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The Evolution of Clothing in Sri Lanka: Invisible Imprint of Half nakedness and Current Social Discourse

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Clothing is a symbolic and historical representation of the culture and traditions of any country. Traditional costumes of a country provide unique identity to its members. Whatever the main purpose of clothing is, it performs several important functions. Clothing is found to be very influential for individuals as well as for a society as a whole. Emergence of clothing in Sri Lanka is found to be less clear but it had clearly passed several milestones until now in the process of its evolution. While there are only a few historical records on clothing, there is considerably enough evidence to identify its progression in spite of some confusions. On the other hand, women's clothing always receive attention and consideration rather than men's clothing as women are more into clothing and fashion. A careful investigation of the evolution of women's clothing through historical records showed that women's clothing had a significant attachment to half nakedness. This attachment is present and visible both in the past and present Sri Lankan traditional clothing patterns of women. In contrast, the current Sri Lankan popular social discourse is more likely to reject and condemn half nakedness terming it a consequence of westernization and modernization. This sociological study was done after a comprehensive literature review and analysis, observations and discussions on current social discourse and practices. It showed that the half nakedness is an invisible imprint of women's clothing in Sri Lanka. As a result of the study, the term "cultural nakedness" is coined to define the half nakedness in women's cultural/traditional clothing at present which is found to be invisible or unrecognized.

Key Words: *Women's clothing, Imprint, Half nakedness, Social discourse, Cultural nakedness*

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