

## **Origins of Sri Lankan Kolam Drama, its Correlation of Caste Hierarchy and Creativity.**

**(Special reference to Ambalangoda Kolam dance)**

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### ***Abstract***

*This academic abstract focuses on an in-depth exploration of Sri Lankan Kolam drama, with a specific focus on the characteristic features of the Ambalangoda Kolam tradition, using a mixed-method research approach, this research delves into the historical origins, cultural significance, and the fascinating relationship between Kolam drama and the caste hierarchy in Sri Lankan society. Kolam drama, rooted in Sri Lankan folklore, has a rich history spanning centuries. It seamlessly blends music, dance, dialogues, and storytelling, using decorative costumes and masks to convey folk narratives and religious stories. Ambalangoda Kolam, well-known for its exceptional masks and identical costumes, stands out as a charming embodiment of this art form. The uniqueness of Ambalangoda Kolam drama is the central point of interest in this research. Compared to other regional variations, it showcases distinct features, both in its craftsmanship and performances, which are attributed to the regional influences on mask-making and artistic expression. This study aims to reveal these unique traits and their significance in preserving Sri Lanka's cultural heritage. The research methodology followed a combined historical-ethnographic approach. Historical research traces back to the origin and routes of Kolam drama concerning its regional differences. In parallel, ethnographic fieldwork is employed to obtain ideas from specialists, traditional artists, and other experts in the discipline to shed light on the peculiar aspects of Ambalangoda Kolam. The data that caste backgrounds related to qualitative and quantitative are collected and analyzed. This helps in shedding much light on the caste dynamics.*

**Keywords:** *Kolam Dance, Bali, Caste hierarchy, Creativity, Regional influences.*

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## **Introduction:**

Sri Lankan Kolam drama, a vibrant and captivating form of traditional and ritualistic theatre, has been an integral part of the country's rich cultural heritage for two centuries. Kolam combines elements of Story, dialogues, music, dance, and traditional storytelling, using elaborate costumes and masks to convey folk, mythological, and traditional narratives combined with ritualistic and religious customs.

Ambalangoda Kolam, a regional difference of this art form, is celebrated for the unique features that set it apart from other Kolam traditions in south Sri Lanka. This study delves into the historical origins and distinctive characteristics of Ambalangoda Kolam, while also exploring its correlation with the caste hierarchy within Sri Lankan society.

This study focuses on providing an in-depth exploration of the historical origins and exceptional features of Ambalangoda Kolam, focusing on its remarkable Traditional families, craftsmanship and performances, and examining its correlation with the caste hierarchy within Sri Lankan society.

Kolam has played an essential role in preserving and transmitting socio-cultural dynamics, myths, legends, and historical narratives from one generation to the next, ensuring the continuity of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage. The Ambalangoda Kolam tradition, as a regional variation of this art form, is significant not only for its attractive performances but also for its role in condensing the essence of its origin of white and black magic ritualistic harmony. Ambalangoda Kolam originated from the influence of south Indian Kolam Thullal and the south Sri Lankan traditional white and black magic rituals and the essence of Bali sacrifice hymns.

Furthermore, the social dynamics and caste hierarchy in Sri Lanka have historically influenced various aspects of this traditional dance form and societal structural relationship. This study aims to uncover the correlation between the caste hierarchy and the practice of Kolam drama. It explores the roles played by different caste groups in association with traditional maritime careers. It developed and preserved this art form, highlighting how caste dynamics have shaped and evolved within this cultural context. By doing so, this research contributes to our understanding of the complex interplay between art and society in Sri Lanka.

In the subsequent sections, we will detail the methodology employed in this study, and present the findings related to the uniqueness of Ambalangoda Kolam, and its relationship with the caste hierarchy. We will conclude by emphasizing the importance of recognizing and celebrating the diversity of Sri Lankan culture and the role of Kolam drama, especially in the Ambalangoda region, as a symbol of the nation's cultural richness.

### **Methodology:**

This study is initiated on an interpretive philosophical approach and, based on the Inductive research approach, employs Qualitative research methods to collect the data. Qualitative data were gathered by using literary reviews, In-depth Interviews, non-participant observations, narrative analysis, Studying life histories, and ethnocultural background of the related communities. Interviewed and studied Kolam artists, and experts in the field, shedding light on the unique features and regional influences specific to Ambalangoda Kolam. Observations of Musiam materials and, archives have been used to clarify the facts taken from the Interviews and the field. Additionally, qualitative data related to the caste backgrounds of Kolam participants are collected through reports, and interviews under their ethical approval to

analyze their roles and contributions to the development of the Kolam tradition.

### **An Analysis of Literature Sources:**

Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra has stated that the meaning of the word 'Kolam' is the nature of getting into something, possession, and comic. To entertain the audience actors use comics. Therefore literally 'Kolam' is something that is performed for entertainment.

Providing a proper explanation about the meaning of the word 'Kolam', Dr. M.H. Gunathilaka has mentioned in his book titled 'Kolam Nataka Sahithya' (1984), that the word 'Kolam' is not just a Sinhala word which is limited to Sinhala language but also a word which can be found in Tamil language. Further, he has explained that it gives the idea of beauty, shape, colour, adornment, and jewellery. Among those sounds in the Tamil language, the two words jewelry and adornment are predominant.

The book 'Seelappadikaram' which was written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, tells that 'Kolam' is a dancing costume that is used for a folk dance called *Urwaree*. Especially with the meaning of 'the shape of the mask, look, the beauty of the costume, glory' they have used the word 'Kolam' in Malayali language. The same meanings can be found in the Kannada language as well. In Theligu language the word 'Kolam' refers to the idea of dance. In the Thulu language, it gives the idea of devil dance and in the book titled 'Wesmuhunu and Kolam Dance' by Dr Nandadewa, he says the word Kolam means deformed.

The Rev.Charles Carter defined the word 'Kolam' as not in proper order, obstinate, imagery, jovial, etc. (Carter, 1999) In the Sri Sumangala dictionary, there is no tholam' but the word 'Kolakkara'. The synonym for 'Kolakkara' is 'Konangiya' and as it has been explained in this dictionary 'Konangiya' is a joker character of Thelingu drama.<sup>5</sup> The word 'Konangiya' comes in the

folklore dictionary composed by Mr. Siri Liyanage and in the book the word folk dance is used as a synonym. This is a comedy character name of an actor in Nadagam. According to the Sinhala dictionary of the cultural department, the meaning of 'Kolam' is shyness, diffidence, and awkwardness. In the same book the verb 'Kolam karanawa' is used to explain the activity of cracking jokes. According to the Malalasekara English–Sinhala dictionary, this word gives the idea of a drama done by wearing a mask. Sri Lankan Kolam Drama: Sri Lankan Kolam drama, deeply rooted in the cultural and religious traditions of the island nation, represents a significant form of ritualistic theatre. It combines various artistic elements, such as music, dance, and storytelling, to communicate myths, legends, and religious stories. These performances typically employ intricate masks and costumes, each with its unique symbolic significance (Balasooriya, 2016). Kolam drama plays a crucial role in the preservation of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage, serving as a bridge between the past and the present, ensuring that traditional narratives are passed down through generations (Arsecularatne, 1999). It is important to note that the characteristics of Kolam drama can vary significantly across different regions of Sri Lanka, with Ambalangoda Kolam emerging as a prominent and distinctive tradition due to its unique features (Holt, 2017).

Ambalangoda Kolam and Its Unique Features: The Ambalangoda region, situated on the southwestern coast of Sri Lanka, is renowned for its unique contribution to the Kolam drama tradition. Ambalangoda Kolam stands out due to its exceptional craftsmanship in mask-making, as well as its distinct regional influences on costumes and artistic expression (Obeyesekere, 2004). The masks created in Ambalangoda are known for their intricate designs, each representing specific characters, and are instrumental in conveying stories and cultural narratives. Ambalangoda's mask-makers are highly regarded for their expertise and dedication to preserving this ancient craft (Jayasuriya, 2013).

Furthermore, Ambalangoda Kolam's performances incorporate traditional music and dance, making them distinct and captivating cultural events that attract both local and international audiences.

**Caste Hierarchy and Its Influence:** Sri Lanka has a long history of caste divisions that have influenced various aspects of society, including cultural and artistic practices (Spencer, 1990). The caste hierarchy has traditionally determined social status and opportunities for individuals within the country. The correlation between caste dynamics and the practice of Kolam drama is an area of particular interest (Obeyesekere, 1968). Different caste groups have played varied roles in the development and preservation of this art form, thus shaping the dynamics of Kolam drama. This interplay between caste hierarchy and the artistic tradition underscores the intricate relationship between culture and society in Sri Lanka (Gunawardana, 1990).

In summary, the literature review reveals the unique characteristics of Ambalangoda Kolam, compared to the other areas of Kolam, emphasizing its exceptional craftsmanship, regional influences, and role in preserving Sri Lanka's cultural heritage. It also highlights the historical context of caste hierarchy and its influence on the development and practice of Kolam drama. This review provides the foundation for our study, as we further explore the interconnections between Ambalangoda Kolam, the caste hierarchy, and the broader cultural context of Sri Lanka.

### **The Historical and Mythological base of the Origin of Kolam:**

When it comes to the origin of Sri Lankan traditional 'Kolam', historical sources explain that it was 200 years ago and there are enough proofs to explain that 'Kolam' originated in ancient times.

Considering the ancient Kolam scripts these are measured as the oldest scripts. No 7/N (Script in the museum library, Colombo), OR 4995 (Script in the British Museum), ‘Kolam Kawi Potha’ which was written by A.J.Perera (Perera) Appuhami and published in 1895. Scripts were edited by Don Juwanis Appuhami in 1928 and scripts were published in the book ‘Sinhala Jana Sammatha Kawya’ by the Royal Asian Society in 1935. Similarly, mythical stories of the origin of the ‘Kolam’ can be found in the books like, ‘Pahatharata Natum’ by S.H.Sawris Silva, ‘Sri Lankawe Kolam Nataka’ by Prof. M.H.Gunathilaka, ‘Sinhala Kolam Sampradaya’ by Prof.Gamini Dala Bandara, ‘Wesmuhunu and Kolam Nateema’ by Dr Nandadewa Wijesekara, ‘Kolama Nataka Wimasaua’ by Prof. Ariyaratna Kaluarachchi and the book titled ‘Maname Kolama’ by Prof.Thissa Kariyawasam. When we analyse all those documents, it is very clear that the story of the origin of ‘Kolam’ is almost the same in all those materials. The mythical King Mahasammatha's wife wanted to see some funny and entertaining theatre while suffering pregnancy cravings. To please her, the King had brought in actors from various cities. But that was not enough for her to be happy and her desire kept remained the same. Then the King brought in actors from various countries. That also didn't work and finally, the king called for his advisor and asked what they could do to solve this. The book ‘Kolam Kawi Potha’ written by A.G. Perera explains the above incident as follows.

(“ලෝකයෙහි පළමු රජ කල සම්මත රජුගේ කාලයෙහි ස්වකීය අග්‍ර මහේසිකාව දරු උපතක් හටගත් කල්හි දඹුරුව ක්‍රීඩා දැකීමට දොළක් උපත. ඒ දොළ සංසිඳවීම පිණිස එකලට නැඹු ලී කෙලි ආදී නානාප්‍රකාර ක්‍රීඩාවන් දැක්වූයේ නමුත් දොළ නොසන්සිඳුණු බැවින් රජහු විසින් ඇමතියන් කැඳවා සගයෙහි නොප ඇස දුටු අනික් ක්‍රීඩාවක් දැක්වන්නෙමි යැයි රජ අස්වසා එවකට සිටි දක්ෂ වඩුවන් රැස්කරවා අලංකාර වූ නානාවිධ දඹුරුප කප්පවා විසිතුරු මඩුවක් සලස්වා එහිදී මෙම යථෝක්ත ක්‍රීඩාව දැක්වීය. එකල ඒ බිසවගේ දොළ සන්සිඳීමෙන් සැපතට පත් විය. එතැන්පටන් මෙය ලෝකයෙහි පතළව තිබී නැවත දෙමළ භාෂාවෙන් ඇවිත් ලංකාවාසීන්ට සම්භව ලංකාවාසීන් විසින් සිංහල භාෂාවට නගා මහජනයා විසින් ගරුකොට සලකාගෙන එන මෙම පොතෙහි...”)(Perera, 1895)

Writing a special note A.G. Perera mentioned that he did draft this story after analyzing a few Kolam scripts which were written by hand and available at that time. Also, he has emphasized that he did edit the mistakes that were made by the copywriters when they copywrite these scripts. This is how the story of the origin of kolam is explained in poems. There are a few changes in this story which were mentioned in S.H.Sawris Silva's book and John Calave's document Even though the story about the origin of Kolam differs slightly in various cities, generally, the story says that the first Kolam drama was staged because the Queen of King Mahasammatha had a great desire to watch Kolam.

### **Origin of Bali and its relationship with Cast of Oli:**

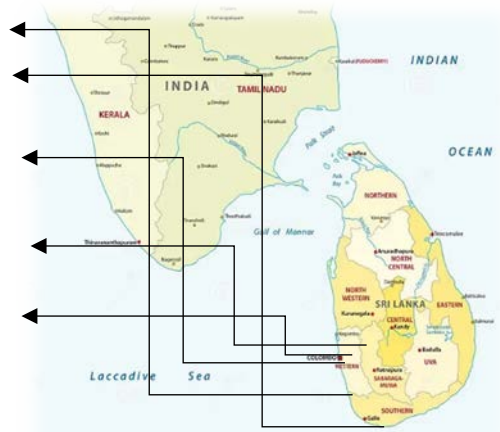
In the book, 'Caste Conflict and Elite Formation- The Rice of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka', Michel Robert has stated how the casting system has been spread according to the areas of Sri Lanka. As it is explained the cast '*Oli*' has spread out the areas like Colombo, Galle, Matara, and Tangalle. According to the folk tale among the Oli community, In the Kotte period, after taking the Bali ritual from the Indian Brahmana cast, it was given to the King's men to perform at the palace. This was done by Thotagamuwe Siri Rahula thero, as it was ordered by Weedagama thero. And Weedagama thero has given the Oli people to practice and contribute to serving the people. (Sedaraman, 1964) The book titled 'Lankawe Bali Upatha' says, "මෙසේ දේශීය ක්‍රමයටම සකස් වූ පසුබිමක් ඇති බලි තොවිලය රජගෙයිදී රඟ දැක්වීම පිණිස එවකට රජගෙයි හා මහා ස්ථවිරයන් වහන්සේගේ අන්තේවාසික ගදඹයින් කිහිපදෙනෙකුට පුහුණු කරවීය. මෙයින් පසුව රජගෙයිද ඇමති මැදුරු වලද ග්‍රහදෝස, ඇස්වහ, කටවහ ආදී උවදුරු දුටුසඳ කේන්ද්‍රය බලා බලි නියමකොටගෙන ශාන්ති ක්‍රමයන් කිරීමට බොහෝ අය ඇබ්බැහි වූහ. කල්යෑමේදී ලංකාව පුරාම බලි ඇදුරෝන් බලි කරවා ගන්නෝන් වූහ. මීට පෙර තිබුණු යක් තොවිල් වලට වඩා එකම ආචාර්ය කෙනෙකුගේ මනා සංවිධානයකින් යුතුව බිහි වූ බලි යාගය ශාස්ත්‍රීය අතින් දර්ශනීයත්වයෙන් උසස් වූ නිසා මහජනයාගේ රෝබය පහ කිරීමට ද එය මහා ඖෂධ සංයෝගයක්ම විය. යාගය පටන්ගත් තැන සිට අවසානය දක්වා ගැයිය යුතු පැදි සැහැලි ස්ත්‍රෝත්‍ර අදිය හඳුන්වාදෙන ලද කවි පන්තියක් ද විය. මුල් කාලයේදී සකස් වූ කවි පන්ති අනුකරණයෙන් පසු කාල වලදී කවියන් විසින් සකස්කොට සාහිත්‍යයක් බිහිවිය. එසේම මුල් කාලයේදී උගතුන් අකම වූ බලි යාගය ක්‍රමයෙන් නූගත් ගැමියන් අතරට පත්විය. උගත් ඇදුරන්ගේම



අතෙහි තිබියදී සිඳු නොවූ අශාස්ත්‍රීය යෙදුම් ද පිටපත් කිරීමේ දෝස කල්යාණමේදී ඇති වීම වැළැක්විය නොහැක්කකි. එදා විදාගම හිමියන් අතින්ම කෙරුනැයි කියන “රත්න අලංකාරය” නම් ග්‍රන්ථයෙහි බලියාගයට නියමිත කවි හි ස්තෝත්‍ර මෙසේ නම්කොට තිබේ.” (Sedaraman, 1964)

Thotagamuwe Siri Rahula thero who lived in Thotagamuwe Pirivena, Thelwaththa. Thotagamuwe Siri Rahula, a Buddhist monk, is famous among the folk stories in Sri Lanka as a powerful monk who could ride on air and also get services from demons through the power of his magical oil called ‘Henaraja Thailaya’ made by himself. Thelwaththa ancient ‘Thotagamuwa Privena’ is located between Ambalangoda and Hikkaduwa. Therefore this explains how Oli cast got this Bali tradition because of that cast deployed to play traditional drumming as a vanship to the Buddha in Thelwaththa Viharaya.. Further, Prof. M.H. Gunathilka explains in his book ‘Kolam Nataka Saha Lankawe Wesmuhunu’ that mainly of Bali descent living in Elpitiya and Benthara villages close to the Ambalangoda. The people of Oli cast are traditionally those who perform sacrificial sacrifices by occupation and are engaged in the work of fortune-telling and conducting ‘Druming Theva’ in temples. ( Roberts, 1993) From ancient times, Kolam has been very popular in districts like Matara and Galle in the southern province and Kalutara and Panadura in the western province. ( Roberts, 1993) Below are’s and the villages which were very famous for Kolam.

- I. Bentara – Bentara, Kommala,
- II. Suddagoda. Mirissa – Ginthota, Mirissa, Udupila, Kaburugamuwa, Thotagamuwa, Wakwella
- III. Ambalangoda – Ambalangoda, Hirewaththa.
- IV. Raigam Koralya – Aluthgama, Mathugama, Raigama.
- V. Western Province – Olaboduwa, Batuwita, Pokunuwita, Bokundara, Meegoda, Pitigala, Meegama, Pereigama, Polgampola, Mathalana, Rukgahawila, Thelikada, Horagamvita, Gampaha, Ganemulla, Batuwaththa, Bemmillla, Wigada.



➤ Villages located in Kolam Darama in Sri

According to the books written by Brais Rayn and Michel Robert, above mentioned areas which were stated by Prof. M.H. Gunathilaka, were also very famous for Bali rituals.

**The Origin and Expansion of Kolam in Ambalangoda:**

Ambalangoda is famous as a place where artistic people lived for a very long time. Even the renowned Sri Lankan author, philosopher Martin Wickckramasinghe has admitted this fact in his biography. As he said, in New Year's times, people from different villages have to Ambalangoda only because there were glorious events created by those people. (Wickramasinghe, Edition,1994)

Similarly, Amabalangoda is famous for, the Muppet industry. In addition, there are a few pioneer artists who are famous for drawing paintings on temple walls and who are considered hereditary drum players who live in areas like Wathugedara and Karagahathota which are close to Ambalangoda. Among all the facts another important thing is majority of the population who live in

Ambalangoda belongs to the ‘Kawrawa’ lineage and the first traditional profession of this pedigree is fishing and the second is carpentry. There were four main carpentry community groups belonging to the catchment area of the Ambalangoda Purana Rajamaha Viharaya, ( The Main Historical Buddhist Temple in Ambalangoda) and they have their folklore related to their equal talent in wood carving and carpentry, generation which is popular in this area. These carpenters are talented engravers and because of that Ambalangoda is famous for artistic ancient wooden furniture even the present. To establish the Ambalangoda ‘Kolam’ as an art these factors have been affected similarly and carpentry people deployed the creating Kolam masks as their life experience and after as their traditional ritualistic entertainment.

### **Lineage of Kolam Artists:**

When we analyze the lineage of Kolam artists in Ambalangoda, it’s very important to identify and understand the relationships between the ‘Kawrawa’ lineage and south India. As Michel Roberts explains in his book ‘The Caste in Modern Ceylon’ fishing is their main profession and another important fact is members of the cast called ‘Nakathi’ have worked together with ‘Kawrawa’ lineage when they are fishing using big fishing boats called ‘Theppam”. The Nakathi people work as an assistant to the Karawa fishermen. The Cast based job role of the ‘Nakathi’ is to check precious times, and horoscopes and perform rituals. They are the experts in performing Bali rituals and especially in designing and moulding those Bali. (Roberts, 1993) Some of them worked in their free time as fishing boat assistants. (Roberts, 1993) ‘Kawrawa’ lineage has received immense support from the Nakathi cast in terms of expanding ‘Kolam’. Especially the conceptual and theoretical knowledge which is needed when craving wooden face masks. They creatively used ‘Bali Yaga Kawi’ ( The Sacrificial poems which described mathematical measurements

of moulding Bali statues) to get the Ideas to create Kolam face masks, especially for its measurements and ideas of colouring. ( Gunathilaka, 1984) Bali is a moulded clay statue. Ambalangoda carpenters have craved the wooden Kolam faces following the poems which consist of the guidelines of moulding Bali. (Sarathchandra, 1999) There are Kolam masks which are two decades old and preserved carefully. Based on the correlations and interactions they had with each other, have helped them in a way to secure their traditional ritualistic knowledge about unique techniques and share them even more with each other.

**Analysis of Relationships of Ambalangoda Kolam Artists**

The pedigree of Ambalangoda Kolam artists has originated from centralizing one special family. That is T.W.Gunadasa Gurunnanse’s family who lived in Mahaambalangoda and they have been living in this village from the very beginning. The pedigree of Ambalangoda Kolam originated from the grandfather of T.W. Gunadasa ‘Gurunnanse’ (Master Guru Gunadasa) and his name was T.W.Oinis ‘Gurunnanse’ (Master Guru Oinis) It was around 1780 AD when he started carving Kolam masks with a person named S.H.Ondiris. Prof. M.H. Gunathilaka has mentioned T.W. Gunadasa’s idea like this in his book ‘Kolam Nataka Saha Lankawe Wesmuhunu’. (Gunathilaka, 1984) (“

ගුණදාස ගුරුන්නාන්සේගේ පියා වූ ටී. ඩබ්ලිව්. පැලිස් ගුරුන්නාන්සේගේ සීයා වූ ඩබ්ලිව්. ඔයිනිස් ගුරුන්නාන්සේත් කෝලම් නැටුමට මෙන්ම කෝලම් කැපීමට ද එක සේ දක්ෂය. ඔවුනගේ මුල් නමට “වඩු” නාමය යෙදී තිබීමෙන් පෙනෙන්නේ වඩු කර්මාන්තයට සම්බන්ධ සහ ගෙවල් තැනීමේ කාර්යයට උපදෙස් දුන් කාර්මික ඥානයන් හෙබි කලාකරුවන් වූ බවයි. ඔයිනිස් ගුරුන්නාන්සේ සහ එස් . එච් ඕදිරිස් යන දෙදෙනා එකතු වී, ගඟ අයිනේ වැටුණු දිං ගස්වල පිතිවලින් ප්‍රථමයෙන් වෙස් මුහුණු කපන්නට වූ බවත්, කඳුරු ලිය යොදා ගත්තේ ඉන් ඉක්බිතිව බවත් ගුණදාස බාසුන්නැගේ පැවසීය. අම්බලන්ගොඩ කෝලම් කුට්ටම නිර්මාණය කිරීමේදී තුන්දූවේ සින්දා ගුරුන්නාන්සේගෙන්ද ඔවුන්ට අගනා සහායක් ලැබීන. ගුණදාස ගුරුන්නාන්සේ සතු කෝලම් පොතේ ගෝඨයිම්බර කථාවත් මනමේ කථාවත් ලියන විටද ඔහුගේ සහය නොමඳව ලබාගත් බව පෙනේ. බෙර තාල නිර්මාණයේදීද සින්දා ගුරුන්නාන්සේගේ ගුරුකම් බෙහෙවින් ප්‍රයෝජනවත් වූ බව පෙනී යයි.” )



for a longer period. And another method was ‘Jaadi’. ‘Jaadi’ is a fermented fish product, produced by adding salt and preserving fish flesh long time without outdated. Fishermans in the Ambalangoda area have gone to the villages called ‘Rameshwaram’ and ‘Dhanuskodiya’, the coastal area which runs from ‘Kerala’ to ‘Thrivenmpuram’ at present. As was mentioned earlier in this paper, the majority of the people who live in Ambalangoda belong to the ‘Kawrawa’ lineage and fishery is their hereditary profession. There is a dragon in the logo of the Ambalangoda municipal council and it symbolises the fact that they belong to the ‘Kawrawa’ lineage. South Indian fisherman Community who belong to the ‘Kawrawa’ lineage is called the ‘Kariyar’ community and they also do the same profession as the Ambalangoda fisherman Community.



The Karava Flag ([www. https://defonseka.com](http://www.https://defonseka.com))



The Makara flag of the Karaiyars (19<sup>th</sup> Century)



Urban Council Logo -

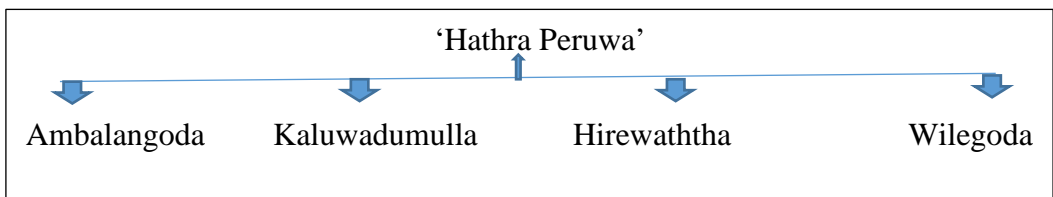
Citing a document produced by Valantine in 1726, Sir Pole E. Peris has mentioned in his book titled ‘Portuguese Era’, that there are nine sectors in ‘Karaawa’ cast.

- I. *Oru Karawa* (මරුකරාව . මරුවෙන් ගොස් මසුන් මැරීම) – Fisherman's fishing by boart

- II. *Madal Karawa* (මා දූල් කරාව . මා දූල් මගින් මසුන් මැරීම) - *Fisherman's fishing by 'Madel Nets'*
- III. *Dadu Karawa* (දඬු කරාව . වඩු කර්මාන්තය) – *Carpenters*
- IV. *Kaspa Karawa* (කැස්ප කරාව . කැස්බෑවුන් ඇල්ලීම) – *Catchers of Sea Turteles*
- V. *Baru Dal Karawa* (බරු දූල් කරාව . බරු දූල් දමා මසුන් ඇල්ලීම) - *Fisherman's fishing by 'Baru del Nets'*
- VI. *Porawakaara Karawa* (පොරවකාර කරාව . ගස් කපා ලී ඉරීම) – *Tree Cutters and wood shredders*
- VII. *Goda Karawa* (ගොඩ කරාව . මිරිදිය ධීවර කර්මාන්තය) – *Inland Fishermance*
- VIII. *Gok Karawa* (ගොක් කරාව. ගව මහිඞාදීන් ඇති කිරීම) – *Cattle Farmerce*
- IX. *Idimal Karawa* (ඉදිමල් කරාව . ජනයාට මල් සැපයීම) – *Flower suppliers to the community.*

Among above mentioned classes, ‘Porawa Karawa’ and ‘Dadu Karawa’ were famous for carpentering and the rest of the classes were famous for fisheries. But they also have engaged in carpentering in off-seasons where they can’t go to the sea.

The famous Buddhist temple in Ambalangoda, ‘Sunandarama Maha Viharaya’ had four alms-giving villages and all those villages had carpenter workers and here are the names of Those villages called ‘Hathra Peruwa’.



There are so many generations who live associating above mentioned villages and here are few surnames. ‘Alagiyawadu, Peththawadu, Pemmawadu, Tukkawadu, Manikkuwawadu, Aranawaththawadu, Udiriappuwadu, Kalamullawadu, Hampalawadu, Dodanduwwawadu, Piniyawadu, Peduruwadu,

Balapuwadu, Mahawadu, Manawadu, Yathrawadu, Rathuwadu, Lasadawadu, Lukkuwadu, Lokuwadu, Sampathawadu, Uththamawadu, Arumawadu, Waduthanthree, Wannkkuwaththa waduge, Ambalangoda Waduge.’ (Electoral Rolle – Ambalangoda) Those surnames mentioned their casting relationship with the professionalism of carpentry.

Ambalangoda fishermans who went to South India from time to time had experienced a religious ritual which was performed by South Indians to worship the goddess Kali and it was performed by wearing masks. There is a performing art called ‘Kolam Thullei’ in Western Kerala and in the Tamil language the word ‘Kolam’ gives the idea of shape, beauty, colour, glory, and jewellery. Similarly in the Malayali language, this word gives the idea of the shape of the mask, look, and beauty of a costume. In Kannada language ‘Kolam’ stands for the same meaning and in Theligu language the word ‘Kolam’ is used to explain a dance.

Here is a poem used in rituals like *Suniyam yagaya* in Ambalangoda.

රාම වඩිත ගුරුළු තෙළිගු ගොඩි ආඩි	බාසෙනි
මගධ පාලි දෙමළ සිහල සංස්කෘතය	බාසෙනි
කල්ලු වඩිත දේව යක්ෂ සිපයි පට්ටැඩි	බාසෙනි
මෙලෙස වඩිත පටුනය කීවේ දහඅට	බාසෙනි

It is evident from all the given facts that there was a relationship between South Inida and Ambalangoda fishermans. Also, there are prominent facts to prove that Ambalangoda fishermans have been influenced by the folk dances, dramas and other performances which has been done by South Indians and once they came back to Sri Lanka they tried them out and they have introduced these new performing arts to their community people. M.S.Somadasa who lives in Mahaambalangoda confirms this information. By this time Thovil



ritual was very popular in the Ambalangoda area and Kolam artists had carved the new masks taking ideas from them and using their imagination.

The pioneer Kolam drama artist in Ambalangoda 'Tukkawadu Palis Gurunnanse's relative married a lady from Thunduwa village and Thunduwe Sinda Gurunnanse was the pioneer in creating drum beats and content of Kolam. He is an uncle of Ambalangoda Palis Gurunnanse. Because of this connection, Ambalangoda people received poems called 'Abum Kavi' which explains how the clay sculptures should be done for the Bali ritual and using those guidelines Ambalangoda people have carved the faces on 'Kaduru' wood for Kolam. From the outlook, Ambalangoda kolam masks are very similar to faces in Bali stratus faces and their colour themes.

Face masks in rituals like 'Suniyam yagaya' are flat and plain. Face masks in 'Bali' are three-dimensional and, Ambalangoda Kolam faces are similar to Bali face masks not just in shapes and colours but also in this 3D effect. In the early stages, facemasks were used in 'Perahara' events which happened in areas like Ambalangoda and Hikkaduwa. As time went by, they organized this event in a proper way which happened at one place throughout the night and they adopted the structure of thovil and other yaga rituals. (Sarathchadra,1999)

Therefore we can assume that Ambalangoda Kolam originated 200 years ago and the main reason for this was Sinhalese got the exposure to experience the 'Bali' ritual. The Kotte period belongs to 1412-1580 AD and this was the time when the Portuguese invaded the country. Even though the fact that the professional relationship between Ambalangoda Kolam pedigrees and Benthara Bali pedigrees made a positive impact on developing the Kolam as a unique art is controversial, the book titled 'Cast in Modern Ceylon' written by Prof. Bryce Ryan explains it properly.

## **The Reasons that affect Professional Relationships between the Kawrawa lineage and the Oli Cast:**

According to Prof. Bryce Ryan, the majority of the people in Oli's cast were dancers who performed at rituals and events. “However, is there evidence that the roles of Oli and Berawa are precisely separated? In some Kandyan villages, Oli are entirely divorced from ceremonial matters and are generally poor and often landless peasants in the low Country they are in some instances agricultural labourers and peasants, although one large village is almost exclusively engaged in selling fish caught by neighboring **Karava**. Elsewhere in the Low Country, they are termed “Nekati” and hold a virtual monopoly in astrological practices usually they profess no ritual responsibilities, but are aware of the Kandyan Oli. It is doubtful that marriages take place between those of the low Country and the in terror, although caste oneness is claimed” (Ryan, P-128-129, 1960) Citing Jhon Devi, Prof. Bryce Ryan has stated that Oli cast has lived both in upcountry and low country. However, the largest population has lived in a low country, specifically in the Southern province.

Oli who lived in the central and western provinces were dancers and were engaged in Dewala rituals. So they have received Nindagam as a gift for their service. In some cases, they have worked as labourers in fields to survive. In the south, they have worked as helpers of the Kawrawa people and have engaged in fisheries. Further, according to Bryce Ryan in low country areas, they have converted into Nekathi cast and have maintained a monopoly in astrology. Astrology plays a huge role in the Bali ritual. Oli people have engaged in astrology by serving people and it is a practical fact that, since the Bali ritual doesn't happen frequently they have lived by checking horoscopes of village people and calculating auspicious times.

Another important fact which comes in Prof. Bryce Ryan's book is low country Oli community has lived with the Kawrawa people as neighbors and because of the co-existence they have taken their professional relationships to another level by doing cross-cultural marriages. In the book 'Kolam Natema Saha Lankawe ves muhunu' by Prof. M.H. Gunathilaka, the author discusses the relationship between the Ambalangoda Kawrawa people and the Benthara oli cast.

### **The Relationship between Maha Ambalangoda Kolam lineage and Benthara Bali lineage:**

The professional connection between the Kawrawa lineage and the Oli cast is evident in above mentioned historical facts and the documents written by Michel Roberts and Jhon Devy. The bond both of these parties had for the creative arts might be the fact which made them closer. It's very practical to understand that Oli cast didn't get to work in astrology throughout the year and this made these people go and work with Kawrawa people in carpentering and fisheries. They have considered some other facts like neighbourhood, talent, and professional connections in the first place rather than considering the cast. They have valued practical facts more than any other thing.

As has been stated by Prof. H.M Gunathilaka, the Ambalangoda Kolam tradition started with Maha Ambalangoda T.W.Oinis Gurunanse and he tried to carve masks with S.H.Odiris. T.W.Oinis Gurunanse belongs to the Kawrawa lineage and Thunduwe Sinda Gurunnanse belongs to the Nakathi cast and he is a pioneer artist of the Benthara Bali tradition. This proves how Ambalangoda Kolam and Benthala Bali are connected. Two pioneer families were famous for the Benthara Bali ritual and Sinda Gurunnanse's family and Amarasa Gurunnane's family were those two. As a relative Sinda Gurunnanse was an uncle of T.W.Oinis Gurunanse and later he received support and

guidance from Sinda Gurunnanse to develop Kolam. The fifth chapter of the book titled ‘Kolam Nataka Saha Lankawe Vesmuhunu’ written by Prof. M.H. Gunathilaka provides a proper explanation of this matter.

T.W.Oinis Gurunanse, Sinda Gurunnanse, T.W.Palis Gurunnanse and Benthara Dani Gurunnanse were famous in Ambalangoda for Kolam dance. Maha Ambalangoda T.W. Gunadasa Gurunnanse and Hirewaththa J.W. Ariyapala Gurunnanse were students of T.W.Palis Gurunnanse. In Sinda Gurunnanse’s time, Thunduwe Eliya Gurunnanse was the popular drummer.

T.W. Palis Gurunnanse and T.W. Oinis Gurunanse were equally talented in carving Kolam masks. The contribution of Sinda Gurunnanse is also remarkable and his advice and guidance have been very useful in creating Kolam drum beats. The same chapter says that Dingiri Gurunnanse, Dani Gurunnanse and Laithenis Gurunnanse were the best drummers at that time in Kolam dance.

### **Conclusion:**

According to the above-mentioned formation, we can assume that the birth of Ambalamgoda Kolam happened around 1780 AD and Ambalangoda Kolam is a folk drama which is unique to the area. Here are the main points which helped to derive this conclusion.

1. There is a hereditary cast factor in Ambalangod Kolam.
2. There is a professional background which is attached to this hereditary cast factor and it is visible in this Ambalangoda Kolam.
3. This cast factor and professional background reveal the relationship of these people with South India who were engaged in the fishery.

4. Ambalangoda Kolam has been influenced by the technical and creative facts of the Benthara 'Nakathi' cast community, through professional and socio-economic and cultural relationships.

Few conclusions can be derived based on above mentioned facts.

Kolam is an independent folk art that originated through South Indian relationships in the early British colonial period or at the end of the Dutch period. This art is located in areas like Benthara, Ambalangoda, Matara, and Mirissa and is especially near the fishing harbours, associated with fisherman communities. There are special stories in Kolam drama which is unique to each area. For example 'Gon Koti story' is unique to Ambalangoda. These characteristics have emerged with the rituals which can be found in these areas. And all these things have happened within 200 years and it doesn't go beyond more than 200 years. Some sources say that the history of Kolam goes as far as Gampola or Dabadeni period and these sources oppose that argument. Kolam is the primary folk drama that originated among the Karawa community in Sri Lanka influenced by their cast relations with the South Indian Kariyar community.

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සේදරමන් ජේ.ඊ.(1964) ලංකාවේ බලි උපත, පළමු මුද්‍රණය, ගුණසේන ප්‍රකාශන.

සොරත වැලිවියේ පණ්ඩිත ස්වාමීන්ද්‍රයක් වහන්සේ. (1970) ශ්‍රී සුමංගල ශබ්ද කෝෂය, කාණ්ඩ 1/11, දෙවන මුද්‍රණය. අභය ප්‍රකාශන.