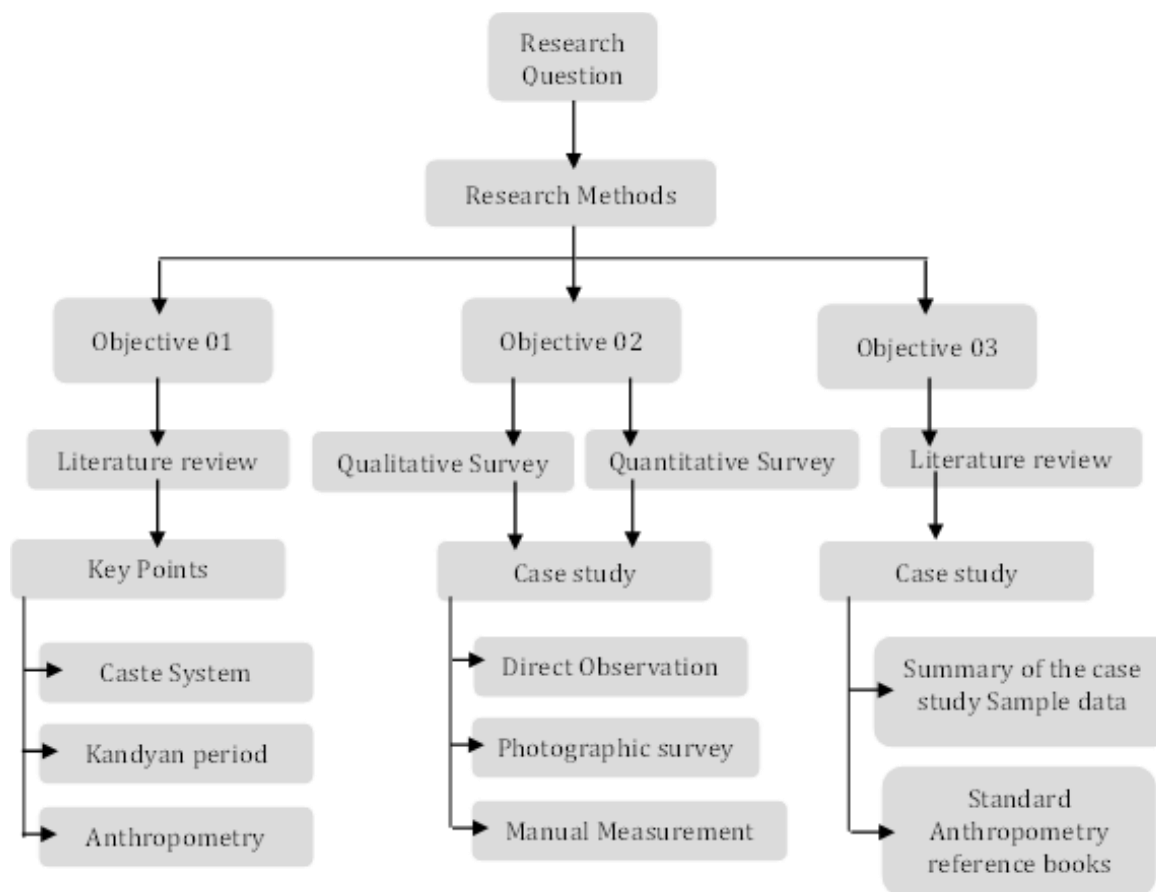
- To investigate how the anthropometric and ergonomic features of Kandyan-era chairs reflect the social status and identity of their users

This was achieved through field-based case studies at key locations such as the National Museums of Colombo and Kandy and Walukarama Temple. Through direct observation, photographic documentation, and manual measurements of chairs, data was collected on seat height, backrest dimensions, and other physical features. The analysis revealed that higher-status individuals used larger, more elevated chairs with upright postures, symbolizing authority and discipline, whereas no such designs were used by commoners.

- To compare the anthropometric features of Kandyan-era chairs with current-day ergonomic standards to evaluate their comfort and functional suitability

This comparison was carried out using measurement data from traditional chairs alongside modern ergonomic standards from references such as Neufert’s Architects’ Data and Human Dimensions and Interior Space. The results showed that many Kandyan chairs—particularly those used by royalty and monks—exceeded modern ergonomic dimensions, emphasizing symbolic presence over physical comfort. This helped assess the usability and ergonomic effectiveness of historical furniture within a contemporary framework.

The methodology of this study was formulated based on a central research question and subsequently structured to address it systematically.



Flow chart 1 – Research methodology, Source – by Auth

4. Results and Discussion

The study was conducted using nine case studies, each selected to provide insights into variations in design, symbolism, and anthropometric characteristics across different social contexts.

| Section | Social Group | Case Studies |
|---------|----------------|---|
| 4.1.1 | Royal (King) | Case Study 01, Case Study 02, Case Study 03 |
| 4.1.2 | Nobles | Case Study 04, Case Study 05, Case Study 06 |
| 4.1.3 | Clergy (Monks) | Case Study 07, Case Study 08, Case Study 09 |
| 4.1.4 | Commoners | |

4.1. CASE STUDY

4.1.1. Section 01 -Royal (King)

Case Study 01



Figure 1, King Chair
(Source: author)

This royal throne, gifted to King Wimaladharmasuriya II in 1693, symbolizes Kandyan royal authority through its grand proportions and rich symbolic motifs. Features like the Makara Torana, lion carvings, lotus petals, and sunburst designs reflect protection, sovereignty, purity, and divine power. Adorned with gold and precious stones, the throne visually reinforces the king's elevated status and spiritual role within the Kandyan kingdom.

Case Study 02



Figure 2, King Chair
(Source: author)

This royal chair, used by King Sri Vikrama Rajasingha to receive esteemed guests, is a powerful symbol of authority and grandeur. Its design features elaborate lion motifs carved into the armrests and legs, representing power, courage, and royal sovereignty in Kandyan tradition. The Makara (mythical sea creature) appears prominently on the upper structure, serving as a protective and auspicious emblem. Intricate lotus petals and flame-like carvings adorn the backrest and crown, symbolizing purity, spiritual awakening, and the divine right to rule. These motifs, combined with the chair's elevated seat and golden hue, reinforce its ceremonial significance and association with royal dignity, making it not just a functional object but a throne of symbolic stature.

Case Study 03



Figure 3, King Chair
(Source: author)

The Burgomaster chair, introduced by the Dutch between the 17th and 19th centuries, is recognized for its round backrest and multi-legged base, symbolizing authority and high status. Its circular form reflects unity and power, while its restrained European motifs such as turned wood, rosettes, and acanthus leaves highlight Dutch Baroque influences. The design conveys formality and was typically associated with colonial administrators or nobility.

4.1.2. Section 02 - Nobles

Case Study 04



Figure 4, Noble Chair
(Source: author)

The motifs on these chairs combine traditional Kandyan symbolism with colonial influences, highlighting the cultural fusion of the era. Intricate carvings such as floral patterns, scrolls, and animal forms not only serve decorative purposes but also signify the high social rank of the users. These motifs emphasize authority, elegance, and status, reinforcing the chair's role as a marker of prestige. Overall, the design details reflect both artistic craftsmanship and the social hierarchy, with more elaborate motifs reserved for elite individuals.

Case Study 05



Figure 5, Noble Chair
(Source: author)

This late 18th to early 19th-century armchair showcases neoclassical motifs characterized by its elegant sabre legs, horizontal backrest, and gently curved arms. These design elements reflect a refined aesthetic popular among the elite, combining both style and comfort. The motifs emphasize symmetry and smooth lines, highlighting handcrafted detail that signifies status and sophistication in its historical context.

Case Study 06



Figure 6, Noble Chair
(Source: author)

This side chair, popular among the upper class and used in ceremonial settings from the 16th to 19th centuries, showcases a rich blend of local Kandyan and European artistic influences. The motifs carved into the chair often include symbolic elements such as floral patterns, scrolls, and geometric shapes, which represent authority, refinement, and cultural identity. The intricate craftsmanship highlights the importance of social status, with each decorative detail carefully designed to convey prestige and dignity. The fusion of traditional Sri Lankan motifs with European stylistic features reflects the historical interactions between cultures during this period, making the chair both a functional piece and a statement of power and elegance in elite social gatherings.

4.1.3. Section 03 – Clergy (Monks)

Case Study 07



Figure 7, Clergy Chair
(Source: author)

This seat, reminiscent of King Wimaladharmasuriya II's throne and used by monks at Valukaramaya, Pothupitiya, showcases a blend of Kandyan period craftsmanship with Dutch Colonial influences. Its motifs combine traditional Kandyan symbolism with colonial design elements, reflecting both cultural heritage and historical interactions. The intricate carvings and structural details emphasize the seat's sacred and authoritative function, symbolizing the high status of its users within religious and social hierarchies.

Case Study 08



Figure 8, Clergy Chair
(Source: author)

This armchair features a lyre-shaped back, elegantly curved scroll arms, and graceful cabriole legs, all of which symbolize high social status and ceremonial importance. These motifs highlight refined craftsmanship and were traditionally reserved for elite or formal settings, emphasizing the chair's role as a marker of prestige and authority.

Case Study 09



Figure 9, Clergy Chair
(Source: author)

This chair features intricate motifs that reflect a fusion of traditional Kandyan and Dutch colonial styles, symbolizing the high social status of its users such as nobles or temple council members. The detailed carvings showcase skilled local craftsmanship, with decorative elements that emphasize authority and prestige. The blend of cultural influences is evident in the combination of elegant colonial patterns and traditional symbolic motifs, highlighting the chair's ceremonial importance and its role as a marker of social hierarchy during the period.

4.1.4., Section 04 - Commoners

During the Kandyan era, there is no historical evidence of specially designed wooden chairs for commoners. Carved wooden chairs were predominantly reserved for royalty, nobility, and religious leaders, serving as symbols of power, status, and ritual authority. Commoners typically used floor-level seating such as mats or simple stools, reflecting their social position and limited access to luxury furniture. (Furniture of the Dutch Period in Ceylon, R. L. Brohier, 1950, p. 19) formal chairs were largely confined to persons of consequence, and their use was almost unknown among common people. (Traditional Furniture in Sri Lanka, Jayasena, 2011, p. 43)

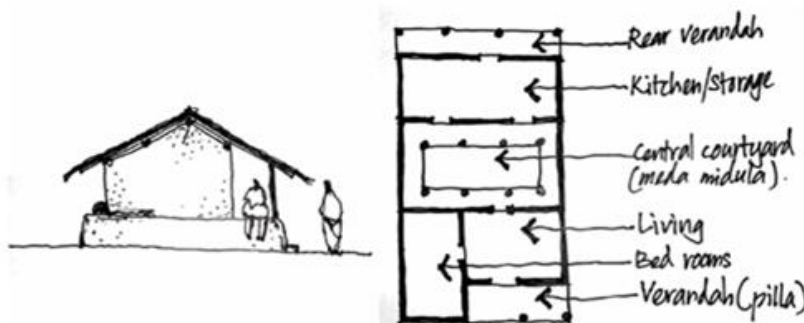


Figure 10, Pila
Source - (Sri Lanka Design Journal)

4.2. DATA ANALYSIS

Data for this study were collected from nine case studies, categorized by social group—Royal, Nobles, Clergy (Monks), and Commoners. For each chair, detailed anthropometric measurements were recorded, including seating height, back height, total height, seating width, back width, seating depth, and armrest height, to systematically analyze variations in design, proportion, and social hierarchy across different status groups.

4.2.1. Section 01 -Royal (King)

Table 1-Summary of Royal Seating In Kandyan Period(mm)

| Case study Number | Seating height | Back Height* | Total Height | Seating Width | Back Width | Seating Depth | Arm Rest Height** |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 01 | 600 | 900 | 1500 | 900 | 900 | 600 | 200 |
| 02 | 340 | 360 | 700 | 500 | 500 | 540 | 130 |
| 03 | 520 | 440 | 960 | 530 | 740 | 530 | No Arm rest |
| Range | 340-600 | 360-900 | 700-1500 | 500-900 | 500-855 | 530-600 | 0-200 |

*Back height started from seating
**Arm Rest height started from seating

4.2.2. Section 02 – Nobles

Table 2-Summary Of Nobles Seating In Kandyan Period(mm)

| Case study Nb | Seating height | Back Height* | Total Height | Seating Width | Back Width | Seating Depth | Arm Rest Height** |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 04 | 375 | 660 | 1035 | 450 | 385 | 480 | 220 |
| 05 | 450 | 480 | 930 | 490 | 400 | 460 | 260 |
| 06 | 490 | 490 | 960 | 480 | 430 | 380 | No Arm rest |
| Range | 375-490 | 480-660 | 930-1035 | 450-480 | 385-430 | 380-480 | 0-260 |

*Back height started from seating
**Arm Rest height started from seating

4.2.3. Section 03 – Clergy (Monks)

Table 3-Summary Of Clergy Seating In Kandyan Period(mm)

| Case study Nb | Seating height | Back Height* | Total Height | Seating Width | Back Width | Seating Depth | Arm Rest Height** |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 07 | 600 | 900 | 1500 | 500 | 855 | 580 | 200 |
| 08 | 600 | 570 | 1170 | 490 | 530 | 450 | 220 |
| 09 | 380 | 530 | 910 | 390 | 350 | 470 | No Arm rest |
| Range | 380-600 | 530-900 | 910-1500 | 390-500 | 350-855 | 450-580 | 0-220 |

*Back height started from seating

**Arm Rest height started from seating

4.2.4. Section 04 – Commoners

There is no historical evidence of specially designed wooden chairs for commoners during the Kandyan era. Seating furniture such as carved wooden chairs was predominantly reserved for royalty, nobility, and religious leaders, serving as symbols of power, status, and ritual authority. Commoners typically used floor-level seating arrangements, such as mats or stools made of simple materials, reflecting their social position and limited access to luxury craftsmanship.

4.3. COMPARISON AMONG THE CASE STUDY

This section presents measurement findings from royal, noble and clergy seating, analysed alongside symbolic form, ergonomic relevance, and status expression. Tables summarise quantitative variations, while discussion interprets how design, proportion and posture reflected social hierarchy.

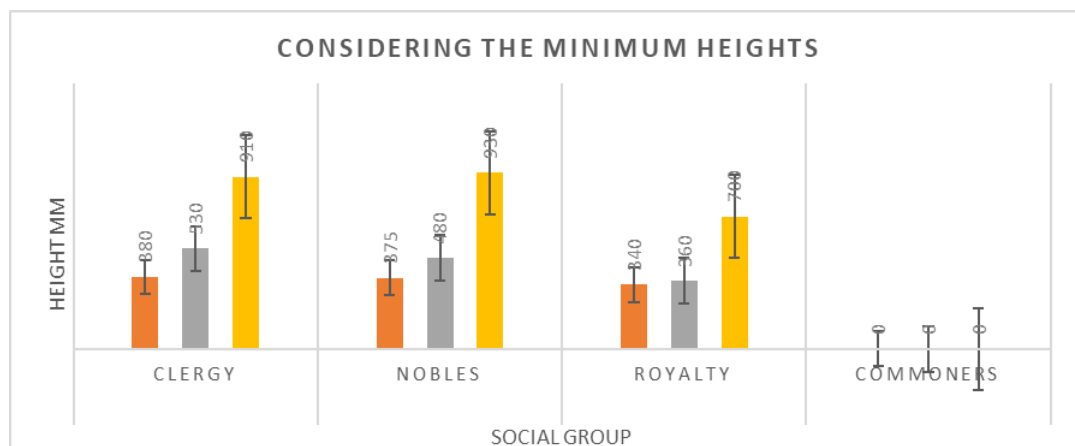
4.3.1.Hierarchy in Height

Seat height, backrest height and total height demonstrate clear stratification in Kandyan society. Royal and clergy seats recorded the greatest dimensions, while nobles aligned closer to moderate ergonomic ranges.

Table 4- Height Variation Across Social Groups (mm)

| Social Group | | Seat Height | Backrest Height* | Total Height |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| Kandyan Period | Royalty | 340-600 | 360-900 | 700-1500 |
| | Nobles | 375-490 | 480-660 | 930-1035 |
| | Clergy | 380-600 | 530-900 | 910-1500 |
| | Commoners | - | - | - |
| Standard Dimensions | | 420-500 | 300-500 | 430-950 |

*Back height ranging from seat



Bar chart 1-Considering the minimum Heights(mm)

Higher chairs elevated the user physically and symbolically, placing the king or monk above others’ eye level a posture associated with command, divinity, and authority. Nobles remained elevated but less imposing, indicating respect without equating royalty. Clergy heights closely overlap royal proportions, demonstrating that religious authority held equivalent spatial dominance. The absence of measurements for commoners reinforces their lower placement seated at ground level, spatially and socially.

4.3.2. Symbolism in Form

Symbolic carvings amplified anthropometric dominance. Royal chairs incorporated lions, lotuses, makaras, and sun motifs, visually reinforcing power and sacred legitimacy. Nobles displayed moderate symbolism, while clergy integrated religious motifs that expressed spiritual hierarchy rather than political rule. Symbolism was therefore not decoration it worked with dimension. A tall chair with a lion crest multiplies authority; symbolism without mass loses power. The combination of scale + motif becomes the language of hierarchy.

4.3.3. Material & Craft Identity

Material choice influenced scale, durability, and authority. Royal and temple seats used dense hardwoods like ebony, nadun and jak enabling wider spans, thicker backrests and taller uprights without structural failure. Noble chairs employed high-quality timber but with less mass, resulting in moderate proportions.

Table 5- Material Craft identity

| Social Group | Materials & Craft Quality | Interpretation |
|--------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Royalty | Ebony, Nadun, high carving density | Supports tall + heavy structure → ceremonial authority |
| Nobles | Hardwood, moderate carving | Respect + refinement without dominance |
| Clergy | Ebony, Nadun, high carving density | Supports tall + heavy structure → ceremonial authority |
| Commoners | Mats, platforms, cane | No anthropometric development → low social rank |

4.3.4. Ergonomic Deviations

When compared to Neufert ergonomic standards, elite chairs regularly exceed comfort thresholds — especially in seat depth and total height. This suggests discomfort was intentional; posture was meant to discipline the body, not relaxit.

Table 6- ergonomic Deviations(mm)

| Measurement Category | Royal | Noble | Clergy | Modern Standard |
|----------------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------------|
| Seat Height | 340-600 | 375 - 490 | 380-600 | 420 -500 |
| Seat Depth | 530-600 | 380 -480 | 450-580 | 400 -450 |
| Backrest Height | 360-900 | 480-660 | 530-900 | 300 - 500 |

Elite seating stretching beyond ergonomic ranges implies that discomfort acted as a symbolic tool upright posture conveys control, solemnity, and ceremonial presence. Noble ranges sit closest to ergonomics, suggesting balanced comfort for elite but non-royal function. Clergy overlap both extremes reflecting spiritual austerity yet high status.

Anthropometry, symbolism and craftsmanship align consistently with hierarchy. Royal and clergy seating assert power through height and depth, noble chairs balance dignity with usability, while commoners lacking chairs altogether demonstrates social exclusion through ergonomics. Status was therefore constructed physically, not only visually.

5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that wooden chairs of the Kandyan era were not merely functional seating typologies, but carefully crafted artefacts that embodied social power, hierarchical rank, and spatial privilege. Chairs designed for royalty, nobles, and clergy exhibited substantial variation in anthropometric dimensions—including seat height, seat depth, and backrest height—reflecting deliberate strategies to assert authority and influence bodily comportment. In contrast, the absence of formal chairs for commoners underscores a culturally entrenched ergonomic and spatial hierarchy, wherein

seating itself visually and physically demarcated social boundaries. Comparative analysis with Neufert's modern ergonomic standards reveals that many high-status chairs significantly exceeded comfort-oriented dimensions, suggesting that restricted comfort was itself a deliberate marker of formality, superiority, and ritual discipline. For example, royal chairs ranged from 340–600 mm in seat height, 530–600 mm in seat depth, and 360–900 mm in backrest height, whereas noble and clergy chairs exhibited slightly smaller yet still elevated proportions (see Table 1). In comparison, modern ergonomic standards advocate 420–500 mm for seat height, 400–450 mm for seat depth, and 300–500 mm for backrest height, highlighting the symbolic and status-driven exaggeration of traditional designs.

Material selection further reinforced these hierarchical and symbolic dimensions: the use of dense, visually commanding woods such as ebony, nadun, and satinwood enabled both structural scale and durability while simultaneously communicating visual authority. Together, anthropometric exaggeration, symbolic ornamentation, and material identity functioned as integrated mechanisms by which the Kandyan furniture system communicated and reinforced social stratification.

5.1. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study provides new empirical evidence for how social hierarchy influenced anthropometric proportions in Kandyan chairs an under-documented dimension of Sri Lankan furniture scholarship. It contributes measurement-based insight that links craft, symbolism and body-to-object relationships, expanding heritage interpretation beyond descriptive visual analysis.

5.2. LIMITATIONS

The research was limited to museum and temple-based examples, meaning measurements rely solely on surviving artefacts rather than the full historical spectrum. The absence of preserved commoner seating restricted direct anthropometric comparison for lower classes.

5.3. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies may extend this work by examining other forms of period seating, posture-based interaction, or reconstructing missing designs such as commoner furniture through experimental archaeology. Further ergonomic simulation could also help reinterpret traditional seating in modern design applications and adaptive heritage furniture production.

5.4. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENT

- Objective 1 was fulfilled by demonstrating how seating distinctly varied among kings, nobles, clergy, and commoners each group occupying different forms and levels of seating.
- Objective 2 was achieved through detailed measurements and case studies that revealed how chair dimensions corresponded to the physical stature and symbolic identity of their users.
- Objective 3 was met by comparing traditional chairs with contemporary ergonomic standards, revealing a greater emphasis on ritual and symbolism than on comfort or function.

Social hierarchy during the Kandyan Period was visually embedded in every aspect of chair design. Elevated seats, large dimensions, and upright postures denoted authority, particularly in royal and noble settings. Carved motifs such as lions, makaras, and lotuses symbolized power, protection, and purity, and were often reserved for high-status individuals. Materials like ebony and nadun were used for royal and sacred seating, while commoners relied on simple, local woods or cane. The use of height both in structure and spatial placement reinforced dominance, transforming furniture into a silent political instrument rather than a mere sitting device.

6. Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the lecturers of the Department of Design Studies, Faculty of Engineering, NSBM Green University, for their invaluable guidance, expertise, and unwavering support throughout the course of this research.

7. References

- Appadurai, A. (1986). *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bandaranayake, S. (1989). *Symbolism in space: Social dimensions of Kandyan religious architecture*. Department of Archaeology.
- Brohier, R. L. (1950). *Furniture of the Dutch period in Ceylon*. Government Press.
- Brohier, R. L. (1941). *Sinhalese domestic furniture and customs*. Government Press.
- Cave, H. W. (1908). *Christian missions in Ceylon*. Marshall Brothers.
- Coormaraswamy, A. (1909). *Sinhalese art: Buddhist and Hindu*. Mediaeval Sinhalese Art Society.
- Daswatte, C. (2009). *Furniture of Sri Lanka*. Sapumal Foundation.
- Dewaraja, L. (1988). *The Kandyan Kingdom: The secretariat's contribution to Kandyan studies*. Central Cultural Fund.
- Jayasena, R. (2011). *Traditional furniture in Sri Lanka: Cultural heritage and design*. National Craft Council.

Neufert, E., & Neufert, P. (2012). *Architects' data* (4th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Mendis and Jayasignhe (2018) examined the non-verbal communicative aspects of verandahs in “walauwa” houses in Sri Lanka’s Uva Province, highlighting how architectural elements can convey social and cultural meanings within residential spaces.

Mendis, M. S., Rajapaksha, M., & Halwatura, R. U. (2020). Unleashing the potentials of traditional construction technique in bioclimatic building designs: a case of Ambalam Sri Lanka. *Int. J. Env. Sci. Dev*, 11(6).

Mendis, M. S., & Halwatura, R. U. (2019, November). Decoding the societal transitions on environmental innovation under vernacular timber construction practice in Sri Lanka. In *2019 from Innovation to Impact (FITI)* (pp. 1-6). IEEE.

Beligatamulla, G., Siyambalapitiya, N., & Fernando, A. (2015). Seating As A Cultural Expression: A Critical Reading Of Seating In Non-Secular Buddhist Contexts In Colonial Sri Lanka. *Faru Proceedings-2015*, 491.