

## **Practical Project-based Analysis of Sri Lankan Traditional Mythical Creature Designs**

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### **Abstract**

In Sri Lanka, the rich mythology and cultural legacy are deeply rooted in traditional stylized legendary creatures. These animals play a crucial part in forming the island nation's identity and beliefs since they are frequently featured in literature, art, and religious rites. The present study investigates the traditions of politicizing these symbols focusing on the instruments, the techniques and the processes of sculpting. The focus is on the relevance of the lore in the present and its relation to modern sculpture. This research paper follows correlates of artistic activity. Written records, sculptural reliefs and wall paintings are studied as well as ideas. The practical work includes the restoration of the methods of imagination and learning of the ancient masters. The Berunda Pakshiya stands for strength, protection and balance, embodying the contemporaneity from culture rather than direct observation of nature. It does this by placing the design within the context of Sri Lankan art and its stylistic development while studying animal anatomy and behavior. All knowing encompasses these figures as patterns and focused aims that are spasms of repetition and creative vision. The concepts of modern design practice illustrated by concept art and digital art bridge the past traditions with the present day. This research is a tribute to the artistic heritage of Sri Lankans as it demonstrates how certain cultural practices sustain modern creativity and remain relevant within the culture.

**Keywords:** *Mythical creatures, Cultural symbolism, Traditional visual art techniques, Practical exploration*

## **Introduction**

This particular paper examines local specificities of traditional Sri Lankan mythical animal design and attempts to recreate some of the lost historical processes through practical project-based approach. Further, the objectives of the study include reconstructing the methods used to create such a legendary bird as the Berunda Pakshiya, a two-headed bird presenting strength, protection and balance. Finished pieces tribute to the antique methods and characteristic features of the lifestyle while bringing forward the system of composition, imagination, and disguise in the significance of Srilankan art.

Sri Lankan historical artist of the past are known to have a neat and orderly way of doing things when creating art. From a young age, the craftman were trained to copy preset forms and patterns, starting basically with a dot and working their way up to a highly intricate figure of a deity. Development was focused on the use of sensory perception, composition, and memory, facilitated by tools, materials, and techniques developed specifically for the region. Such customs brought about a style that was founded on principles of conservatism and self-expression thus guaranteeing upholding and development of the form of art.

The research also emphasizes how Sri Lankan artisans were informed about their surroundings and used them in their work. The thorough studies of the structure, skin, and movements of the aggressors were interspersed with active images that remained realistic and were ethnically oriented with culture carving them. This synthesis of realism and stylization can be easily related to the contemporary practices of design within the concept art and cultural media.

Specifically, the Berunda Pakshiya is being analyzed in this research in an attempt to especially peel back the layers of complexity, ideas and social significance that lie in the core of traditional designs. The results will not only contribute to the understanding of the artistic heritage of Sri Lanka, they will help to demonstrate the ways in which the fundamentals of the art continue to operate in the modern domains of creativity.

## **Research Methodology**

A qualitative study is being conducted in this particular research to understand the traditional art forms of Sri Lanka particularly the Berunda Pakshiya (two-headed bird) with respect to the mythical animal motifs. This research is formal in the sense of being academic but it is also pragmatic because it seeks to reconstruct such historical practices and their use within the context of a project.

The major approach here seeks the exploration of the historical and cultural context of the practice, which includes manuscripts, carvings, and murals, framed and supplemented by theoretical ideas. In this case, practical components include recreating traditional processes and materials including the stages of drawing on a true to scale drawing board, sculpting and some ornamentation in order to understand the space and time of ancient artisans and materials they used.

This research paper includes comparative analysis in which some sort of parallels are sought between the traditional Sri Lankan techniques and the present day techniques used within the framework of conceptual art. The methodology finally attempts to combine traditional forms of art with contemporary ones, not losing the essence of these creative processes along the way.

## **Traditional techniques and processes in Traditional visual art**

To analyze traditional techniques and processes, There are no any specific criteria or evidence to draw or create traditional mythical creatures. But there are some practicing art techniques in that early days. The basic traditional artists' step by step start to finish workflow in the early days, artists first learned to draw on a wooden drawing board known as "Yeti Poruva," which was covered in a substance called "Vadi." This was the beginning of traditional drawing instruction. Ground kikirindi leaves, tamarind seeds, coconut charcoal, iron slag, indigo, and finely ground quartz powder were all used to make this. The prepared surface allowed the artist to practice using a sea urchin spine or a

kumbuk bark stylus. Over time, modern slate pencils and slates replaced these tools.

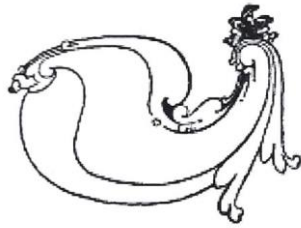


Figure 01:  
Vaka deka with paturu and sina mala



Figure 02:  
Katuru mala; modern drawing

In the beginning stage of the artists were initially tasked with copying their senior artist designs, such as the "Vaka deka," (Figure 01) a double curve design. This regular practice increased their hand control and memorization. As their confidence increased, artists were expected to recreate the design from memory, gradually adding more complex elements like "paturu" (wedges) and "sina mala" (flowers). More intricate forms, like "Katuru mala" (Figure 02) and "Tiringi thale" (Figure 03), developed from these basic shapes and required amateur artists to master intricate internal divisions and external embellishments.

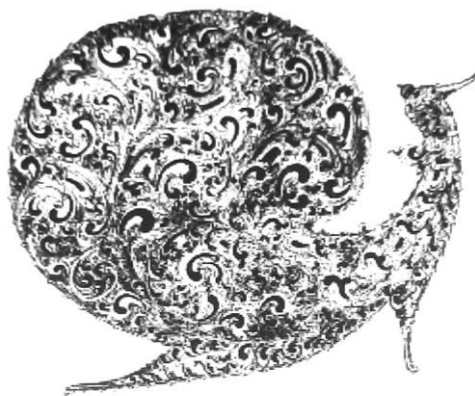


Figure 03:  
Tiringi Tale, half-size of original. From an old drawing in black and red belonging to. B. Keppitipola, Basnayaka Nilame of Embekke Devale. The vaka deka first drawn is clearly recognizable within the elaborated design. The broad, curved tongues (tandu) are red

in the original drawing. All these figures are drawn with a brush.

Since artist were supposed to draw the tiringi thale without using a duplicate, it was seen as a test of proficiency. The distinctive qualities of each artist's work persisted in spite of the conventional framework. Craftsmen were able to differentiate themselves by subtle differences in style and execution. The art form maintained its vitality while maintaining its historical and cultural value because of this fusion of tradition and uniqueness. (Coomaraswamy A.K. (1956), *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, Sri Lanka, Thisara Prakashakayo Ltd.)

### **Tools, Techniques, and Materials**

Confidence and accuracy were stressed throughout the drawing process. Because they were encouraged to approach sketching with a clear vision, students frequently finished complex ideas without first creating outlines. For example, when sketching a lion, the painter began with the muzzle and boldly used a brush to finish the shape. The significance of memory and imagery over impromptu innovation was emphasized by this approach. (Coomaraswamy A.K. (1956), *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, Sri Lanka, Thisara Prakashakayo Ltd.)

### **Floral Adornments and Repeating Patterns**

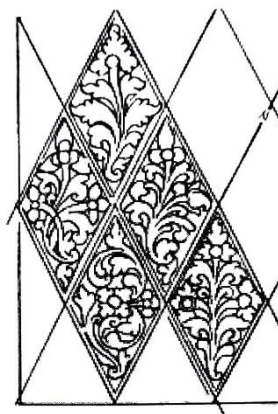


Figure 04:  
"Tundan veda; repeating design with geometrical construction; modern drawing.

Artist also learned to create floral motifs and repeating patterns using mathematical constructions known as "Tundan veda." (Figure 04) These designs varied slightly across families but maintained the core traditional aesthetic. Despite their shared foundation, individual craftsmen had room for creativity, allowing their work to remain distinguishable.

The crafting of repeating patterns and decorations demonstrated the artists' skill and confidence. Seeing these patterns come to life was compared to seeing a smooth, organic process, demonstrating the artists' profound knowledge of ancient shapes. (Coomaraswamy A.K. (1956), *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, Sri Lanka, Thisara Prakashakayo Ltd.)

### **Drawing Figures and Mythical Creatures**

After mastering simple and decorative patterns, artists moved on to sketching mythological animals and characters. The "wusamba-kunjara," a cross between an elephant and a bull, was used for the first training. The "catur-naripalakkiya" (four women and a palanquin) and the "nava-nari-kunjara" (nine ladies and an elephant) were examples of later designs. But the hardest part is amateur artists had to memorize them and modify the conventional components for other surfaces.

This phase placed more emphasis on using conventional design concepts than on copying them verbatim. Additionally, students committed Sanskrit literature like *Rupavaliya* to memory, which offered instructions on how to represent gods, mythological animals, and religious images. From dimensions and decoration to the resources required to make items like swords, thrones, and dagabas, these writings covered it all. (Coomaraswamy A.K. (1956), *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, Sri Lanka, Thisara Prakashakayo Ltd.)

### **Philosophical and Aesthetic Perspectives**

In Sri Lanka, traditional drawing instruction placed a strong emphasis on following rules and being proficient with preset shapes. The Western emphasis on personal interpretation and modification of natural forms was different from this method. The craftsman's focus was on achieving balance, symmetry, and clarity in design, with little tolerance for deviation.

The act of sketching was seen as an intuitive process. Craftsmen visualized their designs on the drawing surface before executing them, resulting in precise and unambiguous works. In addition to maintaining historic techniques, the focus on memory and repetition fostered a profound comprehension of the art form.

Sri Lanka's organized traditional drawing training program produced talented artists who could both preserve and innovate within the limitations of their trade. The educational system placed a strong emphasis on discipline, memorization, and the smooth transfer of ancient methods into real-world applications, from learning simple shapes to producing intricate Iconic patterns.

### **Practical-based Studies of Conceptual Animal Figures.**

In this study we going to applying traditional techniques and processes to sri lankan Berunda bird design and analysis how they get the influence and ideas to create this mythical bird

In common, Berunda birds represented dual heads and an avian body, the Berunda required artists to pay attention to symmetry and balance. Initial sketches focused on the core structure, followed by secondary detailing like wing feathers and tail enhancements. Patterns mimicked natural bird anatomy, modified to align with cultural aesthetics.



Figure 05:  
Berunda pakshiya, Embekke Devalaya, Wooden carvings on the columns, King  
Vikramabahu III,  
Gampola Era  
(AD 1357-1374),  
Sri Lanka

The Berundha Pakshiya, also known as the Gandaberunda bird in Indian culture, represents that two-headed eagle bird with enormous magical powers. This mythical bird influences real-life animals, like peacocks and parrots. And this mythical creature was represented on many occasions like flags, jewelry, murals and weapons in Sri Lankan history. When it comes to studying,

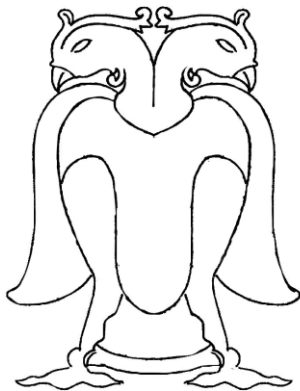


Figure 06:  
Base structure of Berunda pakshiya



Figure 07:  
Silhouette of Berunda pakshiya

Step one is to focus on the basic structure of this creation (Figure 06). Mark down the overall shape and placement of the anatomy elements (heads,



eyes, neck, chest, wing shape, and legs). In common, the Sri Lankan representation of the Berunda bird is a front view of symmetric design with two birds' heads facing opposite sides to make the shape of the silhouette more readable and clear (Figure 07).

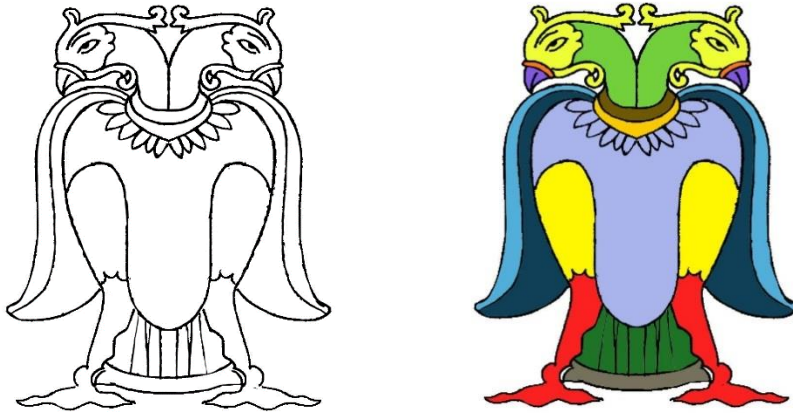


Figure 08:  
Secondary details and dividing the forms Base structure of Berunda pakshiya

Step two, adding secondary details and dividing the forms (Figure 08). Separating elements head and neck, neck and chest, thighs and tarsus, detailed eyes, wing shape, and tail elements.

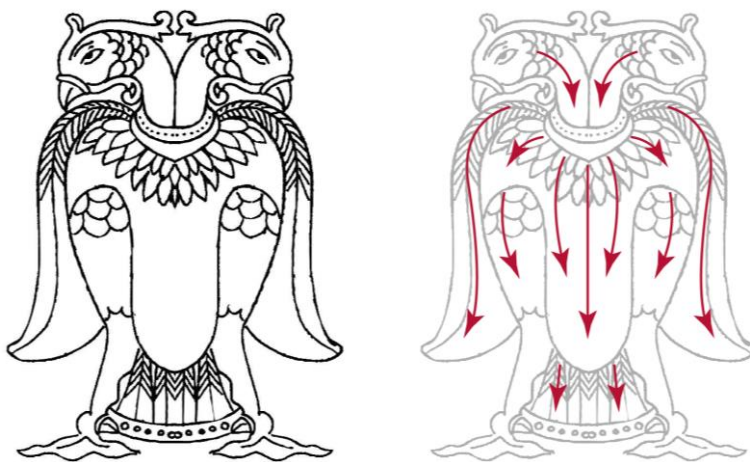


Figure 09:  
Enhancing and developing the feather structure of Berunda pakshiya

Step three is enhancing and developing the main idea of the creature design using patterns and shapes (Figure 09). To mimic organic animal elements like throat feathers, chest and belly feathers, thigh feathers, wing feathers, and finally tail feathers.

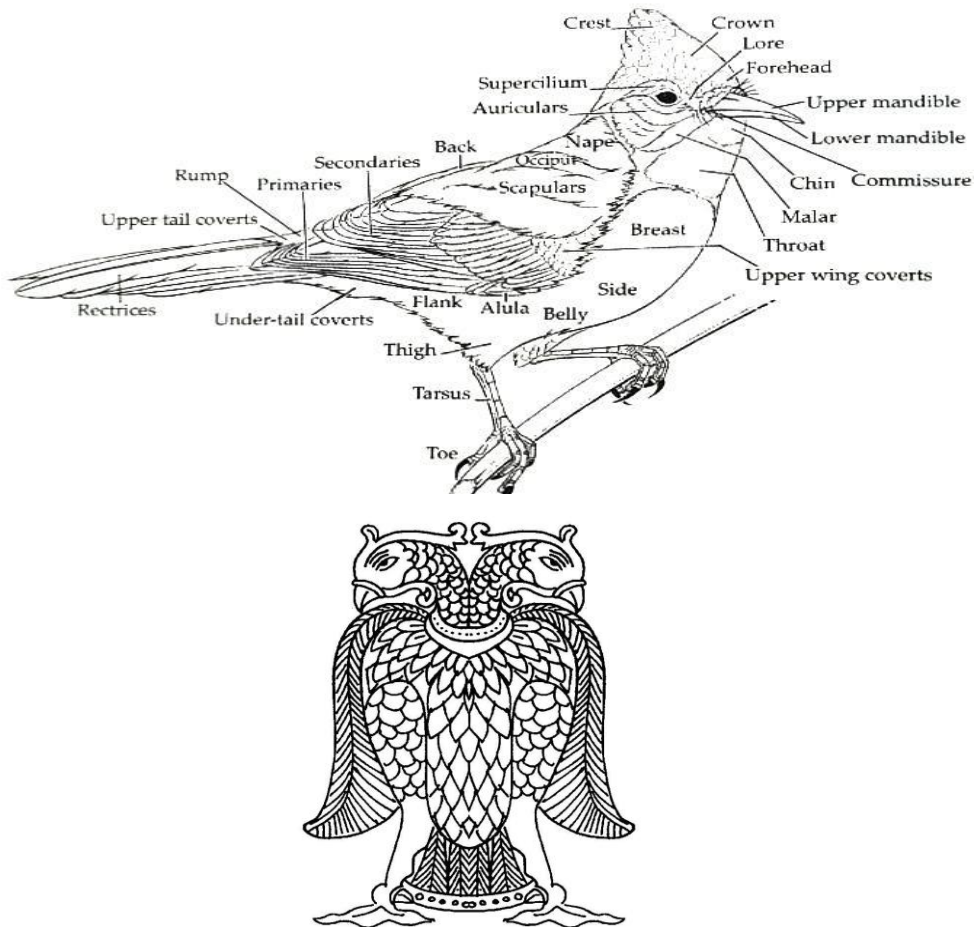


Figure 10:  
Final design of Berunda pakshiya

Step four is the final stage, fine-tuning the design and giving more aesthetics to the creature design. Adding decorative and geometrical shapes to enhance the look (Figure 10).

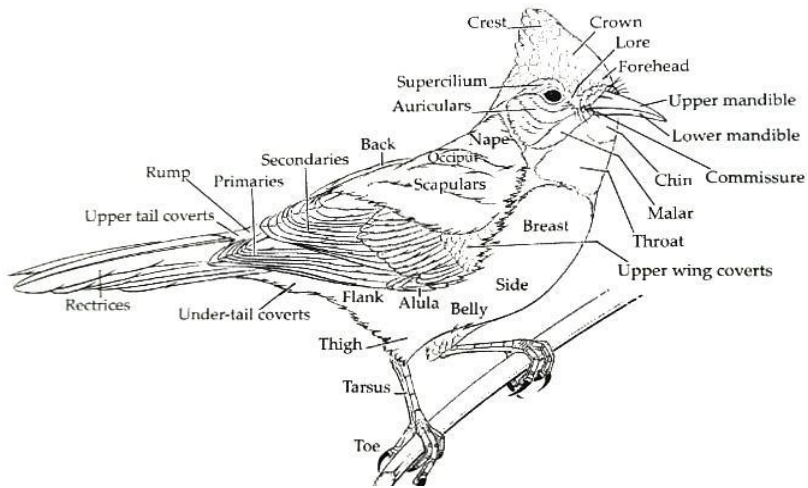


Figure 11:  
 General topography of forest bird

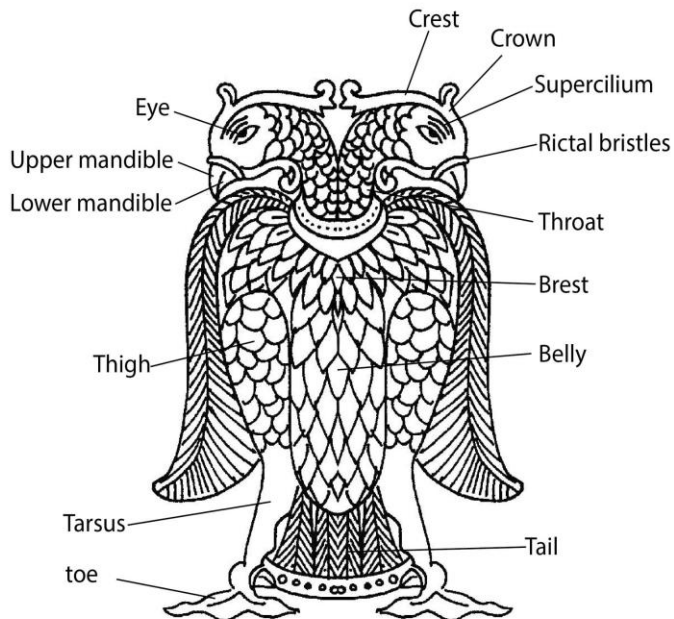


Figure 12:  
 Detail study: Applying General topography of forest bird to Berunda design

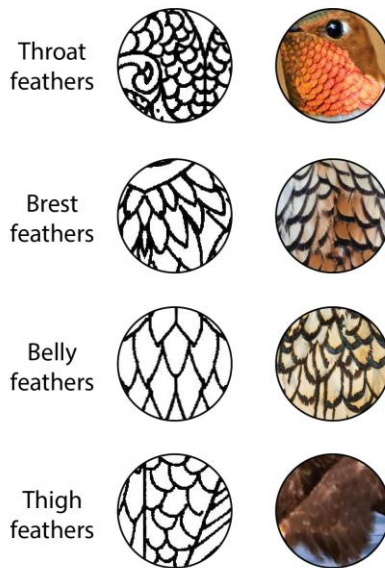


Figure 13:  
Detail study: Comparing feather patton to real-life bird feathers

In this Berunda Pakshiya study, I found out that when the classical artists create this Berunda design, they influence real-life birds' outer body anatomy structure (Figure 11) and texture of the bird feather types and pattern in real-life birds (Figure 13).

In this study, we can realize that, when Sri Lankan historical artists craft these mythical animals, they are mainly influenced by real-life animals that can be seen in nature. Especially, deep detailed study and understanding of those animals, anatomy structure, facial elements, features, skin textures, patterns, habitats, and behavior types. They convert those characteristic elements into a dynamic stylised design form to craft these unique mythical creatures.

They have their own stylized artistic style, but they have some common techniques and processes that are already used in the present day in the entertainment industry. For example, the silhouette of the animal references real-life animals like that in a stylising way.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusions arrived at in the study of the Sri Lankan national traditional designs of mythical animals throw more light on the relationship between the art, the culture and the progress. In particular, the analysis of methods, technologies and philosophies of creation of these works allowed us to reconstruct the approaches which historical Sri Lankan artists had towards the creation of fantastical beasts.

It was noticed that most of these artists were influenced by real animals. They undertook studies of the anatomical structures of animals; the shapes of the face, skin textures and patterns, and natural habitats and behavioral aspects of the animals and were able to ideate such aspects into stylistic representations. This process gave rise to mythical creatures such as the Berunda Pakshiya and others which while capturing the essence of art, also possess a fundamental origin that is in nature.

The analysis of conceptual figures such as the Berunda Pakshiya demonstrates existing stylized processes in sculpting the mythical creatures. The assembling of the sculptured image of a pair of bird heads required a very detailed methodology, beginning with the bulk and shape of the sculpture, going step by step detailing it and adding embellishments at every phase. Models when designing the bird figure sculptures oriented themselves on existing birds of live nature: peacocks and parrots, etc. For example, the construction of wing shapes, the architectural appearance of feathers, and the anatomical structure of the general body were systematically designed.

These studies underline how historical artists combined natural elements with cultural symbolism to create iconic representations. In addition to the essays, the study draws some similarities between pre-colonial Sri Lankan design practices and current techniques employed in the entertainment industry. It's amusing how current practices such as silhouette emphasis and introspective sketch stylisation continue to be applied in animation, video games, and concept art today. This extends our appreciation of traditional skills,

turning them into timeless arts that are readily extensible to modern requirements.

There is an underlying philosophical basis in Sri Lankan traditional arts. Symmetry and clarity were imperative which enabled the artists to design their art pieces without having to sketch them out first. This is different in the prevailing western societies where there is a perception that every single work of art has to be uniquely formed based on nature. In as much as there were set traditional perimeters, traditional artists personalized their works in tiny but conspicuous stylistic or execution details. This interrelationship between an overarching norm and individual voice ensured the freshness of the art whilst retaining its historical import.

This thesis illustrates that Sri Lankan ancient artists were inspired by reality and the environment to create mythical creatures, under traditional construction methods. They merged the real world with the creative world, allowing for the production of timeless masterpieces which are both simple and sophisticated without being bland.

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