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Journal Aim and Scope

The Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka (JOVPA-SL) is a biannual research publication issued by the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo. The journal seeks to capture a broad spectrum of scholarly work in the fields of visual and performing arts, while also promoting multidisciplinary approaches within the humanities and social sciences. JOVPA-SL welcomes contributions from both academics and practitioner-researchers engaged in arts-based research, fostering critical dialogue and innovative perspectives on creative practice and inquiry. It serves as a platform for critical engagement, experimental methodologies, and creative pedagogy, addressing themes that are either discipline-specific such as dance, drama, performance studies, music, or visual arts or situated at the intersection of multiple disciplines. The journal invites original, rigorous, and meaningful research in creative arts and performance studies, both within and across academic boundaries. It encourages critical debate and cross-disciplinary exchange through diverse methodological and theoretical approaches. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to: theatre studies, performance studies, dance studies, ethnomusicology, music education, popular culture, dance and movement analysis, art history, art theory, visual and cultural studies, crafts, digital arts and design, film studies, and fine arts.

Cover Photo: A scene from Mandala Theatre (Nepal) production, *Wounds of War* performed at the Academic Thespians Theatre Festival (ATTF) on the 24th of July 2023 at Panibharatha Theatre. Photo credits, ATTF UVPA

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"Torana: Sri Lanka's Living Canvas of Convergence Art and Cultural Expression"

Abstract

This study examines the Sri Lankan tradition of *Torana* (Pandol) as a distinctive form of convergence art that combines multiple artistic disciplines into cohesive public art installations. Through analysis of historical practices, contemporary innovations, and the collaborative creative processes involved, this research demonstrates how *Torana* represents a unique contribution to global art installation practices. The investigation reveals how this ephemeral art form successfully integrates painting, electrical illumination, narrative storytelling, and live performance into immersive public experiences that transcend traditional artistic boundaries. By examining the work of key practitioners and the evolution of techniques from traditional methods to contemporary Matrix LED technology, this article argues that *Torana* constitutes a significant yet under recognised form of convergence art that challenges conventional distinctions between high and popular art while creating meaningful cultural experiences for diverse audiences.

Keywords: *Torana*, Convergence Art, Public Art Installation, Cultural Heritage, Layer Frame Art

Introduction

The tradition of *Torana*, known colloquially as Pandol/s, represents one of Sri Lanka's most distinctive contributions to the global landscape of public art installations[1] (Hu et al., 2013, pp. 430-438). These temporary structures, primarily erected during *Vesak* celebrations, embody a unique form of convergence art that seamlessly integrates multiple artistic disciplines, including painting, architecture, storytelling, lighting, live and recorded music into cohesive visual narratives. Unlike conventional art installations, which typically emerge from individual artistic visions or institutional frameworks, *Torana* represents a grassroots, collaborative art form that has evolved organically within Sri Lankan cultural practice over centuries.

The significance of *Torana* extends beyond its religious and cultural contexts to encompass broader questions about the nature of contemporary art, public engagement, and the democratisation of artistic expression. As Wijebandara (2012) noted, the habit of erecting *Torana* to celebrate and glorify significant events and to respect people of eminence has continued in the Eastern world from

[1] A public art installation is a work of art specifically designed for and sited in a publicly accessible location, often outdoors, intended to be experienced by a broad and diverse audience outside the traditional confines of a museum or gallery. It is more than just art in a public place; it is art conceived for the public realm, engaging with its context and audience in a way that transforms both the space and the experience of those who encounter it (Hu et al., 2013, pp. 430-438).

time immemorial. This longevity suggests not merely cultural persistence but rather the adaptive vitality of an art form that continues to evolve while maintaining its essential character.

Contemporary *Torana* practice demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of convergence art principles, combining traditional painting techniques inspired by the Buddhist paintings in temples (Bandara, 2020, pp. 39-42) with modern electrical illumination, recorded and live narrative elements, and three-dimensional sculptural components. This integration creates what can be understood as Richard Wagner's Concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'[2] (Wolfman, 2013) - a total work of art that engages multiple senses and artistic disciplines simultaneously. Wagner theorized this concept in 1849 as a new art form that would integrate the arts of music, painting, architecture, and poetry (Rogers, 2023, p. 1). According to Wolfman (2013), Wagner's mission was to reunite the arts — music and fiction, enhanced by dance and gesture (Wolfman, 2013). According to Wagner,

> A 'Zersplitterung der Kuste'—a split between the arts—occurred in Greek antiquity. He believed that 'word, music and dance originally existed in perfect harmony' within the Greek state and its tragedies. Still, with the fall of the *'Athenian Polis*', the arts began to diverge. This explains his youthful revolutionary feeling: one should aspire to create a perfect society in which the ideal harmony of the work of art could again exist (ibid.)

The relevance to *Torana* practice is profound- contemporary *Torana* installations demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of Gesamtkunstwerk principles, combining traditional painting techniques with modern electrical illumination, recorded and live narrative elements, and three-dimensional sculptural components. This creates what Wagner envisioned as a total work of art that engages multiple senses and artistic disciplines simultaneously (Wolfman 2013; Rogers 2023). The temporal nature of these installations, which exist only for the duration of religious festivals, adds another layer of artistic significance that aligns with contemporary discussions about ephemeral art (Martet, 2023) and the relationship between permanence and meaning in artistic practice. However, the ephemerality of *Torana* is not primarily an artistic choice but a religious and cultural one. This raises questions about whether applying secular ephemeral art theory fully captures the spiritual and ritual significance of these installations.

Methodological Considerations: Cross-Cultural Theoretical Application

This analysis acknowledges the methodological complexity of applying Western art theoretical frameworks[3] to non-Western cultural practices[4]. As Katipommarat (2021, pp. 354-355) found,

[2] 'Gesamtkunstwerk' is a German term meaning "total work of art," referring to the synthesis of multiple art forms into a unified, immersive experience. It was popularised by Richard Wagner in the context of opera but has since influenced architecture, performance art, and multimedia installations (Wolfman, 2013).
[3] Western art theoretical frameworks refer to the philosophical, historical, and critical frameworks developed in Western cultures to analyse, interpret, and evaluate art. These theories have evolved over centuries, shaped by cultural, social, political, and technological changes (Tractinsky, 2010).
[4] Applying Western art theoretical frameworks to non-Western cultural practices can be problematic and unfair for several reasons, including issues of cultural hegemony, misrepresentation, and the neglect of indigenous epistemologies (Elkins, 2014, p.63).

> Theravada Buddhism views art practices as related to morality; however, the relationship is not direct, and therefore, art then has value and is not only a tool to serve morality.

While concepts such as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, installation art theory, and ephemeral art provide valuable analytical tools for understanding *Torana* practice, their application requires careful consideration of cross-cultural theoretical appropriation and the potential limitations of external analytical frameworks. Despite these concerns, this study employs Western theoretical frameworks for several reasons, including the installation art genre, which provides robust analytical tools for exploring complex and multifaceted artistic practices and highlights both commonalities and differences. Cultural appropriation occurs in various forms, with different levels of exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. The above categories are derived from cultural models and relations (Rogers, 2006). However, this application is undertaken with explicit recognition that these theories emerged from cultural contexts and may not capture all dimensions of *Torana* practice that would be visible through indigenous analytical frameworks. Stolnitz (1961, pp. 131-143) explains,

> Kant (1790) establishes the concept of "disinterestedness" – aesthetic judgment should be free from personal desire, utility, or morality. This separates the art object from its social context and elevates pure formal appreciation. Defines the "autonomy" of the aesthetic sphere.

However, using these frameworks can also help highlight the innovative and sophisticated aspects of *Torana* that might otherwise be overlooked in local discourse. It can facilitate international dialogue and recognition, allowing Sri Lankan art to be appreciated on a global stage. While narrative art is a recognised category in Western theory, the specific cultural and religious context of *Torana* adds layers of meaning that secular frameworks may not fully capture.

This analysis recognises its limitations in fully representing the cultural complexity of *Torana* practice through external theoretical lenses. Future research would benefit from collaborative approaches that integrate local knowledge systems and indigenous theoretical traditions with broader cross-cultural analytical dialogue.

Historical Foundations and Cultural Context

The historical roots of *Torana* extend deep into South Asian cultural practice, with documented evidence of similar structures in ancient Buddhist contexts (Mahalakshmi, 2010, pp. 245-255). Archaeological evidence from sites such as *Sanchi* provides material testimony to the antiquity of these practices (Chakravarty, 1966, pp. 24-31). This historical precedent establishes *Torana* not as a recent innovation but as part of a continuous tradition of Buddhist artistic expression (Martet, 2023) or Buddhist art[5] that has adapted to changing technological and social circumstances.

> Cultural exchange recalls an ‘‘innocent’’ era or context in which cultures freely and without power implications mutually share cultural elements, perhaps with the effect of greater cultural understanding and creativity (Rogers, 2006, p. 499).

[5] Buddhist art in Buddhism is not emphasised. However, various Buddhist artifacts such as Buddha images, pagodas are considered as Buddhist art (Hoeurn and Yeavya, 2024, p. 139).

The evolution of *Torana* from permanent stone installations to temporary fabric, iron, and electric constructions reflects broader changes in Sri Lankan society, particularly the introduction of electricity and modern materials. Historical accounts describe how 'when *Deepankara Buddha* arrived at *Rammagama,* the people there had erected a beautiful *Torana* as a mark of respect to the *Buddha*' (Wijebandara, 2012), indicating that the practice of creating temporary decorative structures for religious commemoration has ancient precedents. This historical continuity lends legitimacy to contemporary *Torana* practice in Sri Lanka, while also demonstrating the form's capacity for innovation and adaptation.

The transition to modern *Torana* practice occurred gradually, with the introduction of electricity marking a particularly significant watershed. The introduction of electricity has led to the practice of erecting large *Torana* for Vesak celebrations, featuring pictures and lights in various colors (ibid.). This technological integration did not simply add new capabilities to existing practices. Still, it fundamentally transformed the artistic possibilities of the medium (Ryan, 2006, pp. 1-30), enabling new forms of narrative expression and audience engagement that were previously impossible. However, rapid technological change can also risk alienating older generations or diluting traditional craftsmanship. There is a delicate balance between innovation and preservation.

The Convergence of Artistic Mediums

The concept of convergence art[6] (Lim, Lee, and Jung, 2020, p. 1) finds its most sophisticated expression in contemporary *Torana* practice through the integration of multiple artistic disciplines such as painting, lighting, music, and singing that maintain their identities while contributing to a unified aesthetic experience. This concept refers to the process of different artistic movements, styles, or philosophies coming together to influence one another and create new forms of expression (Pinot's Palette Naperville, 2024). Convergence of art operates on several levels (Lee, Olson and Trimi, 2010, pp.1-12), beginning with the fundamental integration of static visual art and dynamic illumination.

> Any artwork that attempts to engage with senses other than just the images, is called multimedia[7]. The various media that could be included in multimedia are images, text, sound, video and animation. The emerging and most dominant forms of multimedia today include animation and the digital art industry (Art Buzz, 2021).

[6] Convergence art is an artistic practice and concept rooted in the integration and hybridisation of diverse disciplines, media, technologies, aesthetics, and cultural forms (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 1-24). It emerges from the broader cultural phenomenon of media convergence (Jenkins and Deuze, 2008, pp. 5-12), where boundaries between previously distinct areas (art, science, technology, entertainment, communication) blur and interact dynamically. The theoretical foundation of convergence art emerged from broader cultural shifts that began in the 1960s, when artists started experimenting with interdisciplinary approaches (Art Buzz, 2021).

[7] Multimedia art, a closely related concept, aims at combining different content types such as images, text, audio, video or animation into a single piece of creative work. The term 'multimedia art' was coined by American showman, songwriter and artist Bob Goldstein, when he inaugurated his show 'Lightworks at L'Oursin' in Southampton, Long Island, New York in July 1966 (Zuras, M. Tech Art History, 2010 cited in Burkitbaev and Kunzhigitova, 2014, p. 36)

As experienced practitioners explain, the relationship between painting and lighting requires careful coordination. According to Gallage[8] (2024), "Firstly, the artist of the *Torana* does a sketch and discusses with the electrician regarding the illumination".

The complexity of this convergence becomes apparent when examining the specific technical challenges involved. Gallage (2024) describes the process:

> I find a story that aligns with my presentation or props such as a ship, wave, peacock, elephant or cart. In other words, the presentation is not according to the story. Then I discuss with the story writer, who will develop a detailed script like a film script.

This description reveals how convergence art in *Torana* practice requires negotiation between different artistic visions and technical capabilities, resulting in collaborative works that could not be achieved through individual artistic practice. Premalal[9] (2019) explains this process as,

> This is primarily the work of the artist. His idea is the key. If the lighting designer does not understand the idea, the outcome may be a failure. In the past, expert lighting designers worked according to the plan with understanding. They improvised the idea with lights. But it happens rarely.

The integration of narrative elements represents another dimension of convergence within *Torana* practice. The inclusion of both pre-recorded and live storytelling components creates layered temporal experiences that engage audiences in multiple ways simultaneously. The storyteller "narrates a *Dhamma* story in an interesting way through devotional songs and poetry mixed with music" (Kaviratne, 2015), while the visual components provide corresponding imagery that illustrates the narrative progression. This multimedia approach anticipates contemporary digital art practices while maintaining connection to traditional oral narrative traditions. Multimedia art brings together elements from distinct mediums into one creative element (Art Buzz, 2021).

Perhaps most significantly, contemporary *Torana* practice demonstrates the successful convergence of abstract and realistic artistic elements. This achievement represents a significant artistic accomplishment, as the successful integration of seemingly incompatible artistic approaches requires sophisticated understanding of visual composition and audience perception. The fact that this convergence has been achieved by practitioners without formal artistic training speaks to the intuitive aesthetic sophistication that characterises *Torana* practice.

The Collaborative Creative Process

The creation of *Torana* installations involves unprecedented levels of artistic collaboration that challenges conventional notions of individual artistic authorship.

> For a big 18-meter *Torana*, at least 100 skilled and unskilled laborers are needed, including welders, mechanics, wood craftsmen, painters, designers, electricians, builders, scriptwriters, dramatists, musicians, announcers, promoters, event managers, security, catering, and many more (Chaturanga, 2023; Campbell, 2018; Dissanayake, 2025).

[8] Sarath Gallage started as an electrician and now a leading *Torana* creator in Sri Lanka.
[9] Ananda Premalal is a talented artist who has been involved in *Torana* art practice for many years (Premalal, 2019).

This scale of collaboration approaches that found in major film productions or opera performances yet operates within community-based organisational structures rather than institutional frameworks.

The collaborative process begins with conceptual development that involves multiple artistic disciplines from the initial planning stages. The coordination between painters and electricians exemplifies this collaborative approach, as the electrician knows viewers are counting the numbers of the art patterns while concentrating on the paintings. The illumination of the *Torana* is a key factor (Gallage, 2024). This interdependence means that neither the visual nor the lighting components can be fully developed independently, requiring constant negotiation and mutual accommodation throughout the creative process.

The role of narrative development within this collaborative framework demonstrates another dimension of the artistic process. Script writers must coordinate with visual artists to ensure narrative coherence while accommodating technical constraints and audience expectations. The storyteller holds an important place in the spectacular pandal and must possess sufficient knowledge of the history of Buddhist literature as well as the Buddha's *Dhamma* (Senaratne, 2016). This requirement ensures that narrative elements maintain religious and cultural authenticity while contributing to the overall artistic impact of the installation. Hence, Buddhist art as representations and symbols of Buddhist spirituality, it is essential to study, analyse, and interpret them according to Buddhist principles (Hoeurn and Yeavya, 2024, p. 137)

The democratic character of *Torana* collaboration extends beyond professional artistic roles to include community participation in construction and support activities. This broad participation creates a form of collective artistic ownership that differs significantly from conventional art world practices. While this model fosters inclusivity and social cohesion, it may also raise issues of artistic quality control and creative direction. Large-scale collaboration can sometimes lead to compromises in aesthetic coherence or thematic clarity.

The fact that it was not necessary to be a Buddhist to take part in a *Torana* creation project, but you must understand your viewer who comes from all over the island with different background indicates how these collaborative processes transcend religious and ethnic boundaries while maintaining cultural specificity.

Technical Innovation and Artistic Evolution

The technical evolution of *Torana* practice demonstrates sophisticated understanding of the relationship between technological capability and artistic expression. The transition from simple illumination to complex lighting systems has fundamentally transformed the medium's expressive possibilities. Early practitioners used 5V bulbs; even during the daytime, people could enjoy it (Gallage, 2024). They employed RGB (Red, Green, Blue) colours; now, pink has been added as well (ibid.). This technical progression has enabled increasingly sophisticated color palettes and lighting effects that enhance narrative expression and visual impact.

The development of Matrix LED technology has particularly revolutionised *Torana* practice by enabling more complex programming and energy efficiency that supports extended display periods (Kanchana, 2025). Contemporary practitioners utilise these technological advances to create the timing of blackout illumination, which should be in a rhythm (Gallage, 2024), demonstrating how technical innovation enables new forms of artistic expression. The rhythmic qualities of

contemporary *Torana* lighting anticipate developments in video art and digital installation practices while maintaining connection to traditional aesthetic principles.

The materials and construction techniques employed in *Torana* creation have also evolved significantly while maintaining essential characteristics of the art form. Traditional painters utilise lacquering paint on thick cotton sheets while ensuring the paint is waterproof, bright, economical and available in the corner hardware shop (Denipitiya, 2024). This practical approach to materials reflects the grassroots character of *Torana* practice while also demonstrating sophisticated understanding of technical requirements for outdoor installation and nighttime visibility.

The integration of three-dimensional elements represents another area of technical innovation that has expanded the expressive possibilities of *Torana* installations. Contemporary practice includes three-dimension creations to elaborate the story such as moving giant snake, devil, elephant or a bird (Gallage, 2024). These mechanical elements require additional technical expertise and coordination while contributing kinetic dimensions to installations that were previously limited to static visual and lighting effects.

The revolutionary contributions of individual artists have marked significant moments in the technical and artistic evolution of *Torana* practice. Motagedara Vanigaratne's 1956 innovations exemplify how individual artistic vision can transform established traditions (Dewasurendra, 2017).

> His creation of a pandal with a completely different form that departed from conventional symmetrical designs marked the beginning of an innovative tradition that was embodied in traditional pandal art, entering a different path (ibid.)

This example demonstrates how technical innovation, and artistic vision can combine to create new possibilities within traditional frameworks.

Torana as Contemporary Art Installation

The recognition of *Torana* as legitimate contemporary art installation requires examination of the medium's compliance with established criteria for installation art. Contemporary art theory recognises installation art[10] (Josephine, 2012) through several key characteristics, all of which are demonstrably present in *Torana* practice (Visualflood Magazine, 2025; MasterClass, 2020).

> Installation art came to prominence in the 1970s but its roots can be identified in earlier artists such as Marcel Duchamp and his use of the readymade and Kurt Schwitters' Merz art objects (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 33).

The intentional design and aesthetics (Tractinsky, 2010) evident in *Torana* creation reflect meticulous design with a strong focus on visual appeal, theme, and overall aesthetic impact (Dhar, 2010, pp.151, 251). This aesthetic intentionality distinguishes *Torana* from merely functional or decorative structures and aligns with contemporary installation art practices.

[10] Contemporary art theory recognises installation art through several key characteristics, including site-specificity, immersive and sensory-rich environments, the use of mixed media, temporality, and active audience engagement (Josephine, 2012; Visualflood Magazine, 2025; MasterClass, 2020).

The theoretical four characteristics of installation art include intentional design and aesthetics[11], narrative dimensions[12], immersive character[13], experimental use of materials[14] and ephemerality[15]. The narrative dimensions of *Torana* installations correspond directly to contemporary installation art's emphasis on thematic coherence and conceptual development (Combrink and Allen, 2019; Kelly, 2010; Sentient by Elysian, 2024). *Torana* mainly depict stories (mainly *Jataka* stories[16] (Husain, Zaidi, and Bhalla, 2015)), social issues (such as slaughtering cows, ill-treating parents, drug menace), cultural themes (such as the arrival of the tooth relic and Buddhism), or even replicating famous landmarks (such as *Sri Pada, Mihintalaya, Sri Dalada Maligawa*). This narrative element is a core aspect of many art installations". The requirement that *Torana* narratives draw from *Jataka* stories ensures cultural authenticity while providing rich source material for visual and dramatic interpretation. Sri Lanka has a long, continuous tradition of decorating Buddhist temples and public spaces with elaborate paintings and murals (Bandaranayake, 1974). These creations often depict *Jataka* stories, the life of the Buddha, and other religious themes, much like *Torana* installations. Using this storytelling technique *Torana* translates theory into practice involves applying theories, principles, rules, and concepts (Hoeurn and Yeavya, 2024, p. 141).

The immersive character (Sethi, 2022; Robertson, Mansfield, and Loke, 2006) of *Torana* installations represents one of their most significant contributions to contemporary art practice. These installations create an immersive environment (Cleek, 2024) for viewers, engaging multiple senses (Voto, 2006) through elaborate decorations, lighting, soundscapes including pre-recorded music tracks with narration and live singing (*Viridu)*, and even interactive elements[17] (Kluszczynski, 2010). The scale and complexity of major *Torana* installations can accommodate thousands of simultaneous visitors while maintaining narrative coherence and visual impact, demonstrating

[11] Installation art rejects passive viewing, demanding deliberate spatial orchestration. The aesthetics are not merely visual but relational, involving the viewer's bodily presence and the site's architecture (Bishop, 2007, p.56). *Torana* engages viewers through donations, reinforcing its participatory nature. Though a three-dimensional installation, it is designed for front-facing interaction, with spatial aesthetics guiding focus toward the Buddha's portrait and halo, emphasising intentional design and engagement.

[12] The narrative dimensions of *Torana* installations correspond directly to contemporary installation art's emphasis on thematic coherence and conceptual development. This alignment is evident in how *Torana* practice integrates storytelling, audience participation, and thematic symbolism—key features recognised in installation art theory (Combrink and Allen, 2019; Kelly, 2010; Socratica, 2024; Parker, 2017).

[13] Immersion character transforms viewers from observers to participants within a total environment. This disrupts traditional art-viewing hierarchies (Bishop, 2007, p. 112). *Torana* fosters immersion by transforming viewers from passive observers into active participants within a total environment. Exhibited free of charge in a public space, it challenges traditional art-viewing hierarchies, where external disturbances—weather, traffic, and noise—become integral to the experience, reinforcing its dynamic and participatory nature.

[14] Installation art privileges materiality as conceptual language. Everyday ephemeral, or industrial materials challenge art's permanence and commodification (Foster, 2008, p.23). *Torana* creators mainly use household bulbs after colouring, cheap cloths instead canvas, printing ink or lacquer paint instead oil paint, Acrylic or water colours. *Torana* structure is made of areca nut trees. The idea of using low cost materials in this art project is to keep expenses under control (Gallage, 2024).

[15] Ephemerality refers to the temporary or short-lived nature of an artwork, which exists only for a limited duration before disappearing (Claus-Bachmann, 2002; López-Bertran, 2018). *Torana* installations exist only during religious festivals like Vesak and are dismantled afterward.

[16] *Jataka* stories illustrate general Buddhist moral ideals, including honesty, wisdom, kindness, generosity and detachment (Appleton, 2015).

[17] *Torana*, features interactive elements, such as allowing people to share Vesak greetings in Sinhala, Tamil, and English via digital screens or boards (Lakpura, 2025).

sophisticated understanding of audience engagement (Jilcott and Price, 2020) and experiential design.

The experimental use of materials in contemporary *Torana* practice aligns with trends in contemporary installation art toward incorporation of non-traditional media and found objects. While maintaining traditional elements such as painted cotton panels, contemporary practice incorporates a vast array of materials, from recycled items and found objects to complex Matrix LED lighting systems and digital projections (Gallage, 2024). This material experimentation reflects artistic innovation while maintaining accessibility to community-based creators working with limited resources.

The public character of *Torana* installations positions them within broader discussions about public art and community engagement. These installations serve as a form of public art, bringing creative expression to a wide audience outside of traditional gallery spaces. Phillips (1989) explained that public art seeks to embody public or universal concepts rather than commercial, partisan, or personal concepts or interests.

> The ability to attract massive audiences from diverse social and economic backgrounds demonstrates the democratic potential of installing art practices that operate outside institutional constraints, making art accessible to everyone and embodying public concepts through extensive community involvement (Sustainability Directory, 2025; Reid, Reeve and Curtis, 2002; Phillips, 1989; Chaturanga, 2023; Campbell, 2018; Premalal, 2019)

Torana installations exemplify democratic art principles through their public accessibility, community involvement, and grassroots collaborative creation processes.

Recognition and Critical Assessment

The critical assessment of *Torana* as legitimate art form has been complicated by social hierarchies that privilege formal artistic training over community-based creative practice (Paldano, 1997; Dissanayake, 2025; Gallage 2024; Denipitiya 2024). Premalal (2019) explained that *Torana* was constructed with extensive community involvement, with individuals contributing through labour or financial means according to their capacity.

The artistic sophistication evident in *Torana* practice challenges conventional distinctions between high[18] and popular art (Bublitz et al., 2019). The visual composition skills demonstrated by community-based painters exhibit a profound ability to address the specific challenges associated with large-scale outdoor displays. These artists ensure that the proportions of figures are accurate for long-distance viewers[19] (Dissanayake, 2025), while showcasing creative expertise in selecting the most dramatic moments of a storyline like the techniques employed by comic strip artists. They carefully utilise mid-shot frames with the precision of seasoned cinematographers (Chaturanga, 2023). Claus-Bachmann (2002) analysed the macro-structure of embodiment through visualisation

[18] High art that is exhibited inside a museum or on the walls of an art gallery, everyday aesthetics—community-based murals and sculptures—form the streetscape of daily life in a locality (Bublitz et al., 2019, p. 313).

[19] This technique could be influenced from the temple paintings. Bandara (2020, p. 40) described the practice as involving *Kandyan* style, lines of use, concepts of light and darkness, proximity and distance within the painting, direct visual elements, and partial rules. These techniques are also used for paintings in various successive areas.

(eyes) of moving *Torana*, like the sequence of paintings on temple walls. However, their artistic practice is dedicated to highlighting Buddha's values to the public, inspired by Buddhist paintings found in temples. Bandara (2020, p. 40) found this as, the image of the Buddha of temple paintings are larger than the normal size of a human which is a clue of 'Maha sampradaya' style in Hindu. However, the lack of institutional recognition for *Torana* can limit its visibility and critical engagement in the global art world. This raises questions about the mechanisms through which community-based art gains legitimacy. Furthermore, the use of Layer Frame Art (WhiteWall, 2024) or Shadow Box Art (Ceesay, 2020) transforms the visually two-dimensional *Torana* into a three-dimensional presentation, thereby facilitating the lighting designers in creating depth and dynamic visual effects. Lighting designers contribute their expertise by crafting intricate decorations synchronised to the rhythmic blinking of thousands of bulbs in the outdoor night-time setting, enhancing the visual impact of the *Torana* (Gallage, 2024). Pre-recorded storytellers creatively align their narration with the frame-by-frame presentation of the *Torana*, employing techniques like radio drama production, such as the use of voice actors and sound effects to connect individual artistic frames (Gunawardena, 2025). These recordings, typically running for 30 minutes, serve as fillers that can be paused and replayed throughout the day. The background music, composed to accompany the narrative, is deliberately serene to foster a religious ambience, often featuring a theme song to enhance the emotional engagement of viewers (Hewawitanagamage, 2025). Claus-Bachmann (2002) examined this practice as an embodiment achieved through auditory realisation. The role of the *Viridu* singer (De Zoysa, 2017), who creates instant poetic verses, is pivotal in fostering audience interaction and encouraging donations. These performers, often presenting as duets, integrate their live poetic renditions with pre-recorded storytelling, using only a small hand drum *(Rabana)* to create musical accompaniment in varying rhythmic patterns (Claus-Bachmann, 2002). Further explained,

> In contrast with the spoken version, the sung version has a dramatic quality which highlights the epic expression. It can be presumed (even in the absence of material documented evidence) that this drum narration originally belonged to an old tradition of *Jataka* interpretation, particularly because of its archaic musical pattern. (ibid., p. 123)

Additionally, an anchor presenter, as part of the creative team, provides announcements and explains the artistic efforts involved, ensuring a cohesive and immersive experience (Wijelal, 2023). Creators are sensible of the fact that audiences may not engage with the *Torana* installation as a holistic artwork but may appreciate individual segments of the creative presentation. Given that these installations are displayed in public spaces during nighttime, external factors such as traffic, street vendors, and weather conditions—such as rain or wind—can disrupt the viewing experience. They concur that their artistic contribution is driven more by devotion than by commercial gain. The technical and aesthetic proficiency exhibited by these practitioners rivals that of formally trained professionals, underscoring the cultural and artistic significance of *Torana* practice in Sri Lanka. Hoeurn and Yeavya (2024, p. 140) explained this practice as,

> Buddhist art influenced by the teachings of Buddhism, expressed through architecture. Buddhist art is fundamentally about beauty, captivating the mind to inspire devotion and access to goodness and truth. It serves as a source of inspiration for faith in virtuous things, fostering inner peace and mental stability.

The innovative contributions of master practitioners like Jayasiri Semage and Motagedara Vanigaratne have gained increasing recognition within Sri Lankan cultural discourse. Semage's

critique that it is time we introduce some changes to this monotonous form (Wijebandara, 2012) reflects a sophisticated understanding of artistic development and the need for continued innovation within traditional frameworks. This critical perspective demonstrates the presence of artistic discourse and aesthetic debate within *Torana* practice that parallels developments in contemporary art.

International recognition of similar practices in other South Asian contexts suggests growing appreciation for the artistic merit of traditional public art forms. The explicit recognition of pandals, especially in places like Kolkata, India during *Durga Puja* as massive, temporary art installations (Gupta, 2024) provides precedent for similar recognition of Sri Lankan *Torana* practice. This international context suggests that the artistic significance of *Torana* extends beyond local cultural value to encompass broader contributions to global art practice.

The involvement of art critics, designers, and even organisations like UNESCO in recognising the artistic merit and cultural significance of pandals indicates growing institutional support for recognition of these practices as legitimate art forms (Agrawal, 2024; UNESCO, 2022). This institutional recognition provides important validation while also raising questions about the relationship between community-based art practices and formal cultural institutions.

Future Directions and Contemporary Relevance

Torana appears in various forms like *Gok Torana*[20], *Mal Torana*[21], *Gedi Torana*[22], *Bulath Torana*[23], *Ramba Torana*[24] *(Wijayawardena, 2021), Laser Torana*[25] or *Digital Torana*[26], but this article focuses on Vesak *Torana*. Crafted during Vesak Poya, it uses art, illuminated patterns, and music to depict a story. Live singing accompanies the *Torana*, providing both education through *Dhamma* and entertainment during the Vesak festival.

Torana, traditionally created to align with the Vesak Poya, narrates a specific story rooted in Buddhist teachings. These stories are brought to life through vibrant paintings by skilled artists, synchronised light patterns, and pre-recorded music that elucidates and enriches the narrative. In some instances, live singing accompanies the display, further elevating the experience with a dynamic auditory element. The blend of visual and auditory storytelling serves the dual purpose of imparting *Dhamma* knowledge while offering entertainment, fostering a cultural atmosphere of reflection and celebration.

Its creation demands significant effort, skill, and financial investment, as noted by Premalal (2019). Despite the challenges, the *Torana* remains a vital cultural tradition, showcasing Sri Lanka's artistry and devotion. It stands as a testament to the country's ability to unite varied artistic disciplines into a single, cohesive expression.

The future development of *Torana* as an art form faces both opportunities and challenges that reflect broader trends in contemporary art and cultural practice. The increasing availability of

[20] *Torana* created with coconut leaves (Wijayawardena, 2021)
[21] *Torana* created with fresh flowers (ibid.)
[22] *Torana* created with coconuts and king coconuts (ibid.)
[23] *Torana* created with fresh beetle leaves (ibid.)
[24] *Torana* created with bananas (ibid.)
[25] *Torana* presented with laser beams (Sri Lanka Foundation, 2025)
[26] *Torana* accessed with digitally only (Peiris, 2013)

digital technologies offers new possibilities for integration of interactive and multimedia elements that could expand the expressive range of installations while maintaining essential characteristics of the tradition. The challenge lies in incorporating these technologies while preserving the democratic and community-based character that distinguishes *Torana* from institutionally produced digital art.

The growing global interest in ephemeral and experiential art forms suggests potential for increased international recognition of *Torana* practice. Contemporary art's emphasis on temporary installations and site-specific work aligns closely with the fundamental characteristics of *Torana*, potentially opening new avenues for cultural exchange and artistic collaboration. The challenge will be maintaining authenticity and community ownership while engaging with international art networks and institutions. However, the ephemerality of *Torana* is not primarily an artistic choice but a religious and cultural one. This raises questions about whether applying secular ephemeral art theory fully captures the spiritual and ritual significance of these installations.

The documentation and preservation of *Torana* knowledge and techniques represents an urgent priority for ensuring the continuation of this art form. The fact that most practitioners haven't had an academic background apart from Veteran Artists Jayasiri Semage or Motagedara Vanigaratne, means that essential knowledge and skills remain largely within oral tradition and hands-on training systems. Developing systematic documentation and training programs while preserving the informal and collaborative character of tradition presents significant challenges.

The potential for academic study and theoretical development of *Torana* practice offers opportunities for deeper understanding of convergence art principles and community-based artistic collaboration. The sophisticated artistic achievements evident in this practice warrant serious academic attention that could contribute to broader theoretical understanding of collaborative art, public installation practice, and the relationship between tradition and innovation in contemporary art.

Conclusion

Torana is a distinctive and deeply symbolic art installation unique to Sri Lanka. These remarkable structures converge multiple art forms, blending visual artistry, intricate lighting designs, storytelling, and music into a harmonious presentation that captivates and educates audiences during the Vesak period. The *Torana* is not merely a decorative element; it is an immersive cultural expression that embodies the island's artistic ingenuity and spiritual heritage. The examination of *Torana* as convergence art reveals a sophisticated artistic practice that makes significant contributions to contemporary understanding of collaborative creativity, public art installation, and the integration of multiple artistic mediums. This tradition demonstrates that meaningful artistic innovation can emerge from community-based practice operating outside formal institutional frameworks, challenging conventional hierarchies that privilege academic training over practical artistic achievement. The successful convergence of painting, electrical illumination, narrative performance, and three-dimensional elements within *Torana* installations represent a unique achievement in contemporary art practice. The ability to integrate abstract and realistic visual elements while maintaining narrative coherence and creating immersive audience experiences demonstrates sophisticated aesthetic understanding that merits recognition within broader art historical discourse. The scale and complexity of major installations, requiring coordination of hundreds of participants across multiple artistic disciplines, approaches that are found in major institutional art projects while maintaining democratic participation and community ownership.

The recognition of *Torana* as legitimate art installation practice has implications that extend beyond Sri Lankan cultural context to encompass broader questions about the nature of contemporary art, the role of tradition in artistic innovation, and the potential for community-based art practices to contribute to global artistic development. The integration of traditional narrative sources with contemporary technological capabilities demonstrates how authentic cultural expression can evolve without losing essential characteristics or community relevance. The future development of *Torana* practice will depend on successful navigation of tensions between preservation and innovation, local authenticity and international recognition, traditional methods and contemporary technologies. The growing academic and institutional interest in this art form presents opportunities for enhanced documentation, theoretical development, and cultural preservation while also raising concerns about the potential effects of formalisation on the democratic and collaborative character that distinguishes *Torana* from conventional art practice. The study of *Torana* as convergence art reveals potential for artistic practice that goes beyond traditional boundaries between high and popular culture, individual and collective creativity, and traditional and contemporary expression. This art form demonstrates that meaningful aesthetic achievement and cultural significance can emerge from grassroots creative practice that maintains connection to authentic community values while engaging with contemporary artistic concerns. The recognition and study of such practices enriches understanding of the full range of human creative expression while challenging restrictive definitions of legitimate artistic practice.

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Performing Emotions: A Phenomenological Reflection on Screen Acting[1]

Abstract

The question of emotion in the actor's art has remained one of the most contested issues in Western acting theory since Denis Diderot's seminal Paradoxe sur le comédien (The Paradox of Acting). Diderot famously argues that, in order to move the audience, the actor should not herself be moved by emotion. In response to this proposition, William Archer, in Masks or Faces, advances an opposing position, arguing that the actor genuinely experiences emotion in the process of acting. A similar emphasis on the psychological experience of emotion can be found in the American Method acting tradition, particularly through the influence of Stanislavski's early psychological approach to acting and the technique of emotional memory. Moving beyond this binary opposition between emotional detachment and psychological identification, this paper explores the bodily rootedness of human perception, affect, and action. It argues that emotions in acting are not necessarily generated within the actor's mind as an isolated psychological phenomenon; rather, they emerge through the actor's embodied, situated, and psychophysical engagement with the world. Drawing on phenomenological perspectives, the paper proposes that the actor's emotional experience is ignited through a bodily being-in-the-midst-of experience, in which body, consciousness, environment, imagination, and circumstance become dynamically entangled. The paper develops this argument through autobiographical reflections on my own experience of performing the character of Silindu in the television series Beddegama (Village in the Jungle), based on Leonard Woolf's novel. Through phenomenological descriptions of my own experience of performing Silindu for the screen, this paper challenges the assumption that the convincing portrayal of emotion is primarily a psychological achievement. Instead, it argues that screen emotion emerges from the actor's psychophysical engagement with the given circumstances. The actor's emotional experience is therefore not simply something that exists within the mind and is subsequently expressed through the body. Rather, emotion emerges relationally through the dynamic coupling of the actor's body mind, environment, imagination, sensory perception, and given situation.

Keywords: Screen Acting, Embodied Emotion, Phenomenology, being-in-the-midst-of experience

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Introduction

The question of emotion in the actor's art has remained one of the most contested issues in Western acting theory since Denis Diderot's seminal essay, "*Paradoxe sur le comédien*" (*The Paradox of Acting*). Diderot famously argues that, in order to move an audience, an actor need not be emotionally moved (Diderot et al., 2015). In response, William Archer, in "*Masks or Faces*", advances an opposing position, arguing that actors genuinely experience emotions in the process of acting (Archer, 2010). A similar emphasis on the psychological experience of emotion can be found in the American Method acting tradition, particularly in the influence of Stanislavski's early psychological approach and his concept of "emotional memory" (Carnicke, 1998). Moving beyond this binary opposition between emotional detachment and psychological identification, this paper explores the bodily grounding of human perception, affect, and action.

This paper examines how an actor experiences and performs emotion in front of the camera. Particular attention is given to the performance of negative emotions such as irritation, anger, mild anger, rage, and frustration through a psychophysical approach to screen acting. I use the term "psychophysical" to indicate that acting involves the inseparable interaction of inner and outer dimensions: the body and mind function together in the actor's work. As this seminar explores irritation in a cross-cultural context, I focus on how emotions are enacted and shaped during the creative process. A dominant assumption in discussions of film acting is that genuine emotions are concealed within the actor and that the camera can capture these inner dynamics through its technology. This perspective divides the actor's work into inner and outer dimensions. Emotion is consequently understood as something generated within the actor's psyche and then expressed outwardly.

The purpose of this paper is to encourage discussion of emotions as bodily grounded phenomena through which we attune ourselves to others and to the world. It proposes that emotion cannot be understood solely as an activity of the brain or nervous system; it is also grounded in our bodily existence and spatial relationships (Johnson, 2024). This proposition challenges dominant approaches to acting theory that rely on Cartesian dualism, according to which the mind generates emotion internally and subsequently expresses it through the body.

The paper first outlines key debates about emotion in acting and distinguishes between emotions experienced in everyday life and emotions performed under given circumstances. It then considers phenomenological approaches to emotion, with particular attention to Martin Heidegger's concepts of attunement and mood, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of embodied intentionality. The discussion subsequently turns to selected Asian performance practices and the concept of "*prana vayu*" (vital energy) as a way of reconsidering the relationship between body, perception, and action. Finally, I draw on my autobiographical experience as a screen actor in "Beddegama", a television series directed by Priyanatha Colombage and based on Leonard Woolf's novel "*The Village in the Jungle*". I focus on my performance of the lead character, Silindu, to propose an externalist understanding of emotional recreation in screen acting.

Phenomenology of Emotion

Phenomenology is concerned with human emotion because emotion discloses our relationship with the world and helps reveal fundamental structures of human existence (Szanto & Hilge Landweer, 2020). In this discussion, I draw on two phenomenologists: Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although neither philosopher developed an extensive theory of human emotion in isolation, their accounts of human existence provide important ways of understanding emotion and its role in lived experience. I begin with Heidegger's account and then turn to Merleau-Ponty.

Heidegger's concept of "attunement" is central to understanding his account of emotion as part of our primordial way of existing. He uses the German term "*Befindlichkeit*" to describe "a general condition of an entity existing in the mode of being-in-the-world" (Szanto & Hilge Landweer, 2020, p. 104). Heidegger argues that "Being attuned is not initially related to the psychical; it is itself not an inner condition which then reaches out and leaves its mark on things and persons" (Heidagger cited in Szanto & Hilge Landweer, 2020). Attunements are not simply elements of an individual's psychological life; rather, they are constitutive features of being-in-the-world (ibid, 106). In this way, Heidegger challenges the subject–object duality often associated with emotion and perception. Emotion can instead be understood as mood, which shapes our basic ways of encountering and inhabiting the world.

Building on Heidegger's work, Merleau-Ponty offers an account that supports an understanding of emotion as embodied and externally situated. He rejects a strict division between the inner life of emotion and the outward bodily actions through which it is expressed. Instead, emotions are embodied and intertwined with worldly phenomena. Our bodies enable us to connect with others and the world through characteristic styles of bodily comportment. As Merleau-Ponty's position is summarised by Szanto and Landweer, "mental phenomena are not hidden inside our bodies like marbles in a container. Rather, our body as a whole is constitutive of subjectivity. I don't simply have a body—'I am my body' (Szanto & Hilge Landweer, 2020, p. 198). To understand this position, we must reconsider the nature of the human body. The body is neither merely an object nor a detached subject. It has physical properties—such as size, weight, colour, shape, and texture—but it is also the body through which we experience and engage with the world. These dimensions should not be treated as separate entities; they form a continuous, lived whole. Merleau-Ponty describes this as the "body-subject": "My body is a physical object with properties like size, weight, color, shape, and texture, but it is also and at the same time a subject, something I experience and live through from the inside as I interact with the people and things around me" (ibid).

Merleau-Ponty's account of consciousness is therefore closely connected to the lived body. Bodily intentionality links us to the world through what he calls the "intentional arc." Intentionality here should not be mistaken for a function of an isolated inner mind. Rather, it refers to the body's capacity to orient itself towards the world through its styles of comportment. Emotions, accordingly, can be understood as bodily ways of being attuned to what surrounds us. As the account cited above suggests, emotions are embodied and externalised as styles of bodily comportment or "variations of being in the world" (ibid.). Merleau-Ponty explains this externalist position through the example of an angry or threatening gesture:

> "I do not perceive the anger or the threat as a psychological fact hidden behind the gesture; I read the anger in the gesture. The gesture does not make me think of anger; it is the anger itself" (Merleau-Ponty cited in Szanto & Hilge Landweer, 2020, p. 199).

This externalist perspective provides a useful starting point for reconsidering how an actor's emotions are created and perceived during performance.

Acting and Emotion

One of the major debates in acting theory concerns whether actors experience genuine emotions while performing. This question has generated sustained discussion about the nature and extent of emotional involvement in acting. Susana Bloch argues that acting behaviour is a learned process that can be taught and reproduced at will. Although everyday emotions and performed emotions have similarities, they also differ. As Bloch explains, "in a spontaneous emotion, for example, the emotogenic stimulation comes from the real world, either external or internal; in the 'represented' or 'played' emotion, the stimulus comes from a text, and the reaction is performed voluntarily in a predetermined place and at a programmed moment in time" (Zarrilli, 1995, p. 197).

Here, the term "text" is important because it identifies one source of stimulation and inspiration for the actor. A screenplay or play text establishes the given circumstances, context, and imaginary framework within which the actor develops a character in relation to co-actors, objects, and the environment. If actors are to learn to recreate life-like behaviour on stage or screen, Bloch suggests that their training should address three areas: voluntary control of the body or body parts involved in emotional and verbal behaviour; techniques for managing psychophysiological activation and performance-related stress while balancing excitatory and inhibitory neural processes; and the ability to stimulate an emotion by reproducing, at will, the respiratory, postural, and facial configurations associated with everyday emotional behaviour (Zarrilli, 1995, p. 199).

I am particularly interested in Bloch's third point. Acting behaviour is a skill that actors learn through the coordination of respiration, posture, and facial configuration. Respiration—inhalation and exhalation—is especially important in considering how actors generate and shape emotions in relation to the given circumstances. Breathing operates alongside posture and gesture to produce the desired emotional expression. When an actor adopts a posture and gestural pattern appropriate to the role, the respiratory system is simultaneously engaged in supporting the delivery of the text. The actor's facial expressions, breathing patterns, and bodily gestures become visible to the camera and to the audience. These elements work together rather than functioning as separate components of performance.

Respiration and *Prana Vayu*

The relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of acting is central to the performance of emotion in theatre and film. One influential account holds that emotions originate in the actor's inner world—the mind—and are then expressed through facial expressions and bodily actions. In this model, emotion moves from the inside to the outside. Phillip Zarrilli's discussion of Asian martial arts and dance-drama practices offers a different way of conceptualising the body and emotional performance.

Discussing Usha Nangyar's approach to *Kūṭiyāṭṭam,* Zarrilli explains how metaphors used in training can guide performers towards a different understanding of emotional expression. Usha is instructed to use her eyes as a central organ for inhalation and exhalation—to "breathe through her eyes." Similarly, in the *Kalaripayattu* martial arts tradition of Kerala, practitioners are taught to use the navel as a centre of perception: the navel becomes a centre of seeing. "Breathing through the eyes" and "looking through the navel" function as metaphors that shift conventional understandings of seeing and breathing. Zarrilli explains:

> In a bio-medical sense, it is not possible of course literally to 'breathe' through one's eyes. However, as explained in detail below, in South Asia the term translated as 'breath', prana or prana-vayu, also means 'wind' or 'winds' (whether external in the environment or internal within the body), as well as 'vital energy', i.e., the force of life itself. Prana as the 'wind' or 'vital energy' is therefore an animating force per se, and is not confined to the bio-medical model of the 'breath (Zarrilli, 2011, p. 248).

"*Prana vayu*" can therefore help us reconsider how actors generate and perform emotion through the interaction of breathing, posture, and bodily comportment. In a paper published elsewhere, I explored the relationship between emotion and the actor's gut, suggesting that the gut can be understood as a site through which simulated emotions are generated. In Sri Lankan everyday language, expressions such as "*bokka*", "*boken karanawa*", and "*bokken ranga paanawa*" refer colloquially to an inner, gut-level source of feeling or conviction in acting. In this context, "*bokka"* refers to the bowels or an interior bodily region associated with truthful feeling and performance. As cited in my earlier work, "Recent clinical studies have revealed that there are direct links between the gut and the moods. Writers like Wilson have argued that in order to understand the relationship between the psyche and the body, our attention needs to be directed from the traditional focus on the central nervous system and brain to other parts of the body" (Barnacle, cited in Liyanage, 2016, p. 23). The English expression "butterflies in my stomach" similarly connects emotional experience with sensations in the gut.

The human body has several openings through which it remains connected to the world, including the mouth, ears, and nostrils. The body is therefore not a sealed or self-contained entity; it is continually affected by and responsive to external stimuli. Our relationship with the environment emerges through this ongoing exchange between body and world. As discussed above, "*prana vayu*" enters through the nostrils and mouth and is associated with breath, vitality, and the energy that enables us to engage with our surroundings. In this sense, the inner and outer dimensions of experience are intertwined. The Sanskrit term "*prana*" is commonly associated with breath or vital life force, while "*vayu*" refers to wind or a moving force. The Greek term "*pneuma*" (πνεῦμα) similarly carries meanings associated with wind, breath, and spirit, and has also been connected to ideas of mind.

Screen Acting and Emotional Performance

I now turn to screen acting and the actor's involvement in performing emotion. Konstantin Stanislavski, a major figure in the development of modern acting, focused largely on acting for live performance and developed concepts to explain the psychophysical nature of the actor's work.

His approach sought to understand how actors could perform truthfully and authentically on stage. Although Stanislavski wrote less specifically about film acting, two of his pupils who travelled to America in the early twentieth century helped disseminate his teachings among theatre and film practitioners. As a result, concepts from his earlier work, including "emotion memory" and the "magic if," became influential tools for actors seeking emotional truth in screen performance.

Discussions of screen acting often divide the actor's work into an inner emotional world and an outer physical world, treating these as separate dimensions of the craft. The inner is associated with the actor's emotions, while the outer is associated with physical and facial movements. I consider this division a serious misunderstanding of human emotion and performance. Screen acting does require skills that differ from those used in stage acting, but this does not mean that either medium is inherently more difficult than the other. Tamur Tohver, however, argues that "to achieve minimalistic and nuanced performance on camera, the screen actor needs to develop and portray a more sophisticated and detailed inner world" (Stamatiou and Carnicke, 2026, p. 31). This formulation retains the distinction between inner and outer dimensions.

The "inner world" to which Tohver refers is the emotional portrayal of the character, often described as something hidden within the actor's psyche. From the phenomenological perspective developed in this paper, such a description is incomplete. Nevertheless, Tohver's discussion of Stanislavski's concept of "radiation" ("*izlucheniya*") is useful for thinking about screen acting. Stanislavski used the term to describe an actor's unspoken communication and the subtle, often unconscious, score of actions that can be important on camera (ibid., p. 31). Stanislavski's interest in radiation was also connected to his engagement with Indian yogic traditions. Yoga was used in actor training at the Moscow Art Theatre, with "*prana*", or vital energy, as an important concept. As cited by Stamatiou and Carnicke, "prana rays become the instrument of true communication with the fellow actors, with oneself, with an object, and with the audience" (Techerkasski, cited in Stamatiou and Carnicke, 2026, p. 32).

It is difficult to claim that screen acting is more complex than stage acting, or that emotions portrayed on screen are more truthful than those performed on stage. Actors who work in both media will recognise that each requires a distinct approach. Stage performance often involves a relatively continuous sequence of actions, allowing the actor to sustain the character's physical and emotional score over time. By contrast, screen acting is shaped by the fragmentary nature of filming: scenes may be shot out of sequence, and continuity must be recreated across separate takes.

Nevertheless, within an individual shot, a screen actor can experience a flow of movement, emotion, and action within the time available. Returning to the concept of radiation, John Gillett argues that an actor's unspoken communication is established partly through the eyes: "We listen with the eyes as well as the ears. The eyes create a continuous flow of contact and energy that prompt words, actions, thoughts and feelings, some of which may be expressed, some of which may only be experienced while the other actor is talking" (ibid., p. 31). This resonates with the instruction given to performers in Kūṭiyāṭṭam to "breathe through the eyes." The eyes become a means through which the actor attends to a co-actor and the situation, helping to generate the vocal, physical, and emotional life of the character.

Silindu and His Emotions

I now turn to my own experience of performing Silindu and consider how emotion is enacted in front of the camera. Given the time available, I have selected a sequence from episode 91 of the 100-episode television series "*Beddegama*". In this sequence, Silindu escorts Ralahami, the village headman, to a chena cultivation plot in order to conclude a deal. During the extended sequence, Silindu speaks at length, while Ralahami occasionally interrupts him.

Silindu is the central character in the series. He is a hunter who lives by cultivating a chena and has two young daughters and a sister living in his household. He is a poor man exploited by several people, including merchants from a nearby town and the village headman. These men also direct their attention towards Silindu's beautiful daughters. Eventually, Silindu kills two of his exploiters: a merchant and the village headman. In the selected scene, he deliberately leads Ralahami to the chena, intending to shoot him once he has been separated from the other villagers.



Figure 1: Silindu (Saumya Liyanage) talks about his fear of jungle with Arachchi (Village Headman), *Beddegama*, Episode 91, photo credits, Colambage Films, Creative Force 2026.

As the sequence demonstrates, irritation and anger are its dominant emotional currents (see figure 1). Silindu begins by telling one of his familiar stories about the jungle, its animals and deities, and his fear of the forest. He gradually turns to Ralahami and describes how a buffalo hides in the bush before attacking. He explains the animal's behaviour, its tactics, and its crude and vicious ways of killing. By the end of this extended conversation, Silindu has decided to shoot Ralahami. His words gradually irritate Ralahami, and this irritation intensifies as the story develops. Silindu, by contrast, performs excitement, fear, and vulnerability, followed by a restrained form of anger, as he moves towards the final stage of his plan to kill his prey.

Silindu nevertheless remains calm and focused. His anger is not fully displayed through his facial expression. Instead, his eyes remain open and sharply focused on his prey. His bodily comportment reveals his stance and readiness to kill. Breathing plays a vital role in conveying his emotional engagement with the situation. This is particularly visible in his torso. His dialogue follows a rhythmic pattern, with the diaphragm supporting the low-pitched delivery of his voice. The

movement of his torso makes visible the role of respiration in shaping the emotion required by the scene. His eyes function in a way comparable to the eyes of a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performer: they absorb and remain connected to the person before him. It is as though Silindu is breathing through his eyes. His body moves rhythmically as muscular contractions support his deep voice. These muscular movements, coordinated with continuous respiratory activity in the torso, help ground his emotional engagement in the scene.

Silindu's psychophysical transformation is completed through his interaction with the co-actor playing Ralahami. His emotions do not emerge in isolation; they develop through the interplay between his co-actor and the surrounding environment. As Ralahami's irritation becomes visible through his bodily comportment and facial expressions, Silindu adjusts his own comportment in response. Their performances become attuned to one another through a process of



Figure 2: Silindu (Saumya Liyanage) confronts with village headman showing his discontent with him. *Beddegama* Television Series, Episode 91, Photo Credits, Colambage Films, Creative Force, 2026.

intersubjectivity. The co-actor's bodily attitude invites Silindu to shape his own physical attitude, through which the emotional charge of the scene develops. Silindu's emotions, therefore, are not generated exclusively within an inner psychological space. They emerge and are performed through the interaction between bodies and their shared environment.



Figure 3: Silindu (Saumya Liyanage) shots Arachchi (Village Headman) and reacts to his fall. *Beddegama* Television Series, Episode 91, Photo Credits, Colambage Films, Creative Force 2026.

Conclusion

This reflection on screen acting has explored emotion as a bodily grounded and relational phenomenon rather than as an inner state that is subsequently expressed through the body. Drawing on phenomenology, acting theory, and selected Asian performance practices, I have considered how respiration, posture, gesture, gaze, and interaction contribute to the performance of emotion. The concept of "*prana vayu*" offers one way to understand the dynamic relationship between bodily vitality and the actor's engagement with the world.

My experience of performing Silindu in "*Beddegama*" illustrates how an actor's emotional life can develop through the coordination of bodily actions, breathing, gaze, vocal rhythm, and responsiveness to a co-actor. Irritation and anger in this sequence are not simply concealed feelings revealed by the camera. They take shape through the actor's embodied relationship with the character's circumstances, the other performer, and the environment. This suggests an externalist and relational approach to emotional recreation in screen acting, in which emotion is enacted through the body's ongoing attunement to the world.

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UNESCO-Inscribed Musical Traditions as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Contributions to Sustainable Development

Abstract

Traditional music plays a significant role in preserving cultural identity, transmitting knowledge, and strengthening community cohesion. As a key domain of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), many musical traditions have been recognized through UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists. This study examines the contributions of UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and explores the safeguarding practices associated with their sustainability. A qualitative documentary research design was adopted, drawing on UNESCO documentation and information related to eleven musical heritage elements inscribed between 2021 and 2024. The elements were selected to represent diverse geographical regions and forms of musical heritage, including singing, dance, rituals, and traditional craftsmanship. The analysis was guided by a conceptual framework connecting intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, cultural sustainability, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNESCO documentation was examined through thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes related to knowledge transmission, community participation, gender inclusion, economic opportunities, and safeguarding practices. These themes were subsequently examined in relation to relevant SDGs and their targets. The findings indicate that UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions contribute to multiple dimensions of sustainable development. Strong associations were identified with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Among these, SDG 16 emerged as the most frequently identified goal, highlighting the role of traditional music in promoting social cohesion, cultural dialogue, and community participation. The analysis of UNESCO documentation on traditions such as Mek Mulung, Hiragasy, and Dutar making identified recurring connections between musical performance, traditional craftsmanship, community participation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, highlighting the importance of holistic and community-based safeguarding approaches. The study further identifies lessons from international safeguarding experiences that may inform the preservation and sustainable management of

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traditional music heritage in Sri Lanka. Overall, the findings suggest that musical Intangible Cultural Heritage contributes not only to cultural continuity but also to broader social, educational, and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

Keywords: Cultural Sustainability, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development Goals, Traditional Music, UNESCO

Introduction

Music reflects human creativity and cultural diversity as an integral element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Traditional music serves as a medium for storytelling, historical preservation and community bonding worldwide. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 2003 Convention, ICH refers to "the oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe" that are transmitted across generations (UNESCO, 2023b, p. 6). The list of UNESCO's ICH has grown to include new inscriptions since 2008. The UNESCO ICH inscribed element list includes 788 elements representing 150 countries across five regions (UNESCO, 2023b). The terms music and song appear in 304 of the 584 entries on the list (52%), referring to music alone or in combination with other qualities such as dance and poetry (De-Miguel-Molina et al., 2021). This indicates the significant presence of musical traditions within UNESCO-inscribed Intangible Cultural Heritage and highlights their close connections with other cultural practices. Given this representation, examining how musical traditions contribute to sustainable development and how their safeguarding practices support cultural continuity is important for understanding the broader role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Traditional music serves as a primary vehicle for the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, acting as a cultural narrative that preserves ethnic memory (Jing et al., 2025). While other forms of ICH may rely on physical artifacts, musical traditions are sustained through oral transmission, which provides them with a distinct convincing power that allows them to persist across centuries (Mandula et al., 2025). Traditional musical heritage is a unique form of ICH because it is a living, performance dependent practice that simultaneously embodies identity, social cohesion, and economic value, making it uniquely positioned to advance multiple sustainable development goals (Liang & Gingging, 2026; Tang & Wu, 2025). Cultural sustainability works as a link between material heritage, intangible heritage, tradition, and identity (Auclair & Fairclough, 2015; Scovazzi, 2023). Protecting this heritage supports cultural resilience, enriches global cultural landscapes, and promotes intercultural dialogue, which is vital in a rapidly globalizing world where intangible cultural elements face threats from modernization, loss of practitioners, and diminishing community engagement.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the 2030 Agenda, are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 (United Nations, 2016). While the SDG framework was initially conceptualized through a tripartite matrix of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, the discourse surrounding global development

has undergone a significant ontological evolution. Critics have historically argued that a strictly techno-economic approach fails to capture the human systems that dictate how societies interact with their environments, leading to a paradigm shift that recognizes culture as an indispensable pillar of sustainable development (Astara, 2014; Hawkes, 2001). Although the 2030 Agenda does not feature a discrete, standalone goal dedicated exclusively to culture, the final text explicitly acknowledges that "all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development" (UCLG, 2018, p. 4). The preservation of cultural heritage through targeted educational and training initiatives is vital for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those concerning inclusive education, localized economic growth, and sustainable urban communities (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of culture in sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001; Astara, 2014), examined music as Intangible Cultural Heritage (De-Miguel-Molina et al., 2021), and explored the role of cultural heritage in education and training (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). However, these studies do not specifically provide a comparative analysis of how UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions relate to individual Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how their safeguarding practices support cultural sustainability. This study addresses this specific area by examining selected UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions from 2021 to 2024 through qualitative documentary analysis. By identifying relationships between musical heritage, safeguarding practices, and relevant SDGs, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the potential contributions of traditional music to sustainable development and to identify lessons that may inform safeguarding strategies in Sri Lanka.

This paper aims to examine UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions as forms of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and to analyse their contributions to sustainable development, with particular attention to the safeguarding practices that support their continuity and transmission across generations. The main research question associated with this research is “What are the contributions of UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions, as intangible cultural heritage, to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?

Sub questions associated with this research are

1. How do UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions contribute to specific Sustainable Development Goals and targets?
2. What are the prevalent safeguarding and management practices for UNESCO-listed musical traditions, and how do they align with sustainable development principles?
3. What best practices and lessons from international UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions can inform effective safeguarding strategies for traditional music heritage in Sri Lanka?

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design to examine selected UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs). Documentary analysis was appropriate because the study focused on information contained in official heritage documentation, including descriptions of cultural elements, safeguarding measures, community participation, and knowledge transmission. The study did not seek to measure the direct impact of musical traditions on SDG achievement. Instead, it examined documented relationships between musical heritage, safeguarding practices, and sustainable development. The analysis was guided by a conceptual framework connecting ICH, cultural sustainability, safeguarding practices, and the SDGs. Cultural sustainability provided the broader perspective for examining the continuity of cultural practices and the transmission of knowledge across generations. The SDG framework was used as an analytical reference for identifying potential relationships between the documented characteristics of musical traditions and relevant development goals and targets. The study employed purposive sampling to examine UNESCO-inscribed cultural elements containing significant musical or song-related components. The selection was restricted to inscriptions made between 2021 and 2024. This period was chosen to establish a defined and manageable group of relatively recent inscriptions for comparative documentary analysis. The selected cases included traditions involving singing, dance, ritual performance, poetic expression, and traditional musical instrument craftsmanship. The selection also included examples from different geographical regions and cultural contexts, allowing comparison of the varied forms in which musical heritage is practised and safeguarded. The inclusion criteria were:

(1) the cultural element was inscribed on a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list during the selected period;

(2) music, singing, or a closely associated musical performance was a significant component of the element; and

(3) relevant UNESCO documentation was available for examining its cultural characteristics and safeguarding practices. Elements that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

The primary documentary sources consisted of official UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage webpages and associated documentation for the selected elements. Depending on availability, these sources included descriptions of the cultural elements, nomination files, information on community participation, safeguarding plans, and decisions of the Intergovernmental Committee. Relevant academic publications were consulted to support contextual interpretation and discussion. Information was extracted from the available documents according to the following categories: characteristics of the musical tradition; associated cultural practices and knowledge; community participation; intergenerational transmission; education and training; gender-related information; livelihood and economic activities; environmental or material-resource considerations; partnerships; and documented safeguarding measures. The extracted information was organised by cultural element to facilitate comparison across cases. The analysis focused on documented evidence rather than assuming that the presence of a musical tradition necessarily resulted in measurable sustainable development outcomes.

The documentary material was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns across the selected cases. The analysis involved four stages. First, the relevant UNESCO documents were reviewed to identify information related to the cultural characteristics, transmission, community involvement, and safeguarding of each element. Second, relevant passages were assigned descriptive codes representing the issues identified in the documents. Third, related codes were compared and grouped into broader themes, such as cultural knowledge transmission, community participation, education, gender inclusion, livelihoods, traditional craftsmanship, and intercultural cooperation. Fourth, the themes were compared across cases to identify similarities, differences, and their potential relationships with sustainable development. SDG mapping was conducted by comparing the documented evidence associated with each theme against the aims and relevant targets of the 17 SDGs. A relationship was recorded when the documentary evidence provided a reasonable basis for connecting a cultural practice or safeguarding measure with a particular goal or target. For example, documented educational and intergenerational learning activities were examined in relation to SDG 4, while evidence concerning livelihoods and employment was considered in relation to SDG 8. Community participation and cultural dialogue were examined in relation to relevant aspects of SDG 16. These relationships were interpreted cautiously, distinguishing documented practices and potential contributions from demonstrated development outcomes. A comparative matrix was used to organise the findings by cultural element, analytical theme, supporting documentary evidence, and associated SDG. The matrix enabled the identification of recurring themes and facilitated comparison of the different ways in which musical traditions and their safeguarding practices may relate to sustainable development.

The study relies on documentary sources, which may emphasise intended safeguarding benefits rather than independently verified outcomes. In addition, the availability and detail of information may vary across UNESCO files. The findings should therefore be understood as a comparative interpretation of documented relationships between musical heritage and sustainable development, rather than a direct evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding interventions or the achievement of individual SDGs.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the documentary analysis and discusses how the selected Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) musical items contribute to sustainable development. By evaluating the data collected from UNESCO dossiers, clear patterns emerge showing how traditional music, songs, and related performing arts act as important tools to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As shown in table 1, ten distinct musical elements inscribed between 2021 and 2024 were analyzed. These items represent diverse regions, including Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Arctic.

Table 1: Examples of Musical Heritage on the UNESCO List and SDG alignment

ICH Item	Category	Inscribed Year in the List	Country	Related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	Rationale for SDG alignment
1. Wosana ritual and associated practices	Rainmaking Ritual	2024	Botswana	2, 3, 5, 16	Rainmaking rituals connect cultural practices with agricultural concerns (SDG 2). Community participation may relate to well-being (SDG 3), gender inclusion (SDG 5), and social cohesion (SDG 16), where supported by documentary evidence.
2. Mangweng we traditional dance	The performance involves a lead singer or dancer, supporting singers and dancers, hand clappers, and musicians.	2024	Zambia	4, 5, 8, 16	Collective singing, dancing and musical performance may facilitate knowledge transmission (SDG 4), gender participation (SDG 5), cultural livelihoods (SDG 8), and community

					cohesion (SDG 16).
3. Sevdalinka, a traditional urban folk song	Form of traditional urban singing	2024	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3, 4, 5, 8, 16	Traditional urban singing may support emotional well-being (SDG 3), musical knowledge transmission (SDG 4), inclusive participation (SDG 5), cultural livelihoods (SDG 8), and social cohesion (SDG 16).
4. Mek Mulung	Traditional Malaysian performance involving acting, dialogue, singing, and dancing	2023	Malaysia	4, 16	The integration of acting, dialogue, singing and dance provides opportunities for cultural knowledge transmission (SDG 4) and community participation (potentially related to SDG 16).
5. Bolero: identity, emotion, and poetry turned into song	Latin American sentimental song	2023	Cuba and Mexico	4, 5, 16, 17	The intergenerational transmission of Bolero singing, poetry, and musical

					knowledge supports cultural learning (SDG 4). Its performance traditions may provide opportunities for women's artistic expression (SDG 5) and promote cultural identity and social connections (SDG 16). Its joint inscription by Cuba and Mexico reflects in
6. Hiragasy	The performing arts comprise of songs, dances, and speeches.	2023	Madagascar	4, 5, 16	Hiragasy combines songs, dances, and public speeches that facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge and social values (SDG 4). Participation in performing arts may provide opportunities for gender inclusion (SDG 5), while

					collective performances and public communication may encourage community participation and social dialogue (SDG 16).
7. Malhun	A popular form of poetic expression	2023	Morocco	4, 5, 16	The transmission of Malhun poetry, singing, and associated cultural knowledge across generations supports cultural education and learning (SDG 4). Participation in the tradition may provide opportunities for women's cultural expression (SDG 5), while shared performances and poetic traditions may strengthen cultural identity, community relationships, and social

					cohesion (SDG 16).
8. Sadeh/Sada celebration	Seasonal festival involves singing, dancing, and praying around a fire and offering blessings	2023	Iran and Tajikistan	2, 16, 17	The celebration reflects traditional knowledge associated with seasonal cycles and agricultural practices, suggesting a relationship with food security and agricultural sustainability (SDG 2). Collective celebrations may strengthen community relationships and social cohesion (SDG 16), while the shared cultural heritage of Iran and Tajikistan provides opportunities for cross-border cultural cooperation (SDG 17)

9. Raï	Popular folk song	2022	Algeria	5, 8, 10, 16	Raï provides opportunities for cultural expression and participation, including women's voices (SDG 5), and contributes to cultural industries and musicians' livelihoods (SDG 8). Its expression of diverse social experiences may support social inclusion (SDG 10), while its role in cultural dialogue and shared identity may contribute to social cohesion (SDG 16).
10. Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional music performing arts combined with singing	Turkmen music and singing	2021	Turkmenistan	4, 5, 12, 16	The transmission of instrument-making and performance skills relates to education (SDG 4). Other proposed links require evidence of

					gender inclusion (SDG 5), responsible resource use (SDG 12), and relevant community or institutional outcomes (SDG 16).
11. Inuit drum dancing and singing	Dancing and singing	2021	Greenland	4, 16, 17	The intergenerational transmission of drum dancing, singing, and associated cultural knowledge may support informal education and the continuity of Inuit cultural heritage (SDG 4). Collective performances and community participation may strengthen cultural identity, social cohesion, and community relationships. However, these activities

					alone do not demonstrate progress towards a specific SDG 16 target. The tradition is shared across Inuit communities in Greenland and Canada. Its multinational inscription provides an example of cross-border cooperation in recognizing and safeguarding shared cultural heritage.

Source: https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists

Two major observations have been identified by considering the nature of these musical traditions in the table 1.

1. **Multidisciplinary Nature of Musical ICH**: The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that musical Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is often multidisciplinary in nature and rarely exists as an independent cultural practice. Many UNESCO-inscribed elements combine music and singing with other forms of cultural expression, including dance, drama, storytelling, craftsmanship, rituals, and social practices. For example, Mek Mulung of Malaysia integrates acting, dialogue, singing, and dancing within a single performance tradition (Jamalludin, 2019). Similarly, Hiragasy of Madagascar combines songs, dances, and public speeches as part of a community based performing art (UNESCO, 2023a). The Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art of Turkmenistan demonstrates the close relationship between instrument-making skills and musical performance (UNESCO, 2021). These examples show that traditional music functions within a broader cultural system rather than as a separate artistic activity. As a result, safeguarding musical heritage also supports the preservation of related knowledge, skills, and cultural practices. This interconnected nature highlights the importance of adopting holistic safeguarding approaches that recognize the relationships between music, performance, craftsmanship, and community life. This finding suggests that safeguarding policies

should move beyond preserving musical performances alone and should also support the wider cultural contexts in which these traditions are created, transmitted, and practiced. This approach is consistent with UNESCO's understanding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a living and interconnected system of cultural expressions.

2. Cross-Border Nature of Musical Intangible Cultural Heritage: The findings presented in table 1 reveal that some musical heritage elements transcend national boundaries and are shared by multiple countries. For example, Bolero was jointly inscribed by Cuba and Mexico, while the Sadeh/Sada celebration is shared by Iran and Tajikistan. These examples illustrate how cultural traditions can develop and be maintained across different geographical and political contexts while retaining common historical and cultural roots. The presence of multinational inscriptions highlights the role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in promoting cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and international cooperation. Rather than belonging exclusively to a single nation, many musical traditions represent shared cultural expressions that connect communities across borders. This finding suggests that safeguarding musical heritage can contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to intercultural dialogue and cultural diplomacy. Such collaborative safeguarding efforts are consistent with UNESCO's objective of fostering respect for cultural diversity and strengthening cooperation among communities and nations.

Traditional Music and Sustainable Development Goals

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that traditional music contributes to a wide range of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis demonstrates that musical heritage extends beyond artistic expression and plays an important role in supporting social, cultural, educational, and economic development. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) emerged as the most common goal associated with the selected musical heritage elements. This goal was identified across all the examples included in the study, ranging from Botswana's Wosana ritual to Inuit drum dancing and singing. Many of these traditions depend on collective participation through singing, dancing, storytelling, and community gatherings. For example, the Mangwengwe traditional dance of Zambia involves collective performance practices that strengthen social cohesion and encourage community engagement (UNESCO, 2024). These activities contribute to social harmony, cultural continuity, and the strengthening of community-based institutions.

Quality Education (SDG 4) was another prominent theme, appearing in most of the selected heritage elements. Traditions such as Sevdalinka, Mek Mulung, Bolero, Hiragasy, Malhun, Dutar making craftsmanship, and Inuit drum dancing and singing serve as important mechanisms for transmitting cultural knowledge. Through oral traditions and practical learning, younger generations acquire musical skills, language, history, values, and cultural identity. These forms of intergenerational knowledge transmission complement formal education and support lifelong learning. The analysis also revealed a significant connection between traditional music and Gender Equality (SDG 5). Several elements, including Wosana, Mangwengwe, Bolero, Hiragasy, Malhun,

Rai, and Dutar making craftsmanship, provide opportunities for the participation of both men and women in cultural activities. In many communities, musical traditions create spaces for artistic expression, leadership, and cultural representation, thereby supporting greater social inclusion and gender equity.

Traditional music also contributes to Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). Heritage elements such as Mangwengwe traditional dance, Sevdalinka, and Rai support cultural industries, festivals, tourism activities, and local creative economies. These traditions generate employment opportunities for performers, instrument makers, cultural practitioners, and event organizers, while also enhancing the economic value of cultural heritage. Furthermore, some musical traditions demonstrate links to Zero Hunger (SDG 2) and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). The Wosana ritual and the Sadeh/Sada celebration are closely connected to agricultural cycles, environmental knowledge, and community well-being. Such traditions reflect the relationship between cultural practices and local livelihoods. In addition, music is often associated with emotional well-being, healing practices, and social support, highlighting its contribution to both individual and community health. Finally, the analysis identified links to Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). The Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art demonstrates the sustainable use of locally available materials and the transmission of traditional craftsmanship skills. Similarly, multinational heritage elements such as Bolero, Sadeh/Sada celebration, and Inuit drum dancing and singing illustrate the importance of collaboration among communities, institutions, and countries in safeguarding cultural heritage. These partnerships contribute to the long-term sustainability of traditional music and strengthen international cooperation in heritage preservation. Overall, the findings suggest that traditional music should not be viewed solely as a form of artistic expression. Rather, it represents a valuable cultural resource that contributes to multiple dimensions of sustainable development and supports the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals.

Implications for the Safeguarding of Traditional Music in Sri Lanka

The findings of this study provide several insights that may support the safeguarding and sustainable management of traditional music heritage in Sri Lanka. The analysis of UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions demonstrates that effective safeguarding extends beyond the preservation of musical performances and involves broader cultural, social, educational, and economic dimensions. The findings also highlight the importance of heritage governance in safeguarding traditional music in Sri Lanka. Effective safeguarding requires more than documenting and preserving musical recordings; it also involves decisions about who participates in safeguarding activities, how responsibilities are shared, and how cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations. The practices documented in the selected UNESCO-inscribed elements suggest the value of strengthening collaboration among tradition bearers, cultural institutions, educational organisations, archives, and relevant government bodies. In the Sri Lankan context, such collaboration could support community participation in safeguarding decisions, the integration of traditional musical knowledge into educational activities, and the

responsible use of digital technologies for documentation and access. These implications should be considered in developing inclusive and sustainable approaches to heritage governance that recognise the knowledge and priorities of the communities concerned.

Integrating Traditional Music into Sustainable Development Policies

The reviewed heritage elements illustrate that traditional music can contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the areas of education, social cohesion, and economic development. This suggests that Sri Lankan traditional music traditions, may be considered not only as cultural expressions but also as resources that support sustainable development. Integrating traditional music into national cultural, educational, and tourism policies could strengthen its visibility and support safeguarding initiatives. In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs and the Department of Cultural Affairs could support the documentation, promotion, and safeguarding of traditional music heritage. The Ministry of Education could facilitate the inclusion of traditional music in school curricula and educational activities, while the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority could promote responsible cultural tourism that recognises and respects traditional musical practices and their communities. Coordination among these institutions, heritage professionals, educational institutions, and tradition-bearing communities would help strengthen heritage governance and ensure the sustainable transmission of traditional music to future generations. Integrating traditional music into national cultural, educational, and tourism policies could strengthen its visibility and justify increased support for safeguarding initiatives.

Safeguarding the Entire Cultural Ecosystem

The study also highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to safeguarding. Examples such as Mek Mulung, Hiragasy, and Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art demonstrate that musical heritage often exists within a wider cultural system involving performers, instrument makers, educators, and local communities. Therefore, safeguarding strategies in Sri Lanka should focus not only on musical performances but also on the associated knowledge, craftsmanship, performance contexts, and community practices that sustain these traditions. Such an approach would contribute to the long-term viability of traditional music heritage.

Promoting Social Cohesion and Intercultural Understanding

The strong association between musical heritage and SDG 16 in the reviewed examples suggests that traditional music can play an important role in strengthening social cohesion and cultural understanding. Sri Lanka's diverse musical traditions, practiced by different ethnic, religious, and regional communities, provide opportunities for cultural exchange and dialogue. Community-

based music programmes, cultural festivals, and educational initiatives may therefore contribute to fostering mutual respect and strengthening social harmony.

Strengthening Documentation and Transmission

The findings further emphasize the importance of documentation and intergenerational transmission in safeguarding musical heritage. UNESCO-listed traditions commonly employ community participation, educational programmes, and documentation activities to ensure continuity. Similar approaches could be expanded in Sri Lanka through systematic documentation, digital archiving, community-based learning, and the incorporation of traditional music into formal and informal education programmes. Overall, the international examples reviewed in this study demonstrate that safeguarding traditional music requires integrated strategies that support cultural continuity, community participation, knowledge transmission, and sustainable development. These lessons provide valuable guidance for future efforts to preserve and promote Sri Lanka's rich musical heritage.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions contribute to multiple dimensions of sustainable development. The analysis revealed strong connections between musical heritage and several SDGs, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Among these, SDG 16 emerged as the most frequently identified goal across the selected heritage elements, highlighting the important role of traditional music in promoting social cohesion, community participation, cultural dialogue, and the transmission of shared values. The findings further suggest that traditional music functions as a living repository of knowledge through which communities transmit languages, histories, artistic skills, cultural values, and collective memories from one generation to the next. The study also found that the safeguarding of musical heritage is closely aligned with sustainable development principles. The reviewed examples demonstrate that traditional music rarely exists as an isolated artistic practice. Rather, it is interconnected with dance, storytelling, rituals, craftsmanship, social practices, and community life. Heritage elements such as Mek Mulung, Hiragasy, and Dutar making craftsmanship and traditional performing art illustrate the importance of adopting holistic safeguarding approaches that support not only musical performance but also the wider cultural ecosystems in which these traditions are created, practiced, and transmitted. Community participation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, support for traditional craftsmanship, and collaborative safeguarding initiatives emerged as common features of successful heritage management. The analysis further identified several lessons that may inform future safeguarding strategies for traditional music in Sri Lanka. International examples highlight the importance of integrating traditional music into broader cultural, educational, and development frameworks

rather than viewing it solely as a form of artistic expression or historical heritage. Strengthening documentation programmes, supporting community-based transmission, recognizing the role of instrument makers and other cultural practitioners, and promoting traditional music within educational and cultural policies may contribute to the long-term sustainability of Sri Lanka's rich musical heritage. Furthermore, the strong association between musical heritage and social cohesion suggests that traditional music can serve as a valuable resource for fostering intercultural understanding and strengthening community resilience. Overall, the study demonstrates that UNESCO-inscribed musical traditions represent more than cultural performances; they are dynamic cultural resources that contribute to education, social inclusion, economic opportunities, cultural continuity, and community well-being. Consequently, the safeguarding of musical Intangible Cultural Heritage should be regarded not only as a cultural responsibility but also as a meaningful contribution to sustainable development. By recognizing and supporting the diverse functions of traditional music within society, policymakers, cultural institutions, and local communities can strengthen both heritage preservation and sustainable development outcomes. Future research could employ field-based investigations to examine the social, cultural, educational, and economic impacts of traditional music within specific communities. In the Sri Lankan context, empirical studies involving musicians, cultural practitioners, educators, and community members would provide valuable evidence for developing effective and sustainable safeguarding strategies for traditional music heritage.

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Temples, Taste, and Power: Objectified Cultural Capital and Bourgeois Appropriation of Buddhist Patronage in Colonial Sri Lanka (18th–19th Centuries)

Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of Buddhist temple patronage in colonial Sri Lanka, with particular emphasis on the Low-country regions. The collapse of the indigenous monarchy and the subsequent decline in royal sponsorship created a vacuum in religious patronage, which was increasingly filled by a new colonial bourgeois elite most notably, the Mudaliyars. These individuals held key administrative and social positions within the colonial system and often converted to Christianity to gain access to privileges such as education, property rights, commercial opportunities, and political appointments. Nevertheless, their religious affiliations were frequently nominal. Many Mudaliyars maintained discreet but active involvement in Buddhist establishments, employing temple construction, ritual sponsorship, and artistic patronage as means to cultivate local legitimacy, maintain power, and assert moral authority. As the main research question, this study examines the multifaceted role of bourgeois patrons in the construction and support of Buddhist temples, with particular attention to how their aesthetic preferences influenced religious art, architecture, and visual culture. The research also explores the deployment of objectified cultural capital manifested in commissioned temple artworks and architectural innovations as a vehicle for expressing power, consolidating caste hierarchies, and gaining social mobility. The phenomenon of dual patronage, wherein some Mudaliyars supported both Christian and Buddhist institutions, is examined as a strategic effort to navigate the colonial order while maintaining indigenous legitimacy. A key focus of the paper is the emergence of the Southern School, an artistic idiom that reflects the incorporation of colonial aesthetic sensibilities into Buddhist temple art. This development exemplifies how the tastes and hybrid identities of bourgeois patrons reshaped religious visual traditions to align with their socio-political ambitions. Ultimately, the paper argues that Buddhist patronage in colonial Sri Lanka was not simply an expression of piety but a deliberate exercise of cultural power. It reveals broader processes of changing aesthetic values, social negotiation, and the formation of a colonial bourgeois identity embedded in both imperial modernity and traditional religiosity.

Keywords: Bourgeois Taste, Buddhist Art, Objectified Cultural Capital, Southern School of Art, Temple Patronage

Introduction

The shift in temple patronage of Sri Lanka from indigenous monarchs to bourgeois patrons during the colonial period had a profound impact on temple construction, as well as on associated art and architectural projects, particularly in the western and southern maritime provinces, commonly referred to as the Low-country. This paper focuses specifically on the class of Mudaliyars in the Low-country and their role in temple constructions, art projects and religious activities. It is well established that, with the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE, temple patronage was integrally linked to kingship. Local rulers made lavish donations of material wealth and monastic lands (*viharagam*) to temples across the island, as recorded in *Vaṃsakathā* narratives and donor inscriptions.

This long-standing relationship between kingship and temple patronage was disrupted under colonial rule, particularly following the British annexation of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. The resulting political transformation led to the emergence of a new generation of influential temple patrons from the bourgeois or comprador classes. These new patrons differed significantly from traditional royal benefactors. They acquired social status and influence through close ties with the colonial administration, access to missionary education, wealth accumulated through new commercial ventures, and their proximity to colonial structures of power.

These bourgeois elites deployed their cultural capital to support temples in ways that aligned with colonial ideologies and social hierarchies. They sponsored to establish new religious fraternities, often structured along caste lines, funded temple construction, commissioned mural paintings, supported Buddhist rituals, and promoted reformist models of Buddhism. In doing so, they were not merely sustaining religious institutions - they were actively asserting authority over the direction of Buddhism itself. This paper explores this critical transformation in temple patronage, examining the socio-cultural background of the bourgeois patrons, their influence on temple architecture and art production, shifts in aesthetic preferences and power dynamics, and the role of objectified cultural capital in shaping Buddhist art and identity during the colonial period.

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

This article considers several theoretical perspectives, namely; objectified cultural capital, taste, and power, in examining the transformation of religious patronage during the colonial period. Cultural capital refers to non-economic assets that facilitate social mobility, enabling emerging social groups to gain influence in traditionally authoritative fields such as religion. It also grants them legitimacy to shape cultural norms and ideals. In the context of colonial Sri Lanka, bourgeois patrons replaced traditional royal authority by leveraging Western-style education, moral reform ideologies, and access to cultural resources to redefine Buddhist monastic art and values.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986), in his seminal work *The Forms of Capital*, identified three forms of cultural capital: objectified, embodied, and institutionalized. Objectified cultural capital refers to material objects that possess cultural value and serve as markers of social status. These include cultural goods such as monastic buildings, paintings, sculptures, monuments, and books - assets that can be owned, displayed, and utilized to signal one's cultural distinction. In the Low-country, bourgeois patrons actively employed objectified cultural capital by

constructing monastic complexes, commissioning Buddhist mural paintings, funding sculptures, printing Buddhists texts, and incorporating colonial aesthetics into religious embellishments.

According to Bourdieu, individuals or groups possessing cultural capital often assert their preferences, values, and interpretations as dominant or "legitimate." In colonial Ceylon, bourgeois patrons utilized their cultural capital to reshape the parameters of accepted Buddhist practices and values through architectural projects, mural commissions, and the orchestration of public rituals. The concept of "taste," in Bourdieu's framework, refers to an individual's preferences for cultural goods, which are shaped by and reflective of their social class. Taste is not an innate or purely personal phenomenon; rather, it is socially constructed and deeply influenced by one's upbringing and access to cultural resources. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), Bourdieu argues that dominant classes deploy notions of "good taste" to distinguish themselves from subordinate groups, thereby legitimizing their social status. Taste, as part of the *habitus* the system of dispositions shaped by one's social environment plays a central role in determining what individuals perceive as aesthetically valuable or culturally legitimate.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991) contends that religious patronage functions as a form of symbolic power, closely linked to symbolic capital and the process of legitimation. By supporting religious institutions such as temples, churches, or schools the bourgeoisie were able to affirm their authority as cultural leaders. Such patronage not only differentiated them from other social groups but also allowed them to align with sacred authority, thereby enhancing their prestige and reinforcing their dominance in the socio-religious hierarchy.

Brief Historical Context of Temple Patronage: Pre-Colonial and Kandyan Models

A strong political affiliation between kingship and Buddhism in Sri Lanka can be observed from as early as the third century BCE, when the religion was first introduced to the island. As recorded in Chapters XI to XX of the *Mahavaṃsa* (1912), King Devanampiyatissa (250–210 BCE), the reigning monarch at the time, offered his full support for the establishment and institutionalization of Buddhism. Thereafter, royal patronage of Buddhism became an essential and defining responsibility of Sri Lankan rulers. Ancient chronicles such as the *Deepavaṃsa* (1879), *Mahavaṃsa* (1912), and *Chulavaṃsa* (1925-30) provide ample evidence of donations made by monarchs to Buddhist monasteries. A notable example is the detailed account of King Duṭugamaṇu's (161–137 BCE) patronage described in Chapter XXVI of the *Mahavaṃsa*.

Between the third century BCE and the mid-thirteenth century - encompassing the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa eras - Buddhist art and architecture flourished under the patronage of Sinhalese kings. Following the decline of the Polonnaruwa Kingdom, political instability resulted in the relocation of the administrative capital across multiple sites, preventing the consolidation of centralized power.

Despite these periods of political crisis, many Sinhalese rulers continued to offer substantial patronage to Buddhist monasteries. The reigns of the Dambadeniya, Gampola, and Kotte kingdoms provide notable examples of continued royal support. In particular, the flourishing of Buddhism under the Kotte Kingdom (1412–1597) is reflected in classical literary works known as *Sandesha Kavyas*. Portuguese records from the early colonial period also remark on

the wealth of Sri Lankan temples, noting that they surpassed the churches of Lisbon in opulence (De Silva 1995: 33). Thus, royal patronage in the pre-colonial period played a pivotal role in shaping temple construction and cultural activities in Sri Lanka.

Following the Portuguese conquest of the Kingdom of Kotte in 1597, the Kandyan Kingdom in the central highlands became the stronghold of local political authority. By the eighteenth century, Kandyan kings had assumed a dominant role in directing the island's religious activities, becoming the new epicenter of Buddhism. Through extensive land donations, Kandyan monarchs enabled Buddhist monasteries in the highlands to evolve into self-sufficient and prosperous centers. These donated lands were cultivated by tenant farmers, while a diverse range of craftsmen - granted land in exchange for their services contributed to the upkeep and embellishment of the monasteries (Knox 1958: 116).

The reign of King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha (1747–1782) represents the most vibrant phase of Buddhist revival during the Kandyan period. His enthusiastic patronage is reflected in the numerous visual representations of him - both painted and sculpted - found in Buddhist temples across the island, including the Dambulla cave temple, the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Diyakelinavela Rajamaha Viharaya in Kandy, and Veheragampita Rajamaha Viharaya in Matara. A key event during his reign was the restoration of higher ordination in Sri Lanka in in 1753 (Malalgoda 1976: 62–63; *Chulavaṃsa*, Chap. C, vv. 137–138). As a result, the monastic order expanded significantly, and a large number of Buddhist monasteries and educational centers were established throughout the Kandyan Kingdom (*Mandarampura Puvata* 1958: vv. 155, 643, 644).

Kandyan kings were regarded as the custodial patrons of Buddhism across the island. As such, they were expected to support not only temples in the Up-country but also those in the Low-country. Monasteries such as Mulgirigala Rajamaha Viharaya, Kelaniya Rajamaha Viharaya, Veheragampita Rajamaha Viharaya, etc., received patronage from Kandyan kings, even though these rulers did not exercise direct political control over all regions of the island (Ferguson 1911: 197–235; Bell and Gunasekara 1916: 145–161; *Kalyani Vihara Varṇanava* 1890).

In addition to King Kirthi Sri, other Kandyan monarchs who extended significant support to Buddhist monasteries include Vimaladharmasuriya I (1591–1604), Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687–1707), Narendrasiṃha (1707–1739), and Rajadhi Rajasiṃha (1782–1798). Scholars such as Coomaraswamy (1908: 56) and Somathilaka (2002, 2006) have documented numerous grants and donations made by these rulers to temple artists. These endowments included land grants, material donations, and honorary titles bestowed upon artists for their services. Kandyan kings typically concentrated their support on prominent temples located in politically strategic locations, thereby reinforcing their sovereignty and religious authority.

The fall of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815 marked a watershed moment in the history of Buddhist patronage in Sri Lanka. The British annexation severely disrupted the traditional systems of temple patronage in the Up-country. Although the British, through the Kandyan Convention (*Uḍaraṭa Givisuma*), pledged to uphold Buddhist religious institutions and the rights of the sangha, these promises were not realized in practice (Malalgoda 1976: 81–90; Gnanavimala 2001: x–xii). As a result, dissatisfaction grew among the Kandyan Buddhist establishment, leading to several uprisings against British rule in 1818, 1830, and 1848. Despite the support of local monks, all these rebellions were ultimately suppressed by the colonial regime.

Buddhism in the Low-country and Strategies for Asserting Caste Power

The geo-political and cultural landscape of the Low-country - comprising the southern and western maritime provinces of Sri Lanka - differed significantly from that of the Kandyan region or the Up-country. These Low-country areas were successively occupied by three European colonial powers: the Portuguese (1505–1658), the Dutch (1658–1796), and the British (1796–1948). Of these, the Portuguese era - particularly the period from 1597 to 1658 - was marked by open hostility toward Buddhism. The Portuguese exercised direct military power against Buddhist institutions by destroying temples, plundering monastic properties, prohibiting Buddhist rituals, and reallocating temple lands and assets to Christian missionaries (Rebeiro 1847; *Chulavaṃsa*, Part II: 95:5–8; Gnanavimala 2001: 71; Pagnaloka 2002: 243). According to the records of Queyroz (1930: 300–301), the Portuguese even assassinated Buddhist monks who resisted their rule.

While Dutch colonial rule also had a generally detrimental impact on the Buddhist establishment, the latter phase of their governance saw a modest relaxation of restrictions. During this time, the Dutch permitted the reconstruction of some ruined temples and allowed public performance of Buddhist rituals (De Silva 2000: 69). These concessions were largely political in nature, intended to win the favor of the local population and mobilize them against the encroaching British. Certain Dutch officials, such as Governor Ivan Willem van de Graaf (1765–1785), made goodwill visits to Buddhist temples in the South. Furthermore, the Dutch colonial administration issued circulars expressing their intention to support Buddhist institutions (Ferguson 1911: 218; Malalgoda 1976: 83).

A pivotal development during the Dutch period was the restoration of the higher ordination, facilitated by the Siamese (Thai) sangha under the patronage of King Kirthi Sri 1753. This event marked a significant religious revival, not only in the Up-country but also within restricted areas of the Low-country. As a result, the *Siam Nikaya* (Siam Chapter) rapidly spread across the maritime provinces. Low-country monks were granted access to education in Kandyan monastic schools known as *Shilpashala* (Devaraja 1995: 292; Pagnaloka 2002: 336–361). However, a caste-based conflict in 1768 led to a schism between Kandyan and Low-country monks, creating enduring divisions within the sangha (*Mandarampura Puvata* 1958: vv. 823–862; De Silva 2000: 70).

In 1796, the British captured control of the maritime provinces by taking over Dutch-held territories (De Silva1995: 11-35, Mendis 1944). While the Buddhist establishment in the Kandyan region declined under British colonial rule, the Low-country Buddhist community experienced unprecedented growth, setting the stage for a significant cultural and intellectual renaissance in the late nineteenth century. One of the principal factors contributing to this resurgence was the emergence of a new class of bourgeois temple patrons in the Low-country. The involvement of the colonial bourgeoisie in the establishment of new Buddhist fraternities was a critical factor contributing to the revitalization of Buddhism during the nineteenth century. In turn, this involvement served as a strategic means for these elites to enhance their status within the prevailing caste hierarchy. The emergence of several new fraternities in the coastal regions can be understood as a direct response to the exclusion of non-*Govigama* monks from the Kandyan Siamese higher ordination lineage, a development of profound significance in the socio-religious landscape of the period.

In 1768, the Siamese Higher Ordination (*Upasampada*) was formally restricted to monks belonging to the *Govigama* caste, which was regarded as the highest caste among the Sinhalese. This restriction systematically marginalized other prominent castes in the Low-country, such as the *Salagama, Karava,* and *Durava*. The exclusion generated considerable resentment among Low-country monks and lay elites, paving the way for the emergence of several new fraternities from the coastal region. Bourgeois patrons played a leading role in this process, and numerous examples illustrate their involvement. For instance, Mudaliyar Sahabandu and Mudaliyar Vijayasriwardena - two prominent *Salagama* elites from the South-were instrumental lay facilitators in the establishment of the *Amarapura* fraternity, which was introduced from Burma in 1802 (*Sinhala Vishwakoṣaya*, Vol. I, 1963: 639). These Mudaliyars also sponsored the founding of Ambagahapitiya Mulamaha Viharaya and Velitara Pushparamaya, both of which became significant religious institutions in the South.

The formation of the *Amarapura* fraternity in 1802 marks a crucial milestone in the history of Buddhism during the colonial era (Mendis 1944: 27–28; Malalgoda 1976: 87–105). Subsequently, additional fraternities emerged, including the *Kalyaṇiwamsa* (1810) and Ramañña (1864) fraternities, as well as several subdivisions of the *Amarapura Nikaya* itself - such as the *Amarapura Dharmarakkhita* (1807), the *Amarapura Mulawaṃsa Nikaya* (1834), and the *Amarapura Sri Saddhammavaṃsa Nikaya* (1862) (*Sinhala Vishvakoṣhaya*, Vol. I, 1963: 640–643; Malalgoda 1976: 147–151). Today, the existence of 22 sub-fraternities affiliated with the Amarapura Sanghasabha testifies to the extensive institutional growth of the order and its expansion into regions such as Sabaragamuwa and the Kandyan interior.

The proliferation of these new fraternities - strongly supported by bourgeois patrons - greatly facilitated the expansion of the Buddhist monastic order in the Low-country. It also enabled non-*Govigama* monks to gain access to higher ordination, a privilege that had previously been monopolized by the *Govigama* caste (Malalgoda 1976: 103–104). Consequently, the construction of new temples and the renovation of existing ones became an urgent necessity to accommodate the growing monastic population. This context fostered significant innovation in Buddhist art and architecture across the maritime provinces.

The economic success of emerging bourgeois patrons provided them with the capital to sponsor Buddhist institutions. As a result, the class of Mudaliyars emerged as the most prominent group of temple patrons during the colonial period. In many instances, these Mudaliyars appear to have supported monastic institutions along caste lines, aiming to ensure that monks from their own caste or community could attain influential positions within the Buddhist order. This strategic patronage allowed them to consolidate and reinforce their socio-political authority in the localities under their control. Their calculated support for new fraternities and religious institutions not only contributed to the revitalization of Buddhist practices but also facilitated their own ascent within the complex matrix of caste hierarchy and colonial power.

The Role of the Mudaliyars in Temple Construction and Socio-Political Activities

Among the colonial bourgeois elites, as noted above, the Mudaliyars emerged as the most influential group of temple patrons in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka. As Peebles observes, “early nineteenth-century sources unanimously agree that the highest status Sinhalese in the Low-country were those men known as Mudaliyars” (Peebles 1995: 3). The prevalence of the temple name ‘Mudalindaramaya’ in the Low-country attests to their significant role in temple

patronage. Notable examples include Dadalla Maha Mudalindaramaya, Vatugedara Sri Vijaya Srivardhana Mudalindaramaya, Hiththatiya Gunaratana Mudalindu Maha Pirivena, and Velipitiya Abhaya Karunaratne Mudalindaramaya, all of which reflect the enduring legacy of Mudaliyar involvement in temple construction and Buddhist institutional development.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the title of Mudaliyar was conferred exclusively upon individuals serving in the colonial administrative service (Peebles 1995: 137). However, in 1853, during the tenure of Governor G.W. Anderson (1850–1855), this system was restructured to also include individuals outside the civil service. The British began to bestow the Mudaliyar title upon wealthy and socially influential persons in recognition of their loyalty to the colonial rule or for their philanthropic contributions (Jayewardena 2007: 309). This change served as a political strategy aimed at cultivating a class loyal to colonial interests (Peebles 1995: 137).

Mudaliyar Mututantrige Simon Fernando, also known as Mudaliyar Sri Chandrasekara, was one such emerging figure in Panadura who received the title due to his wealth, social standing, and religious engagements. He accumulated his wealth through the timber trade, graphite mining, the arrack business, and service as a government contractor (Jayawardena 2007: 187). Later, he became a prominent patron of Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala and made substantial contributions to temple constructions, including Horeduwe Gangaramaya (Dharmabandu 1949: 138–148). Other notable recipients of the honorary Mudaliyar title include Joronis de Soysa, Don Carolis Hewawitharana, and Mahawaduge Andiris Perera, recognized for their charity, religious support, and loyalty to colonial authorities. Joronis de Soysa, the first to receive the title outside of colonial administration, was a Christian who nonetheless made donations to Buddhist institutions (Jayawardena 2007: 174–179). Don Carolis Hewawitharana, a furniture industrialist, supported the Buddhist Theosophical Society and Vidyodaya Pirivena (Dharmabandu 1949: 270–273; Jayawardena 2007: 270–271). Andiris Perera received his title for constructing public decorations during the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1874 (Peebles 1995: 164).

The Mudaliyar class comprised both *Govigama* and non-*Govigama* castes. Notable *Govigama* families included the Saram, Illangakoon, Goonaratne, and Jayasinghe families, while individuals such as Susew de Soysa, Sri Chandrasekara, Don Carolis Hewawitharana etc., were of non-*Govigama* origin. Some Mudaliyars were educated in English, Sinhala, and Pali, representing the products of both colonial and traditional educational systems. For instance, Edmund Roland Goonaratne of *Atapattu Walawwa* translated *Kavyashekharaya*, a classical Sinhala poetry text, into English (Goonatilleke 2012: 185).

Some Mudaliyars donated their personal residences (known as *walawwas*) to the Buddhist monastic order for use as temples, reflecting both their piety and desire to establish lasting religious legacies. For instance, the Dadalla Maha Mudalindaramaya was formerly the *walawwa* of Gate-Mudaliyar A.D. Vijaya Gunaratne; the Keembi-Ela Sri Vijayawardhanarmaya was donated by Mudaliyar Don Abraham Wijayawardana Gunasekara; and the Kuppiyawatta Jayasekararamaya in Colombo was originally the residence of Chief Mudaliyar Arnolds de Abrew Rajapakse Wijayasekara. A plaque at Jayasekararamaya states that, according to the last will of Lady Dona Maria de Silva Siriwardena, the land - formerly the *walawwa* of Chief Mudaliyar Arnolds de Abrew Rajapakse Wijayasekara - was donated to the Buddhist Sangha on 25 October 1823, thereby institutionalizing the transformation of elite residential space into a religious foundation.

Grate-Mudaliyar Adrian de Abrew Wijeyagunaratne Rajapakse of *Maha Kappina Walawwa* was another major patron who reportedly built and restored approximately thirty temples and *kovils* in Velitara. His son, Gate-Mudaliyar Samson de Abrew Vijeyagunaratne (1830–1888), supported many *Amarapura* sect temples, including Goduwa Gangaramaya in Balapitiya (Mangalasiri 1996: 167). He also acted as the chief facilitator during the visit of the Burmese monk Ven. Jagara. Another family member, Mudaliyar Tudor Rajapakse (1868–1959), an artist in the Ceylon Society of Arts, later donated the family *walawwa* to the *Amarapura Saddhammawamsa* fraternity.

Some temples originated as private family shrines of Mudaliyars. For instance, *Kotahena Deepaduttaramaya* - which became a center of Buddhist revival in the late nineteenth century - was initially the personal temple of the Ubhayakulatunga Vijaya Siriwardane family in Kotahena, Colombo. It was transferred to the monastic order in 1806 and opened to the public in 1835 (Manatunga 2005: 7; Kaluarachchi 2004: 334).

Some Mudaliyars deliberately displayed their status and patronage through architectural inscriptions. The stupa archway at *Ashokarama Maha Viharaya* in Kalutara, adorned with the British royal coat of arms, bears the name of Mudaliyar J.S.F. Jayasekara Dharmasiriwardana in both Sinhala and English, inscribed within a medallion placed between two official animals - the lion and the unicorn (Plate 01).

Besides the examples mentioned above, a significant number of Mudaliyars in the Low-country actively participated in temple construction by providing financial assistance, donating materials and land, and employing craftsmen and laborers. Among other notable figures who supported such monastic endeavors were Mudaliyar Bastian Mendis Gunasekara (Watugedara Vijayasrivardhana Mudalindaramaya in Balapitiya), Mudaliyar Edmund Roland Goonaratne (Goonaratne Mudalindaramaya in Matara), Mudaliyar Don Andiris De Siva (Kalutara Kalupahana Viharaya in Kalutara), Mudaliyar Galabada Liyanage Don Allias Amarasiri Jayasinghe (Nagoda Jayasingharama Viharaya in Galle), Mudaliyar Don David Abraham Nicholas Abeysinghe Amarasekara (Mihiripanne Padumaramaya in Galle), Mudaliyar David de Saram (Godapitiya Jetawanaramaya in Matara), Mudaliyar Bastian Freddy Nandiris Obeysekara, (Nawamunise Purana Vihāraya), and Mudaliyar Andris Perera Abhaya Karunaratne Dissanayake (Velipitiya Abhaya Karunaratne Mudalindaramaya in Panadura), to name a few. The patronage extended by these Mudaliyars was generally acknowledged by monastic communities through eulogies composed in literary texts, which served to publicize their acts of generosity among the wider lay population (Gunasena 1999: 460–465).

In addition to temple construction, Mudaliyars supported various Buddhist activities, including the organization of public rituals, the facilitation of religious debates with Christian missionaries, and the establishment of Buddhist educational institutions. For example, the *Gangarohaṇa Puja*, a significant religious ceremony held at the Nilvala River in 1806, was organized by Mudaliyar David de Saram (Weerasuriya 2006: 93). Mudaliyar Andiris Perera supported the Buddhist cause in the renowned Panadura Controversy (*Panadura Vādaya*) (Jayawardena 2007: 266). Ven. Kapugama Dhammakkhanda (1768-1816) was sponsored by Mudaliyar Adrian Abrew Vijesundara Rajapakse for a pilgrimage to Burma in 1806, and the temple now known as Daḍalle Valukaramaya was also donated by him. Mudaliyars William de Abrew Rajapakse, Peter de Abrew Rajapakse, Tudor Rajapakse, and Don Carolis Hewavitharana played significant roles in the founding of Buddhist schools and *pirivenas*.

Owing to the active involvement of Mudaliyars in religious life, their figures frequently appeared in mural depictions of religious processions in temple image houses during the nineteenth century. Moreover, at Ovitigala Sri Sunandarama Viharaya in Kalutara, two imposing figures resembling Mudaliyars stand on either side of the image house doorway in the position traditionally occupied by guardian deities - perhaps visually reflecting the westernized Mudaliyar's symbolic role in monastic patronage.

It is found, however, that the majority of Mudaliyars in the Low-country were either Christian converts, descendants of converts, or individuals raised in environments that were not antagonistic to missionary activity. The exclusive appointment of Christians to high-ranking government positions encouraged Sinhalese nobility and emerging elites to adopt the "government religion" (Malalgoda 1976: 45, 93–94, 208). As Goonawardena (1958: 87–88) observes, colonial authorities viewed the conversion of Mudaliyars as a strategic means to ensure the loyalty of the indigenous populace. However, as Malalgoda (1976: 31) and Pieris (1918: 136) point out, many of these conversions were largely nominal, undertaken primarily to secure positions within the colonial administration.

Several additional factors motivated the Low-country elites to convert, including access to missionary education for their children, entry into new business ventures, and legal recognition of marriages, land ownership, and property rights. The emerging Low-country elites generated substantial profits from ventures such as graphite mining, the arrack trade, plantation agriculture, and the furniture industry (De Silva 1981: 335–337). Engagement in such non-traditional economic activities enabled elites from non-*Govigama* castes such as the *Karava*, *Salagama*, and *Durava* to attain elevated status or recognition as a distinct "status group" within colonial society (Jayawardena 2007; Roberts 1982).

Some Mudaliyars from the maritime provinces actively supported both Christian institutions and Buddhist establishments. A notable example is Chief Mudaliyar Don David Abraham Nicholas Abeysinghe Amarasekara, who patronized the church at Baddegama while simultaneously supporting numerous monastic projects initiated by Ven. Mihiripanne Dammaratana. Mudaliyar Amarasekara contributed building materials for mural projects, financed artists' salaries, and allocated paddy lands to sustain artisans. In recognition of this support, Ven. Mihiripanne composed approximately sixty-nine panegyrics extolling Amarasekara's patronage (Gunasena 1999: 427, 475–476). Another example of dual patronage is Gate Mudaliyar Jeronis de Soysa (1797–1862) of the Moratuwa-based De Soysa family, who provided substantial support to both temples and churches along the coastal region (Dharmabandu 1949: 172–179; Don Bastian 1904). Temples such as Moratuwa Soysaramaya, Dodamduwa Shailabimbaramaya, Kalutara Pulinatalaramaya, and Borella Gotami Viharaya all received patronage from the De Soysa family.

In addition to their support for Buddhist institutions, several Mudaliyars pursued strategies to curry favor with the colonial administration. For instance, Mudaliyar Samson de Abrue Wijeyagunarathne who was an influential Buddhist patron in the South established a scholarship fund of Rs. 8,000 at St. Thomas' College to commemorate the visit of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh and son of Queen Victoria in 1870 (Dharmabandu 1949: 154–155). Prince Alfred was the first member of British royalty to visit Ceylon (Jayawardena 2007: 312). Mudaliyar Samson subsequently founded another Rs. 8,000 scholarships in the name of Governor William Gregory and also contributed Rs. 5,000 towards the construction of a statue of Governor Gregory, which still stands in front of the National Museum in Colombo (Dharmabandu 1949: 155). In 1870, Mudaliyar Susew Soysa and Charles De Soysa

organized a grand banquet in honour of Prince Alfred, the son of Queen Victoria, during his visit to Sri Lanka. These affluent Mudaliyars are reported to have spent approximately Rs. 100,000 on the event, which was held at *Bagatelle Walawwa* in Colombo (Dharmabandu 1949: 176–177).

Reporting on the royal feast in 1872, Capper wrote: "Two thousand guests were provided with a variety of Eastern and Western entertainments. This was symbolic of the cultural mixture that had taken place among the local bourgeoisie… While all the jamboree was going on in the garden, the Soysas were entertaining the Prince, the Governor and his wife, and a selected group of Europeans and local guests to dinner and dancing to the music of the Rifle Band" (Cited from Jayawardena 2007: 319). Skeen (1870: 383) interpreted this event as an opportunity for the local elite to reaffirm their loyalty to the British Crown. In 1875, two new schools named the Prince of Wales College and the Princess of Wales College were founded in Moratuwa by the De Soysas, with an initial investment of £30,000. This act commemorated the visit of the royal couple to Sri Lanka (Jayawardena 2007: 319). Thus, the Mudaliyars actively engaged in both Buddhist and pro-colonial activities within their respective territories, thereby affirming their status as an influential social group.

Taste of the New Temple Patrons and Objectified Cultural Capital in Practice

The affiliations of bourgeois patrons with colonial systems particularly in education, administration, and religious conversion - had a substantial impact on the transformation of their cultural tastes. This transformation significantly influenced Buddhist art and architecture in the Low-country region. The evolving aesthetic preferences of these patrons also posed a challenge to traditional artistic practices, ultimately contributing to the decline and marginalization of the hegemonic status of the Central Kandyan School, which had been patronized by the Kandyan monarchy, in temple art. A revealing statement by the renowned artist M. Sarlis (1880–1955) helps to contextualize this shift:

> "… at that time, those who followed European lifestyle and attitudes were considered as the foremost in the society… Therefore, Sinhalese value systems, art and crafts deteriorated day by day. Although we had known the traditional methods, we never had a chance to use them in our ordinary art practice as we had to adjust to suit with the demand of the country… Mural works are mostly being carried out according to the ideas of the custodian monks of the temples and the elite patrons.… If the painter is given his own freedom, he can decide the quantity of images and their scales fitting in the location and do the job using traditional Sinhala colours. But, the situation we have faced is quite different."
>
> (*Kaladeepa*, 15 May 1953:2)

The above-mentioned statement by M. Sarlis underscores the profound influence that bourgeois patrons exerted on the art-making process during the colonial period. Furthermore, his interview published in *Kalādeepa* (15 May 1953) offers several key insights:

1. The transformation of aesthetic taste among the new bourgeois patrons during the British colonial period critically impacted temple artists, who were compelled to cater to these altered preferences. These patrons' tastes were shaped by colonial aesthetic ideals and Eurocentric artistic paradigms.

2. Within the colonial context, the highly stylized Kandyan art tradition came to be viewed as primitive and lacking sophistication. Colonial aesthetic standards, grounded in notions of Western superiority, rejected the traditional art forms of Sri Lanka as products of ignorance.

3. Temple artists who failed to adapt to these new colonial expectations faced the risk of professional marginalization and loss of livelihood.

The widespread incorporation of Western-inspired artistic and architectural elements into Buddhist temples in the Low-country clearly reflects the aesthetic preferences of the patrons behind these projects. Mudaliyars, the dominant patron class during the colonial period, integrated European design features such as verandahs, porticos, gables, pediments, Tuscan columns, pointed and Florentine arches, stilted arches, awnings, lattice-work, wide overhanging tiered roofs, etc., in their residences known as *walawwas*. Examples include the Kataluwa Aṭadahewatta Walawwa, Veligama Halalle Walawwa, Matara Illangakoon Walawwa, Balapitiya Maha Kappina Walawwa, Kotahena Walawwa, and Meerigama Botale Walawwa.

Similar architectural features are visible in many temples in the Low-country such as Panadura Rankoth Viharaya, Dodanduwa Shailabimbaramaya, Ambagahapitiya Mulamaha Viharaya, Kuppiyawatta Jayasekararamaya, and Dadalla Maha Mudalindaramaya. The image house of Panadura Rankoth Viharaya, for instance, resembles an elite mansion more than a conventional Buddhist image house (Plate 02). Notably, a British coat of arms molded in relief is found above the main entrance to Aṭadahewatta Walawwa, a motif that later became common in many Low-country temples (Plate 03).

The desire among colonial bourgeois elites to emulate European customs and Western lifestyle is affirmed by missionary priest Selkirk, who noted in 1844 that these elites aspired to resemble Europeans by adopting Western dress and customs (Selkirk 1844: 60). Consequently, trousers, coats, shirts, frocks, jackets, hats, shoes, and socks became popular among the bourgeois elite. Even the official dress of the Mudaliyars, the *Kastana* dress, was derived from Dutch colonial fashion (*Sinhala Vishwakoshaya*, Vol. III, 1967: 148–149). These influences are evident in the temple murals of the Low-country, which frequently depict figures dressed in European attire.

When Kandyan temple artists portrayed kings, courtiers, and elites in the traditional regalia of the Kandyan aristocracy, Low-country artists - under the patronage of colonial elites - replaced these with Western models. Consequently, temples in the Low-country are replete with visual elements drawn from the colonial milieu. Bodhisattvas, kings, and queens appear in Western-inspired garments in murals at many temples such as Kataluwa Purwaramaya, Thotagamuwa Subhadraramaya, Dodanduwa Shailabimbaramaya, Panadura Rankoth Viharaya, Karagampitiya Subodharamaya, and Sapugoda Sri Maha Viharaya. For instance, Plates 04 and 05 respectively show a group of royals in European attire and upper-class women in Western-style frocks within the Buddhist narrative murals at Thotagamuwa Subhadraramaya.

In terms of interior décor, Mudaliyars prominently displayed symbols of colonial authority, such as British coats of arms, imperial medals, Western-style furniture, flags, European ceramics, lamps, clocks, guns, and portraits of the British royals. These objects, which were

usually absent from traditional Sinhalese aristocracy, signaled their power and social elevation. In temple murals across the Low-country, such items are frequently depicted as attributes of high status. For example, Western furniture, clocks, ceramics, weapons, and English inscriptions can be seen in murals at Karagampitiya Subodharamaya, Sapugoda Sri Maha Viharaya, Kataluwa Purwaramaya, Thotagamuwa Subhadraramaya, and Dodanduwa Shailabimbaramaya (Plate 06).

Although these Western elements are historically anachronistic in the context of Buddhist narratives, neither the patrons nor the custodian monks in the Low-country appear to have objected. These visual choices seem to reflect a conscious aesthetic accommodation to colonial modernity. It is unlikely that educated monks were unaware of these contradictions; rather, their silence may indicate a shift in taste aligned with the colonial elite's lifestyle. The rejection of Kandyan artistic conventions is further evident in the decorative motifs of Low-country temple art. Traditional motifs such as lotus petals and *liyawela* scrolls were replaced by Western-inspired designs including roses, cherubs, grapevines, and other floral patterns. A ceiling adorned with roses, instead of the traditional lotus, can be observed at Dodanduwa Kumara Maha Viharaya.

Temples built after the 1850s show a deliberate attempt to integrate Victorian aesthetics and inspirations of the Academic Realism of the West into Buddhist visual culture. Techniques of light and shade, spatial depth, and naturalistic features - valued by colonial patrons - are observable in murals at Panadura Rankoth Viharaya, Sapugoda Sri Maha Viharaya, Maramba Purana Viharaya, and Karagampitiya Subodharamaya (Plate 07). Material practices also shifted under bourgeois patronage. The introduction of commercial products in the West enabled artists to expand the limited, flat Kandyan colour palette into a broader range of vibrant tones. After the 1870s, Low-country temple artists increasingly employed a wider range of colours, incorporating tonal gradations to simulate three-dimensionality.

These transformations led to the erosion of traditional indigenous art training, which had been based on stylized features - largely characterized by linework (Coomaraswamy 1908: 64–69). The devaluation of Kandyan artistic standards in the colonial territories contributed to a radical transformation of the island’s Buddhist art landscape. Additionally, new practices emerged within the artists’ professional culture, such as the formal signing of contracts between artists and patrons or monastic authorities.

Sculptures and other embellishments were similarly influenced by colonial styles. Traditional stylized Kandyan Buddha statues evolved toward more naturalistic versions. Sculptural elements in archways - such as those at Kalutara Ashokarama Maha Viharaya -incorporate Western features including unicorn and lion figures, neo-Gothic pointed arches, sunken columns, floral motifs (particularly roses), and ornamental moldings, all of which reflect colonial artistic inspiration.

As a whole, nineteenth-century Buddhist murals in the Low-country developed into a hybrid visual language that merged Western and indigenous aesthetic elements. Art historians have identified this syncretic style as the "Southern School." More than a mere stylistic development, this hybrid aesthetic reflects a deeper cultural shift: a transformation of taste rooted in the social aspirations and symbolic capital of colonial bourgeois elites.

Agendas behind Temple Patronage

A range of motives underpinned the support extended by bourgeois patrons in colonial society toward temple construction and other religious activities in the Low-country. While some of these elites offered donations out of a genuine commitment to the development of Buddhism, others appear to have pursued personal agendas such as gaining social prestige comparable to that of the Kandyan *Radala* aristocracy. The most prominent motivations for their involvement in temple-related initiatives are outlined below, not in any particular order of importance.

a) A significant number of bourgeois patrons had nominally professed Christianity the official religion of the colonial state to avoid persecution by colonial authorities and to gain access to various privileges, including high-ranking positions in the colonial administration, education in missionary schools, business opportunities, and legal recognition of land ownership. Consequently, covert affiliations between these nominally Christian *Mudaliyars* and their former faith, Buddhism, were a common feature of the colonial era. When the colonial administration—particularly under British rule relaxed its religious policies, many of these elites were quick to reassert their ties to Buddhism through public acts of patronage.

b) The support extended by bourgeois patrons was often reciprocated by monastic custodians through panegyrics and other forms of public praise, which in turn bolstered the patrons' local influence (Malalgoda 1976: 206). Maintaining close relationships with influential monks thus served as a strategy for *Mudaliyars* to preserve or enhance their social respectability and political leverage.

c) c) Some Low-country *Mudaliyars* had previously been lay disciples of Buddhist monks, resulting in strong personal bonds between members of the new elite and the Buddhist clergy. For example, Gate Mudaliyar Samson de Abrue Wijeyagunaratne, who resided at *Mahakappina Walawwa*, studied under several prominent monks, including Ven. Balapitiye Dheerananda, Ven. Kahawe Gnanananda Tissa, and Ven. Vansapala Dheerananda (Dharmabandu 1949: 152–153). Similarly, members of the Soysa family—such as Mudaliyars Jeronis De Soysa and Charles Harris De Soysa, who supported both Christian and Buddhist institutions received their early education at the Palliyagodella Temple (Dharmabandu 1949: 173–174).

d) d) The consolidation of the Higher Ordination (*Upasampadā*) for *non-Govigama* fraternities (e.g., Karāva, Salagama, and Durāva), which had been previously rejected by the Kandyan monastic system, was closely linked to the upward social mobility of these castes within the colonial hierarchy. As a result, many *non-Govigama Mudaliyars* were eager to support new monastic fraternities, often aligning their patronage along caste lines in an effort to legitimize and elevate their social status.

e) e) The British colonial government took philanthropic and religious contributions into account when conferring imperial titles and honors. This incentivized many members of the emerging capitalist class to engage in charitable and religious activities, including contributions to both Christian and Buddhist institutions, in order to secure recognition from the colonial authorities.

f) f) Temple construction and the commissioning of inscriptions provided patrons with a means to publicly display their benevolence, piety, and elevated social standing. By

officiating at public ceremonies and religious functions, these patrons gained visibility, and coverage in the Buddhist press extended their reputation beyond the immediate locality. For some *Mudaliyars*, especially those who had accumulated wealth through stigmatized ventures such as the liquor trade, temple patronage served as a tool for moral rehabilitation and social respectability, allowing them to "whitewash" their reputations through religious merit.

Towards a Conclusion

The transformation of temple patronage in colonial Sri Lanka - particularly in the Low-country - reflects a complex interplay of religious, social, and political dynamics under colonial rule. With the decline of traditional monarchical support, a new class of bourgeois patrons, particularly the Mudaliyars, emerged as key benefactors of Buddhist temples. While some individuals within this elite class engaged in religious patronage out of genuine devotion or as lay disciples of the monastic community, many others strategically used temple construction, art projects and associated religious activities as vehicles to secure social legitimacy, consolidate caste-based hierarchies, and gain political recognition from both the indigenous populace and the colonial administration. Christian affiliation of bourgeois patrons, often nominal, allowed them access to colonial privileges, while their visible support for Buddhist establishments sustained local reverence and reinforced traditional social authority. In many cases, religious patronage was not simply an act of piety but a deliberate expression of social power, moral rehabilitation, and cultural identity. The shifting patterns of temple patronage during the colonial period thus illuminate broader processes of social mobility, colonial accommodation, and religious negotiation. The aesthetic preferences and objectified cultural capital of these bourgeois patrons significantly reshaped Buddhist monastic art and architecture in the Low-country, transforming traditional aesthetic norms and artistic conventions in Sri Lanka. This new artistic idiom, often referred to as the Southern School, redefined the visual culture of Buddhist institutional life and contributed to the formation of a distinct colonial bourgeois identity - one that navigated the imperatives of empire while preserving ties to indigenous religiosity.

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Plates

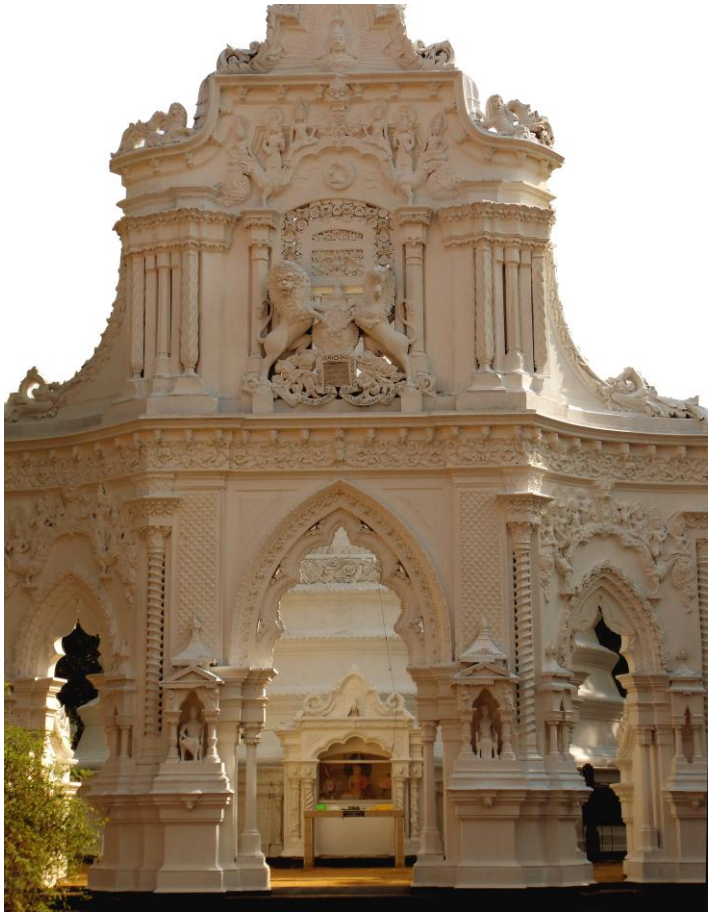


Plate 01: Archway at Ashokarama Maha Viharaya, Kalutara, late 19th century.



Plate 02: Image house of Panadura Rankoth Viharaya, Kalutara, late 19th century.



Plate 03: British coat of arms at the image house of Dodanduwa Shailabimbaramaya, Galle, late 19th century.



Plate 04: A group of royals in European attire, Story of King Maha Kappina, Thotagamuwa Subhadraramaya, Galle, 19th century.



Plate 05: Upper-class women in Western-style frocks in Buddhist narrative murals, Thotagamuwa Subhadraramaya, Galle, 19th century.

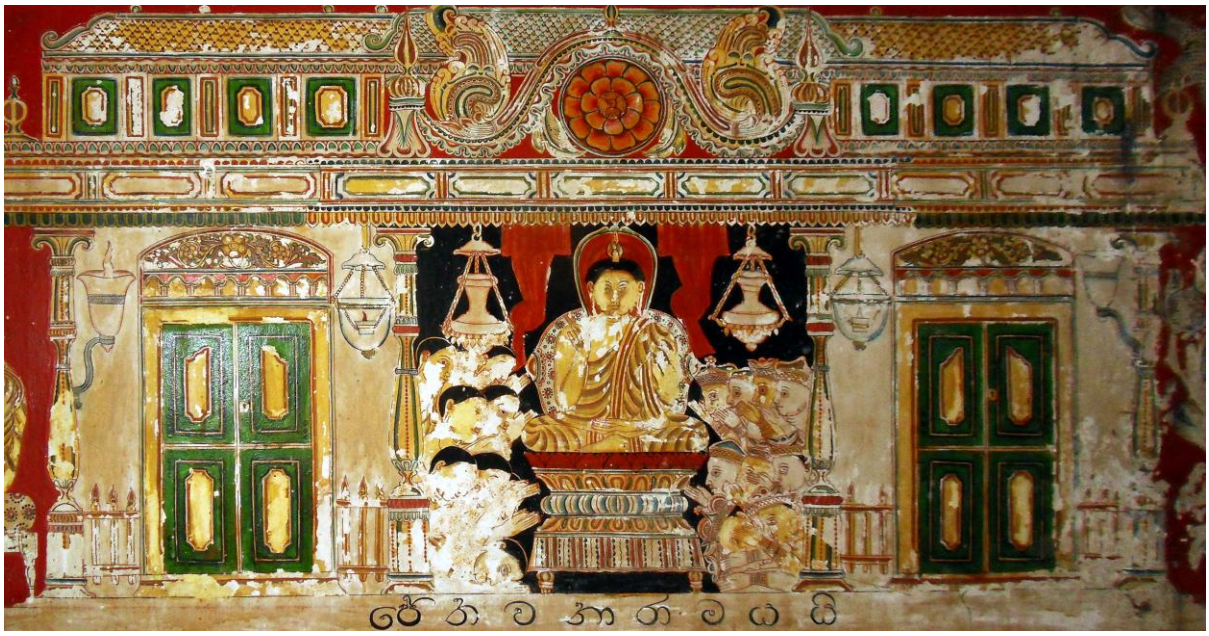


Plate 06: Jethavanaramaya decorated with Western lamps, utility objects, and architectural features, Kataluwa Purwaramaya, Galle, 19th century.



Plate 07: A scene from Ummagga Jataka story, Panadura Rankoth Viharaya, Kalutara, late 19th century

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