

Portuguese imprint in Sri Lankan Art and Culture: Historical and Aesthetic expedition

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Abstract

The appearance of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) makes a significant turning point in the history of the island. Simply, it marked the end of medieval period in Sri Lankan polity, especially the ruling by a kingship, and the beginning of modern era in Sri Lanka. When we look in to the matter from a deeper sense, it is apparent that their arrival enabled transform the Sri Lankan society from its Indian, or more precisely the Asian mould, and gave it a unique western identity that lasted for about five centuries under colonial powers vested by three consecutive power unions namely: Portuguese (1505-1658), Dutch (1658-1796) and the British (1796-1948). Of which, the inspiration of Portuguese is immense due to its everlasting physiognomies embedded in Sri Lankan culture and society to date. Their inspiration is evident in almost every aspect of Sri Lankan culture: language, religion, socio-cultural affairs, dress patterns, food, art and architecture, music, dance, etc., Thus, it appears so important to have an in-depth study to identify and examine the influences/ inspirations of Portuguese that caused a significant transcendence of Sri Lanka's culture and other major aspects to date.

The study expects carrying out a major literature survey from Sri Lanka and overseas, with a particular focus on evidence found from Portugal: in government and private/ individual archives, libraries, galleries and parlours, which are under the custody of Portuguese government with their special permission, and a field study from Sri Lanka and in Portugal to map and detail the similarities, identities, and remarkable contributions and intercourse between two countries in terms of restoring the cultural values of the civil community. The excavated data, and evidence will be published in the form of complete volume covering all the areas and will also be uploaded into the relevant

academic and research databases with the permission of the relevant authorities. New findings will be published in accredited Research Conferences and journals.

Keywords: Portuguese in Sri Lanka, Portuguese Creole, Colonial architecture, Fortresses in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese lingua dialects

Pioneering work on the subject

It is apparent that many a scholars have examined and analyzed the facts and evidence to embrace the Portuguese imprint in the country from different perspectives, whereas its influence on Asian cultural transformation has also been discussed at varying degrees by scholars at home and overseas. Among the pioneering studies, those carried out by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya (1996-2008) is significant in which she has discussed the influence of Portuguese Creole in detail. John Holm (1994) examines the influence of Portuguese in a similar context in which she discusses the significance of Pidgins and Creoles with special reference to Sri Lanka. C.R. de Silva (1972, 1987, 1994, 2001 & 2002) studies about the Portuguese influence in Sri Lanka from various perspectives in that he examines the common features of Portuguese imprint in Sri Lanka and South Asia with special reference to Maldives. K.M. de Silva (1981) in his “A History of Sri Lanka” paid much attention to study about the significant turning points of the polity of Sri Lanka in that the legendary role played by the Portuguese has been analyzed from a broader perspective. Apart from major studies by Sri Lankan scholars some overseas scholars i.e. W. Fox (1819), J. Ferguson (1903), S. Ghana Prakasar (1919), Hugh Nevill (1904), John Holm (1988), and many of the scholars have examined the Portuguese influence from various perspectives. The latest study is seen in the work by Hugo C Cardoso,., et al. (2019) in “Documenting modern Sri Lanka Portuguese – Scholar Space” by putting more attention on language space accommodated by Portuguese Creole in Sri Lanka. It was realized through all these readings, the scholars have paid more attention on the language, and they have discussed the other socio-cultural elements as part of the establishment of language in the Sri Lankan society.

In my view, the Portuguese involvement in Sri Lankan culture

and society is broader than what we have evaluated to date, its amalgamation is vital in shaping and reshaping Sri Lanka's Art & Architecture, dance and music that are deep rooted to date in Sri Lankan culture. Even though centuries have passed after the Portuguese invasion of the country as a colony, their inspiration is rather a package of new elements in all its aspects which could not be exterminated by her successors: Dutch and British rulers. Thus, it appears more important to have an onsite examination and evaluation with the Portuguese culture and its affinities with regard to the contemporary Sri Lankan socio cultural behaviour and restore them for the future references and further studies as well.

Introduction

Sri Lanka, located in the southern tip of the Indian Ocean, formerly known as Ceylon, Serendib, Tabrobane, Thabmbapanni etc., throughout its history, experienced a variety of cultural influences, mainly because it became the natural focal point at the southernmost part of the sea routes that connected Asia with the Mediterranean. Sailors from Greece, Rome, China, Persia and many of the Southeast Asian countries i.e. Cambodia, Indonesia (Java, Sumatra, Bali) and Indian sailors and merchants have visited the island for many a purposes, of which gem and jewelry, spices, and natural beauty is significant. Nevertheless, they left their cultural heritage in varying degrees in the island through various channels: marriage, religious institutions, language, arts and crafts, music and dance, architecture etc.,

The year 1505, turns a new chapter in the history of Sri Lanka with significant steps taken in the polity, economy and society, and a major volume of cultural influence with the landing of a fleet of Portuguese headed by Don Lourenço de Almeida when they were randomly gusted into the island at Galle, the southern coastal tip of the island.¹ They were sailing from around Maldives as a result of a pursuit made against ships belonging to Moorish and Arab traders, and finally rescued themselves in the island Serendib. This incident is considered the first European appearance in the country with a different

¹<http://www.galleheritage.gov.lk/en/the-portuguese-period/>, accessed: 01/06/2022

behavior, advanced military equipment i.e. guns, and allied military weapons. It is apparent that the arrival of the Portuguese prevented the Island from becoming an Indian province. With the naming of the island as Ceilão, Sri Lanka gained a unique identity, imposing a considerable amount of influence on the country's culture nearly five centuries since 1505. We agree, all Portuguese influence was not beneficial with regard to its identity and the sustainability of the country, its positive aspects have contributed to develop a diverse economic, social and cultural domain through which traditional aspects were restored and promoted by the ordinary society where the Portuguese administration never forced restrictions.

The naval captain Almeida having received a friendly hand by the king of Kotte, Vira Parakrama Bahu, was permitted to implement commercial avenues the island, and as a result established formal contact with the king of Kotte. Not only that, in 1518 they were permitted to build a fort at Colombo and were given trading concessions.² The particular transformation is described in the Sinhalese chronicle Rajavaliya as follows;

"At that time, in the year 1522 of our Lord Jesus Christ, there came a ship to the harbor of Colombo from the Portuguese settlement in Jambudvipa...there in our harbor of Colombo a race of people fair of skin and comely withal. They don jackets of iron and hats of iron: they rest not a minute in one place: they walk here and there...they eat hunks of white stone (bread) and drink blood (wine): and give two or three pieces of gold and silver for one fish or one lime. The report of their cannon is louder than thunder when it bursts upon the rock of Yugandhara: their cannon balls fly for a gawwa and shatter fortress of granite."³

Portuguese visitors also had the opportunity to rule the country when Prince Dharmapala was enthroned as the successor of King Buvaneka Bahu with all the patronage given for his grandson Prince Dharmapala,

² Encyclopedia Britannica, The Portuguese in Sri Lanka (1505–1658)

³ Rajavaliya: A Historical Narrative of Sinhalese Kings from Vijaya to Wimaladharmasuriya II ed, B. Gunasekara, 1900. Colombo, George J.A. Skeen, Government Printer, Ceylon p.73

who was even more dependent on Portuguese support. An agreement between Bhuvanaika Bahu and the king of Portuguese granted to receive a tribute of cinnamon. Further, the Prince was educated at the Roman Catholic Church under the patronage of the members of the Franciscan order, and he was converted to a Christian in 1556.⁴ From then onwards the Portuguese ruled the island except the hill country,⁵ by enabling a system of services with the aim of securing the essential produce of the island, especially the cinnamon and elephants. The existing caste system was also secured by the Portuguese in terms of facilitating the needs of the new rule. While Salagama caste was originally serving for Cinnamon industry, the non-Salagamas, i.e. Karawa, Hunu, and Padu castes were newly engaged in peeling of cinnamon by Portuguese rulers.⁶

It is to be mentioned that Portuguese were the first administrators to maintain the Land Register (Tombo) in order to maintain the land and people in each and every village they were ruling,⁷ ‘and the payment in land to officials also was continued and was extended to Portuguese officials as well.’⁸

New beginning of Sri Lankan culture

When Portuguese arrived in the island of Ceylon, they did not have a proper understanding of its native culture: their religion, culture, norms and customs etc., The best option for them to introduce their own pattern of polity, economy and a culture, utilizing their power and strength. Whether the new beginning was alien to the existing population was a question though, it must have created ground for conflicts between the rulers and the civilians, also creating hardships in

⁴ Perera, C. Gaston. “THE FIRST EVANGELICAL MISSION OF THE FRANCISCANS TO CEYLON.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 53 (2007): 153–202. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23731204>.

⁵ De Silva, K.M. 1981. *A History of Sri Lanka*, Berkley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, pp. 113- 132

⁶ -ibid- p. 179

⁷ Paranavithana, Karunadasa Dias, 2007. “The Portuguese Tombos as a Source of Sixteenth-Seventeenth Century Sri Lankan History,” *Re-Exploring the Links History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*. Ed. Jorge Flores, Maritime Asia 18, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, pp. 63-67

⁸ Silva, K.M., 1981. pp.177- 178

daily life. We need to accept that the Portuguese introduced a feudal society where the system was administered by employers and people were employed in several positions to obtain the services. They were either daily paid or monthly paid depending on the services rendered to the government. While they were governing the island, the main profitable income of the Portuguese was Cinnamon and elephants, thus, the services were more accrued towards these products. In addition, they promoted the produce of pepper and betel nuts (areca nuts) since it gave a profitable harvest upon the Ceylonese weather. Apparently, the new administration created a new beginning of Sri Lankan culture, economy and culture as briefly mentioned below;

Language

It is imperative that Portuguese served as a lingua franca in Sri Lanka nearly for three hundred years. Even to date, the Burgher community of 0.3% of the population covering both Portuguese burghers and the later appeared Dutch Burghers, have made a significant impact on Sri Lankan language. To date, we Sri Lankans use a quite a large number of words borrowed/ inspired from those belonged to Portuguese (Table 01). Apparently, it has led to the evolution of a new language, “Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole.”⁹ The interaction of the Portuguese and the islanders led to the evolution of a new language, Portuguese Creole. It helped flourishing as a link language between the 16th and mid-19th centuries and continues to be spoken today (there is no written form) by an extremely small percentage of the population.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that the miscegenation of the Portuguese-Sri Lankan marriage resulted in the growth and expansion of bilingual community that was proficient in both Creole and Sinhala/Tamil.¹¹

⁹ De Silva, Shehan & Jayasuriya, Shihan de S. 2008. *The Portuguese in the East: A Cultural History of a Maritime Trading Empire: Volume 11 of International Library of Colonial History*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York. P.113

¹⁰ Cardoso, Hugo C., et al. 2019, *Documenting modern Sri Lanka Portuguese – Scholar Space, Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 19, Documentation and Maintenance, of Contact Languages from South Asia to East Asia*. Mario Pinharanda-Nunes & Hugo C. Cardoso Ed., p.7 <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream>: Accessed 03/07/2022

¹¹ Jayasuriya Shihan de Silva. *The Portuguese Cultural Imprint on Sri Lanka*. In: *Lusotopie*, n°7, 2000. *Lusophonies asiatiques, Asiatiques en lusophonies*. P. 253. (pp.

Words borrowed/ inspired from Portuguese Language

Person names	City names	Object names
Almeda/ Almeida	Batticaloa (Batecalou)	almariya (wardrobe)
Alwis (Alves)	Chilaw	annasi (pineapple)
Aponsu	Colombo	baldiya (bucket)
Cabraal	Milagiriya (milagre)	bankuwa (bench)
Corea (Correia)	Negombo	bonikka (doll)
Costa	Putlam	bottama (button),
Croos (Cruz),	San Sebastian Hill	gova (cabbage)
De Abrew (Abreu)	St. Joseph	kabuk (laterite, a building material)
De Mel (Melo)		kalisama (trousers)
De Saram (Serra)		kamisaya (shirt)
De Silva (Da Silva)		kussiya (kitchen)
De Soysa		lensuwa (handkerchief)
De Zoysa Dias		masaya (month)
De Fonseka		mesaya (table)
Fonseka (Fonseca),		narang (orange)
Fernando		nona (lady)
Fernandes		paan (bread)
Gomes or Gomis		pinturaya (picture)
Livera		rodaya (wheel)
Mendis (Mendes)		rosa (pink)
Nonis		saban (soap)
Perera (Pereira)		salada (salad)
Peiris o		sapattuwa (shoe)
Pieris		simenti (cement)
Peres		sumanaya (week)
Pinto		toppiya (hat)
Rodrigo		tuwaya (towel)
(Rodrigues) Salgado		viduruwa (glass)
Sigera		
Silva/ de Silva		
Suwaris		
Thabrew/ de Abrew Thisera		
Vaas (Vaz)		

Table 01: Words adapted from Portuguese Creole to the Sinhalese vocabulary

Furthermore, the Portuguese influence within Sri Lankan society is even more prominent in Portuguese Burgher communities and Afro-Lankan communities within the Island which formed a new language dialect “Sri Lankan Portuguese.”¹² And to witness to date some of the names of the cities, persons and objects are still identified by Portuguese terms. Most Burgher people have preserved Western customs of which their language in that their surnames are retained with pride.

To date, speakers of Portuguese Creole are generally members of the Burgher community (descendants of the Portuguese and Dutch) who reside in Batticaloa and Trincomalee.¹³ In addition it is spoken by the Kaffir community (Bantu slaves brought to the Island by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch and British), in Puttlam.¹⁴ Portuguese Creole consists of words from Portuguese, Sinhala, Tamil, and even Dutch and English.¹⁵ It is considered to be the most diverse creole dialect in Asia because of its vitality and the influence of its vocabulary on the Sinhala language. The Portuguese Burghers were more mixed, following Catholicism and speaking a Portuguese creole language, and due to its vibrant usage and adaptability to the social demands, Portuguese Creole continued to be used by the Dutch Burghers families too, as the informal language until the end of the 19th century.¹⁶

Religion/ Roman Catholicism.

The introduction of the Christianity is seen with the arrival of Portuguese to the island. Being the main form of Christianity in Sri Lanka to date, it was first introduced through the particular intercourse with Portuguese missionaries. Whereas the Portuguese influence was marked by intense Roman Catholic missionary activity, Portuguese

¹² A Succinct Survey, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, p.102

¹³ -ibid-p. 254

¹⁴ Holm, John, 1994 (Reprint), Pidgins and Creoles Vol. II- Resurvey, New

¹⁵ York: Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Pp. 288-289

¹⁶ Pathmanadan, S., 2006 “The Portuguese in North East Sri Lanka (1543-1658): An Assessment of Impressions Recorded in Tamil Chronicles and Poems,” *Maritime Asia* 18, Re-Exploring the links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka, ed. GJorge Manuel Flores, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz. p.31

established Catholic religious teaching centers by Franciscan priests since 1542.¹⁷ They seem to have been more responsible with regard to the education. Since the Jesuit priests were well versed in teaching, they have engaged in teaching in the Northern areas. However, Catholic clergy was more active in transforming the traditional system of education in the country: from temples, or *pirivenas* to the formal schools and educational institutes. It is the fact that they established several schools in Jaffna Peninsula while giving some opportunities for the communities in other areas as well. With the publicity they gained by establishing a school in Colombo, following schools were established in different areas in the country;

1. St. Aloysius College, Galle and Rathnapura
2. St. Michael's College, Batticaloa
3. St. Servatius' College, Matara
4. St. Joseph's College, Trincomallee
5. St. Mary's College, Kegalle¹⁸

With the arrival of the Dominican and Augustinian priests, different tasks were assigned to each school.¹⁹

Most important with regard to the polity of this country is the education provided to Prince Dharmapala, grandson of King Buvaneka Bahu under the Franciscan Priests, and his conversion to Catholic resulting many members of the Sinhalese royal inheritance to follow the same. Particular coronation resulted in transferring of Buddhist orthodoxy in kingship towards Christianity, more precisely Catholicism. It is informed that the Prince Dharmapala or Don Juan Dharmapala, endowed missionary orders lavishly, often from the properties of Buddhist and Hindu temples. The particular movement helped Portuguese to promote Christianity. "Members of the landed aristocracy embraced Christianity and took Portuguese surnames at baptism."²⁰

¹⁷Themere, Kelechukwu, U., ed., 2014 *Language Contact: A Multidimensional Perspective*, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 209

¹⁸ McGilvray, Dennis B. 1982. "Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, No.2 (1982): p.250 (235–63). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178584>. Accessed: 10/07/2022 19
<https://catholiceducation.lk/history-of-catholic-education/> Accessed: 05/07/2022

²⁰ House of the Archbishops, *Arrival of Jesuit Fathers in Sri Lanka*:

While the priests of Franciscan order were responsible for education, they established parish schools in villages and educated them not only for the sake of education, by converting them as Christians too. “Many coastal communities underwent mass conversion, particularly Jaffna, Mannar, and the fishing communities north of Colombo. Catholic churches with schools attached to them served Catholic communities all over the country. The Portuguese language spread extensively, and the upper classes quickly gained proficiency in it.”²¹

It is so significant that the Portuguese were more successful in retaining their converts than the Dutch missionaries who tried to spread Protestantism after the Portuguese left the island. This is reflected in the census report of Sri Lanka where the Catholic community represented 6.2% of the total population where the Christianity was endowed by 1.4%. There is no seen community of Protestants according to the latest census reports.²²

Portuguese in Administration

It is to be noted that the Portuguese were the first to introduce a system of record keeping in local administration. They introduced a registry of lands in the country in terms of calculating the earnings and profits of the crops, harvest of their cultivation from the lands they acquired. ‘They compiled a tombo, or land register, to provide a detailed statement of landholding, crops grown, tax obligations, and nature of ownership.’²³ The purpose of maintaining the records was to manage and monitor the earnings and profits of the areas under their control, and the particular mechanism helped immensely in later administrative procedures to continue the same practice in a modified and customized manner. It was more or less continued by later occupied Dutch and British rulers of the island, despite some of them were destroyed. It is to be noted that the Portuguese administration, and the practice is continued in the country even to date. The government position of land registrar, and the Land

<https://catholiceducation.lk/arrival-of-jesuit-fathers-in-sri-lanka/>

²¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka/The-Portuguese-in-Sri-Lanka-1505-1658>

²² Census Report- 2012. Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Policy Implementation, Economic, Child, Youth Affairs and Cultural Affairs, ISBN: 978-955-577-940-1.p.147

²³ Paranavithana, Karunadasa Dias, 2006. pp.63-78

Registries in the country is hailed from the system of Tombo.

A different approach in local administration was also captured by Portuguese descendants in the country during the colonial period due to their educational background. Since the Catholic priests took the responsibility of educating the local community with a different objective, they were taught in the English medium. When, the colonials were taking control of the country, these Portuguese descended, English educated community were on top priority list and were employed in higher positions in the local government offices. They were in different ranks from civil servants, administrators, bankers, teachers, court registrars and other jobs. To date, we see that some of the highly paid jobs are reserved by the Portuguese descendants in the country.

Portuguese Art and Architecture

Portuguese once took the rule over several regions in the country, brought their government officials, soldiers, technicians, crafts people from time to time. They married Sri Lankans and initiated the construction of houses, churches, fortifications, and several other buildings that necessarily portrayed the Portuguese architectural inspiration. The masons, carpenters, plumbers, and other local crafts people along with the Portuguese craftsmen, religious value, and/or measures that have been taken to maintain the fullest security in the respective construction work. Use of rubble stones, and the Pise de Terre (rammed earth), use of terracotta floor bricks, half round tiles, etc., were part of the Portuguese influence on architecture.²⁴ Below given is a brief description of built architecture inherited by Portuguese to Sri Lanka.

a. Catholic Churches (Chapel)

When the Portuguese introduced Catholicism in the country, they established the Catholic churches (Chapels) all over the island, especially in the maritime areas. Some of them have been re-constructed and

²⁴ De Vos, Ashley, 2002. Saman Kelegama and Roshan Madawela ed., *Dutch Architecture, Dutch Colonial Architecture, Dutch Period Architecture or Architecture of Dual Parentage?*, in *400 Years of Dutch – Sri Lanka Relations 1602 – 2002*, (Colombo, Institute Policy Studies of Sri Lanka pp.399-438.

effected as Dutch Reformed Churches i.e. All Saints Anglican Church in Galle, Church of Our Lady in Vaddukkoday in Jaffna. To date, Sri Lanka is embraced with several nationally recognized Portuguese churches which are also identified and preserved as archaeological monuments in the country. It is evident that Portuguese introduced a distinctive tradition of architecture which was gradually incorporated in to the Sri Lankan architecture i.e. the inner gardens, facades, arches and arcades which were new to the Sri Lankan masonry.

Fortresses

There are 13 major fortresses around the island with distinctive architectural scape exclusively built by Portuguese to provide the utmost security to the island they conquered. They were all individual arrangements depending on the natural landscape to fulfil the need and the circumstances. The evidence remains to date in Galle (Fig. 01 & 02), Kalutara, Matara, Pooneryn, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Kytes and Delft Island, Mannar, Menikkadawara, Negombo, Ratnapura, Ruwanwella, and Hanwella, where all were identified as Dutch fortresses once Dutchers captured the island over Portuguese.



Fig. 01: Marine Entrance of Galle Fort with Dutch Emblam on top



Fig. 02: Main Entrance of Galle Fort

However, to date, some of these fortresses are in a dilapidated stage. The fortresses in main cities i.e. Colombo, Galle, Matara, Kalutara, Poneryn, Jaffna etc., are well maintained by the local government and the foreign aid exclusively sent forth from both Portugal and Holland to preserve and maintain them.²⁵

It is not exaggerating, each of these fortresses portrays its own architectural scape depending on the geographical contours of the place. While sea fortresses like Galle, Matara (Fig. 03 & 04), Colombo, Jaffna (Fig.04), were forced to provide extra care from sea fare threats, the landside fortresses were prepared as barriers to reach the Portuguese mind centers.



Fig. 03: Matara Fortress (Star Fortress)

²⁵ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/451/>



Fig. 04: Matara Fortress- Main Entrance

Houses

Houses made under Portuguese influence were so typical that they were built upon a built platform. The houses had a colonnaded open verandah, portico, interior garden with several rooms facing it, two way doors and windows with niches on the walls to provide light and ventilation to the inside of the house. Gabled roofs were introduced with clay made roof tiles.



Fig. 05 Portuguese built colonial house converted into maritime museum-

Galle Fort

Such characteristics obviously helped demarcating the social hierarchy of Portuguese- Sri Lankan families (Fig. 05 & 06).



Fig. 06 Streets and shops inside the Galle Fort. UNESCO World Heritage Site

Buddhist Art and Architecture

Above all, the Portuguese were able to influence the Buddhist art in the country, especially absorbed the newly introduced Portuguese elements transforming its original form and structure to a westernized structure. Aforementioned façade, decorated pillars in the interior of the image house, arches and gables were gradually evolved, and built by the local craftsmen under the instructions of Portuguese masonry. The stucco designs on the churches, were the precursor to the elaborate designs which adorned the facades of Buddhist temples. The early European facade temples were probably created along the coast which had absorbed European cultural traits; gradually the style penetrated interior parts of the island. There are also instances where actual churches have been converted into Buddhist temples i.e. Balapitiya Pushparamaya

Raja Maha Vihara in Galle District (Fig. 07)



Fig. 07 BalapitiyaPushparama Raja Maha Viharaya

<https://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/Stock-Images/temple-sri-pushparama.html>²⁶

Further, the Bell Tower which has become an integral part of Sri Lankan Buddhist temples was also introduced by Portuguese, though they are not associated with Portuguese Church Art (Fig. 08 & 09).



Fig. 08 Gateway (Thorana) at Kathaluwa Buddhist Temple, Galle



Fig. 09 Gateway (Thorana) with Bell Tower, Sunandaramaya, Buddhist Temple, Ambalangoda

²⁶ Image Code: IBR- 3829736Photographer:MartinMoxter/imageBROKERCcollection, Shooting date: 03/04/2013

Incorporation of European figures into the Buddhist temple paintings is another inspiration received from Portuguese. Of them, the European winged angel is significant. Though the concept of angel is not alien to Buddhist art, Christian style angel with wings became popular in Sri Lankan Buddhist art during the period of Portuguese. These were created by local craftsmen who copied these figures from sketches, books or other portable art material. However, those figures were evolved with typical iconography which emerged a combination of Sri Lankan-Portuguese art conquest in Buddhist paintings i.e. Mirissa Veheragalle Samudragiri temple, Kathaluwa ancient Raja Maha Vihara. Moreover, the grape vines, maple leaf, and several fauna and flora of European style was introduced to Buddhist paintings by the Portuguese.

The most significant characteristics of Buddhist painting during this period is the incorporation of Portuguese style clothes in to the paintings. In many scenes minor details were merged in to the traditional dress of Sri Lankan woman or a man whereas some paintings were entirely representing the Portuguese dress patterns. i.e. Purvarama Temple, Kathaluwa (Fig. 10)



Fig. 10 Frescoes at the Purvarama Vihara, Kataluwa (1886)

Portuguese cuisine and Sri Lankan Spices

Portuguese introduced many food, flavours and sweetmeat to the Sri Lankan culture. One of the major introductions is the red chilies which is a must in Sri Lankan curry making to date. In every Sri Lankan kitchen, chilly and pepper is an essential spice in preparing fish, meat, or any other hot and spicy curry. Similarly, the use of Cummins, dill seeds and cinnamon were popularized in the Sri Lankan cuisine by the Portuguese. Until then, pepper was the only hot mix in Sri Lankan cookery practice.

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Bread and sweetmeat

Along with that they also introduced bread to the Sri Lankan food. According to Rajawaliya, people identified bread as “hunks of white stone.” They introduced various kinds of bread and cakes i.e. love cake, bolo fiado or bolo folhado, a layer cake filled with cashew. Nonetheless, Boruwa (made with semolina (Rulang) or sago seeds), Oil cake, Milk toffee, musket, cookies, and fuguete are prominent sweetmeat in Sri Lanka even today. Bolo Fiado (Layered Pastry Cake), and "Sinisir" (a rice pancake with coconut and spices) show the blend of local and Portuguese culinary traditions.²⁸

Rice and vegetables

The Portuguese introduction to Sri Lanka significantly influenced the island's cuisine, bringing new ingredients, cooking techniques, and dishes. Some of the notable cuisines and culinary elements introduced by the Portuguese include Chili and Spices, which became a staple in Sri Lankan cooking, replacing or supplementing traditional spices.²⁹ They also introduced vinegar in cooking, leading to the creation of dishes i.e. marinated meats, and fish and most of the pickles. Bitter Gourd and Other Vegetables: Certain vegetables like bitter gourd and tomatoes were introduced or popularized through Portuguese influence, becoming

²⁷ De Silva, 1981. pp.90-127

²⁸ De Silva, K.M.1993, A History of Sri Lanka. University of California Press, 116-120

²⁹ -ibid-p. 123.

integral to local cuisine .

Dress and costume

Under the Portuguese rule, Sri Lanka was influenced by a new trend of clothing i.e. maxi and *pinapo* frock became so popular in the country. They were the first to introduce the *Cabaya* or coat to males, *Juan hatte* (a jacket with long sleeves) for women, *saya* (skirt), *kabakurruttu* (a short, long sleeved cotton jacket edged at the side with dainty pillow lace), shoes and sandals, etc., all of which have now become a part of Sri Lankan culture and considered Sri Lankan rather than European.³⁰ Illustrations in Portuguese and Dutch descriptions of the Island in the 16th and 17th centuries reveal that the Sinhalese soldier's dress was of Portuguese influence. There is an engraving from *Description of Malabar and Ceylon* (1672) by the Dutchman Philip Baldaeus that depicts the reception of his fellow-countryman, explorer Joris van Spilbergen, by King Vimaladharmasuriya I. The king's guards are shown wearing a Portuguese-type helmet, white jacket and kilt (Fig. 11).

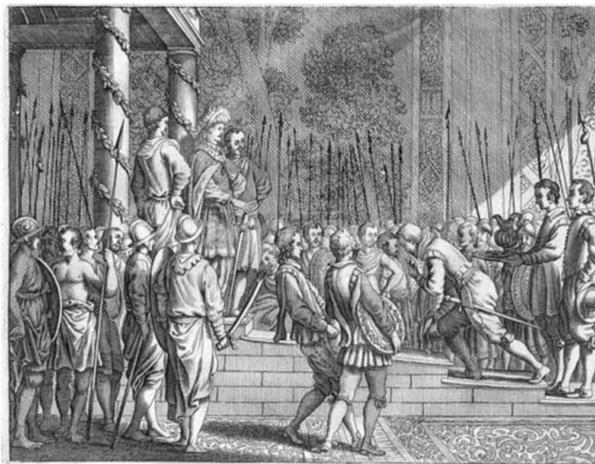


Fig.11 Explorer Joris van Spilbergen received by King Vimaladharmasuriya I.
King's guards with Portuguese helmet³¹

It is significant that the later arrived Dutch and British colonizers

³⁰ Wimalaratne, K.D.G., 2002. *Cultural Impact of the Dutch Rule in Sri Lanka* in 400 Years of Dutch – Sri Lanka Relations 1602- 2002, Saman Kelegama and Roshan Madawela ed., (Colombo, Institute of Policy Studies, pp.543

³¹ Baldaeus, Philip (1672) *Descriptions of Malabar and Ceylon*,

continued the same tradition that they wore Portuguese costume, complete with hat and shoes.

Music and dance

One of the biggest revolutions in Sri Lankan culture is seen in its music as a result of the arrival of Portuguese. They not only revitalized the traditional Sri Lankan music, but their contribution reformed its original form with typical customs and norms into the existing values too. They introduced the so-called western instruments i.e. ukulele and the guitar, viola and violin (western), also the musical forms such as the *baila*, which was originally popular in the community of Portuguese traders and their Kaffir slaves.³² With its particular rhythmic beat 6/8 time, *baila* music has established its own identity in Sri Lankan society even today: in musical entertainments/performances, festivals and celebrations i.e. weddings, birthdays and special gatherings. To date, Sri Lanka boasts of renowned musicians whose nick names have the prefix '*Baila*.' i.e. *Baila Bastian*. There is a popular *baila* song composed of him that goes as *Lankawata baila gena Wally Bastian-Baila valin Rata hollapu baila Bastian*. (*Wally Bastian*, the one who brought *baila* to Ceylon: the one who shook the country by singing *baila*).³³ It is apparent that the *baila* created a particular musical tradition in the country, perhaps due to its new music melodies, the fast tempo, comical lyrics, new instruments, and always entertained by dance. As Radhakrishnan states: The dances include "quadrille dancing known as *láansas* (lancers), which is maintained in Batticaloa as a highly valued albeit more esoteric form."³⁴ Silva argues that music of 16th-century Portugal, has found its way into mainstream popular Sinhalese music in such a way that it has been instrumental in bridging the cultural gap between Sri Lankans and the Portuguese.³⁵

³² Jackson, pp. 73-76

³³ Please refer to the you tube link: https://youtu.be/n_pgmrBZCfQ

³⁴ Radhakrishnan, Mahesh, 2021. "Shake it and Dance": Portuguese Identity and the Performance of *Káffrinha*, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, Taylor & Francis. P. 13 (1-29) Stable URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14442213.2021.1922496> : Accessed 25/06/2022

³⁵ Jayasuriya, Shihan De Silva. 2009. "Tracing socio-cultural roots of the Portuguese influence in

Technical/ Mechanical skills by Portuguese

The majority of the Portuguese descendants are craftsmen in that we find eminent black smiths, key smiths, leather product makers, master carpenters, tailors, printers, painters and mechanics. They are capable of creating many practically, and aesthetically sound equipment ranging from heavy duty machines to kitchen knives, beyond capabilities of these black- smiths. Till recent times, the only owners of printing presses in Batticaloa District in the island were the Portuguese and Dutch descent Burghers.³⁶ Even in the Printing press managed by the Catholic clergy, the master printers and binders were all of Portuguese origin.³⁷

Apart from that, Beeralu-Lacemaking which began as a domestic pastime of Burgher women, is now a part of Sinhalese culture too. The Beeralu lace is an iconic industry in south Ceylon, where it generates high income to the craftsman, also an instrumental wearing representing the social status, especially of Sri Lankan women.³⁸ The typical technique, the designs and the clothing is unique to the industry and has become an iconic of the social hierarchy in the country for a period (Fig. 12).

Sri Lanka,” Special Guest Lecture on “The Portuguese impact on the socio-culture of Sri Lanka” at the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute, 6/02/2019:
<https://bidti.lk/tracing-socio-cultural-roots-of-the-portuguese-influence-in-sri-lanka/>
Accessed 01/07/2022

³⁶ McGilvray, Denis B., Jorge Flores ed. 2007. *The Portuguese Burghers of Eastern Sri Lanka in the wake of Civil War and the Tunami, Re- Exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*, Harassowitz, Wiesbaden, p. 329

³⁷ De Silva R.K., & Beumer, W.G.M. 1988. *Illustrations and Views of Dutch Ceylon 1602- 1796*, Leiden, E.J. Brill. P.115

³⁸ <https://www.ceylondigest.com/traditional-beeralu-lace-a-vital-factor-of-sri-lankan-heritage/>: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/beeralu-lace-industry--297096906649566732/>:



Fig. 12 The incorporation of Beeralu designs from Home Decoration to Bridal Dressing in Sri Lankan society

Traditional Games

Foot Ball is the Traditional game of the Portuguese Burghers. In Sri Lanka, it is the Portuguese Burghers who introduced the game of football and to date football is considered one of the nationally recognized games, which is played from school to club level, at the District, Province, and National level and also in international tournaments. Football is very common and the Eastern Province is well known for the game of football too.

Conclusions

The foregoing data, evidence, and analysis clearly demonstrate that the arrival of the Portuguese marked a decisive watershed in the historical trajectory of the island, reshaping its structures in ways that extended far beyond immediate political domination. Their presence did not merely alter administrative or commercial systems; rather, it initiated a multidimensional transformation that penetrated deeply into the social fabric, value systems, and symbolic life of the society. Through sustained interaction with local communities, the Portuguese introduced new institutional patterns, belief systems, and aesthetic expressions that gradually fused with indigenous traditions. This process was neither superficial nor temporary. Instead, it constituted a profound cultural

encounter in which external influences were localized, adapted, and eventually naturalized within the island's evolving civilizational framework.

One of the most enduring consequences of this encounter was the establishment of a distinct cultural layer that continues to be visible in multiple domains of Sri Lankan life. The introduction and consolidation of Christianity alongside the long-standing predominance of Buddhism illustrates the lasting religious pluralism that emerged from this period. Similarly, architectural forms, artistic motifs, musical traditions, performative practices, and linguistic elements associated with Portuguese influence became embedded within local cultural expressions, ultimately forming part of the composite heritage of the island. Such features did not remain confined to colonial enclaves but diffused across social strata, demonstrating how external cultural impulses can be assimilated into indigenous contexts and reinterpreted over time.

Even after the Portuguese were displaced by the Dutch in 1658, the cultural imprints they had established proved resilient. Subsequent colonial powers, despite possessing their own administrative agendas and cultural orientations, neither fully eradicated nor substantially diluted these earlier influences. This endurance suggests that by the time political control shifted, Portuguese-introduced practices and institutions had already become integral to everyday life and social identity among the inhabitants. In effect, these elements had ceased to be perceived as foreign impositions and had instead been internalized as components of local tradition. The observation made by João de Barros in 1540 aptly anticipates this phenomenon, emphasizing that while material symbols of imperial presence may decay, intangible legacies such as religion, customs, and language possess a far greater capacity for survival across generations.

Therefore, the Portuguese episode in the island's history must be understood not simply as a phase of colonial occupation but as a formative cultural epoch whose effects outlived its political authority. Their legacy illustrates how early encounters in the age of maritime expansion could engender enduring civilizational exchanges, shaping identities and social practices long after the original agents of change had departed. In this sense, the Portuguese contribution represents a foundational layer in the

historical evolution of Sri Lankan society, underscoring the broader principle that cultural transformations, once rooted in lived experience, often transcend the temporal limits of empire and become permanent features of a nation's heritage.

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