

CULTURAL AMALGAMATION: HEADGEARS OF THE KINGS AND ELITE OF THE KINGDOM OF KANDY OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Many foreign cultural influences shaped the tradition of Sri Lanka throughout the history. Traditional customs, norms, values, believes were mixed with different foreign cultural values and norms and came to practice then made our own tradition, original agent of influence is hardly evident. Sri Lankan tradition is a hybrid form of multicultural values which have been experienced and learned throughout the history of Sri Lanka. The Kandyan era(1464-1815 AD) during which most foreign influences came to Sri Lanka within a short period of time, namely South Indian, Western (Portuguese, Dutch, British), Siamese. These influences have caused a huge impact on Sri Lankan society in every aspect. The changes that occurred in Sri Lankan dress from these influences were considerable. The foreign influences reflected in the royal and elite headgear was a result of association and adaptation of foreign sources. The objective of the paper is to discuss how foreign cultural influences affected and showcase a unique identity in headgears of the Kings and elite of the Kingdom of Kandy of Sri Lanka. The research was carried out by studying wall paintings, sculptures, inscriptions of the period and reviewing ancient literature. Reliability of the data was confirmed by cross-checking data.

KEYWORDS: *Headgears, King, Elite, Foreign Cultural Influences, Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka*

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INTRODUCTION

Headgear defines in the Oxford English dictionary as a hat or other covering that is worn on the head. Headgears are also known as accessories which are supplementary decorative items of the dress. Accessories are inessential but heavily contribute to the effect or result of dressing. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his 'MedievalSinhalese Art' uses three terms in the subject of headgears as crown, cap, and hat according to traditional practice. He uses terms of cap and hat for items which were made of fabric or inexpensive materials. Crown is considered as jewellery. Decorative items that the supplement one's garment if they have high value and attached to the body, it is identified as jewellery such as the crown.

The last Kingdom of the early administrative era of Sri Lanka was the Kandyan Kingdom. Kandyan reign of Sri Lanka which lasted from the 14th Century to 1815 is a well-known historical era showing the strong effects of foreign influences on the society. During this era, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the French, Siamese and South Indian

influences affected the society. Compared to other ancient administrative eras the whole period of the Kandyan Kingdom faced different cultural forces. At its beginning, South Indian features gradually descended from the Gampola Kingdom. As a result of colonial inspiration from the 16th century onward the natives soon embraced Western cultural values. As well as, South Indian dominant cultural feature was also quickly and strongly assimilated into the community because of their 76 years of their resident phase. (Tamil Nayakkar). This situation opened the door to Tamil social and cultural influences. They brought their own cultural habits from the same reign. A traditional perception was subjected to change and modified due to sturdier foreign cultural influences which occurred during the period of the Kingdom. Indian, Siamese, Portuguese, Dutch cultural values were most firmly implanted over a hundred years.

LITERATURE REVIEW: AN IDENTICAL NATIVE CULTURE

A distinguished service professor in sociology, Edward Shils (1981, 11p) status tradition means many things, in its barest, most elementary sense, it means simply a *traditum*, it is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. Further Shills (1981 11p) describes that tradition having been created through human actions, through thoughts and imagination, it is handed down from one generation to the next. Wimal Dissanayake one of the modern intellects of our time claims (Dissanayake, 2005 p.15) that 'the word tradition is derived from the Latin word 'tradere' transfer or delivery. He also (Dissanayake, 2005 p.15) explains that the traditional idea of tradition stresses the idea of handing down of ideas, objects, practices, assumptions, and values from generation to generation'. The greatest exponent of the traditional philosophy of art Ananda Coomaraswamy in his scholarly work of Medieval Sinhalese Art, tradition concludes according to ample of evidence gathered from the traditional social organization of the Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka which have been handed down from generation to generation' (Coomaraswamy, 1959 p.). As shills pointed out human actions are the vehicle of which the tradition is transmitted. Shils (1981 11p) shows that one particular concrete actions are not transmitted. Human actions are the most evanescent of things. The transmissible parts of human actions are the pattern or images of actions which they imply or present and beliefs requiring, recommending, regulating, permitting or prohibiting the reenactment of these patterns. Wimal Dissanayake (2005, 15) shows that tradition also implies reception by an active public, alert to both the imperatives of the past as well as the present.

Traditions can change through responses of their bearers to features of the traditions themselves in accordance with standards of judgment which their bearers apply to them. Therefore, Shils (1981, 47-52p) concerns on individual constituted by tradition follow up for several reasons. The sense of the past, the past as a component, memory: the record of the past, and living in the past are significant. In his explanation about the memory, he stresses on that memory is the vessel which retains in the present the record of the experiences undergone in the past and of knowledge gained through the recorded and remembered experiences of others, living and dead. Knowledge of and sensitivity to the past bring the image of the past into the present (Shils 1981,52p).

Wimal Dissanayake status (2005 p.16) that 'the concept of tradition is normally regarded as a transcendental phenomenon in that it is seen to be endowed with certain timeless qualities'. Transcendence is defining in the Dictionary of Cambridge as existence or experience beyond the normal or physical level. Something is transcendental if it plays a role in the way in which the mind "establishes" objects and makes it possible for us to experience them as objects in the first place. Ordinary knowledge is knowledge of objects; transcendental knowledge is knowledge of how it is possible for us to experience those objects as objects. According to Cambridge Dictionary a transcendental experience, event, object, or idea is extremely special and unusual and cannot be understood in ordinary ways such as a transcendental vision of the nature of

God. The vision of the god has been developed through accumulated wisdom of the past. The vision of the god has been experienced, learned through culture and practice through tradition since time immemorial. Shils (1981, 77p) speaks on the transcendence of the transience of physical artifacts such as Statues, paintings, medals and books having as such no significant practical uses, are even more obviously constituted by the spirit or mind which resides in them. The relationship with them or their audience of readers and contemplators is not one of use it is entirely a relationship of interpretation. They are created with the intention that they are interpreted, that their audiences apprehend the symbolic constellations by which they have been constituted (Shils 1981 78p).

Shils (1981 240p) discusses the reason to change the tradition as exogenous factors which are derived or originating externally. Foreign influences were the main in constructing Sri Lankan tradition and which have affected the society since time immemorial. Sri Lanka is situated at the Southern tip of the Indian sub-continent had the possibility of Indian cultural and social elements to flourish. Besides, as it is an Island and located in the midst of important naval route exerted considerable foreign influences. A traditional perception was subjected to change and modified due to sturdier foreign cultural influences which occurred during the period of the Kingdom. Indian, Siamese, Portuguese, Dutch cultural values were most firmly implanted over a hundred years.-

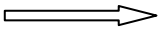
On the journey of developing a unique tradition of a social culture plays a pivotal role. The essentialist attitude to tradition is interconnected with the culture. Shils (1981 6p) says that traditionality became associated with a particular kind of society and culture. Traditional knowledge is the utmost treasure of a culture. The knowledge of tradition is formed, developed, modified, changed by the cultural experience. Culture is, in the words of Tylor, anthropologist, (Tylor 1913,1) "culture has taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Furthermore, he remarks that the condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. Therefore, culture can be assumed as a continuous chain which is nourished by human thoughts and experiences from time to time. According to Boulton (Puri and Tyler 1998) culture stands upon its values and norms. Boulton refers to values as collective beliefs about what is right, good and desirable that has developed within a particular social group. They are conceived at a relatively abstract level and provide guiding principles for living. Norms refer to expected ways of behaving in specific situations, which reflect the values of the group. According to social psychologist Kaiser (1997) the characteristics of culture are (1) transmitted (2) learned (3) shared and (4) transformed. Boulton (Puri and Tyler 1998, 327) states that the society is the culture. He explains that "because people live together in social groups, they tend to share common experiences and come to develop common ways of thinking and acting. The broad set of assumptions or worldview of a social group is its culture.

In order to understand the culture and tradition of Sri Lanka, it is essential to study historical background of the early administration of ancient Sri Lanka. Unarguably, the Political constitution is the main in navigating the cultural perception of a country. Writings of Walter Benjamin (1982, 18) have underlined the importance of understanding tradition not as an ontological question but rather as one of political endeavor. Even though, a tradition of Sri Lanka has been developed since prehistoric age. Indian influences were the main inspiration source in constructing Sri Lankan tradition. Sri Lanka situated at the Southern tip of the Indian sub-continent, then it was quite possible that cultural and social elements to flourish. The recorded history of the Island and its people starts with the Aryan colonization marked by the advent of Vijaya and his seven hundred followers from north India by 6th Cent BC. The greatest social event in the Island history is the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd Cent BC. Rev. Mahinda son of great Asoka of India brought Buddhism

during the reign of Devanampiyathissa (250-210 BC). The historical depuration created the strongest link for Aryan influences on the people. A more Aryan way of life entered with 16 artisan groups of painters, craftsmen and musicians arrival with the depuration. Then Indian influenced tradition developed through the early administrative era. The oldest Kingdom of an early administrative era was Anuradhapura Kingdom (250 AD- 11 Century AD). During the time period, South Indian Pressures as Lambakarna, Moriya, Pandyas, Pallavas, Cholas, were affected to the country. During Polonnaruwa era (11 Century AD- 1310 AD) more South Indian pressures of Pandya as and Colas were entered to the society. Royalty tolerates Hindu religious rites in the palace. Dambadeniya (1220 AD -1345 AD), Yapahuwa (1272 AD -1284 AD), Kurunegala era (13th Century AD- 1335 AD) were also more significant in South Indian Influences. During the Gampola era (1341 AD-1374 AD) seven rulers and mayors of South Indians ruled the Kingdom. During Kotte Kingdom(1371 AD-1594 AD)Western influences of The Portuguese in 1506 first affected the country. The last Kingdom of the early administrative phase of Sri Lanka was Kandyan Kingdom (1469 AD -1815 AD). During the era, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the French, Siamese and South Indian influences affected the society. The Portuguese colonial occupation exerted an inspired of almost of 130 years. Then next the Dutch lasted for 163 years and the British for 33 years. As a result of colonial inspiration from the 16th century onward the natives soon embraced Western cultural values. As well as South Indian dominant cultural feature was also quickly and strongly assimilated into the community because of their 76 years of resident phase. (Tamil Nayakkar). Those are Sri VijayaRajasimha (1739-1747), KirtiSri Rajasimha (1747-1782), Rajadhirajasimha (1782-1798,Sri VikramaRajasimha (1798-1815).

The culture stands upon mutual interrelation of state and religion. In ancient Sri Lanka, the King was the head of the civil institution. ‘Sovereignty’ was considered as divine. Coomaraswamy (1959) claims that in Sinhalese history when the ruler and people met together, united by a common religion and a common culture, in sympathy and with mutual respect. Coomaraswamy’ views on the culture of Sri Lanka was based on Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka provides the best flat form with ample examples as Kandyan tradition has a living culture even today. He (Coomaraswamy, 1959)explains about the medieval era of Sri Lanka that Kandyan Sinhalese were an independent and self-contained community, with a culture and art which had for all an equal appeal and a state religion which was also the religion of the people. Historian Lorna Dewaraja (1988) states that the relationship between the King and the priests had always been one of mutual interdependence.The King defended the faith and the faith legitimized the King. Lorna (1988, 197) states that the“whole political system of the Kandyan kingdom was based upon and the social system revolved around a monarchy which in theory, was absolute”. In theory, the power of the king was absolute. He was lord of the soil. Lorna (1985/86, 126) suggests that even though“The king in the theory, had absolute power, but in practice, it was seldom”.

Characteristics of the Pattern of Traditional Notion of Tradition

- Essentialist attitude to tradition is interconnected with the culture.
- There is a tendency in changing traditional notion of the tradition according to cultural changes happened during the course of time.
- Changes of culture  affect the traditional practice of tradition.
- Culture affects by concurrent political, administration, social and religious factors. A political constitution is the main in navigating the cultural perception of a country.

- There is a mutual correspondence between state and religion which has the direct correlation with the attitude of culture. State and religion were key tools for accepting or rejecting new cultural habits.
- The concept of tradition (behavioral pattern, factors affecting) can well understand by studying arts of Sri Lanka.
- Even though the factors affect the tradition changes very often the basic structure of the tradition remains the same.
- Tradition is an educative force. Tradition is serving to educate.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is a qualitative approach. The Kandyan period is remarkably marked with very significant signs with ample visual and written evidence. There are plenty of visual records to study the background of this study setting such as sketches and descriptions made by observer – participants of the period, historical murals, carvings and sculptures of the period. Wall paintings which depict the full costume with accessories, sketches of foreign diplomats are observed in the research. Historical details about headgears of the kings and elites are well documented visually even more early administrative eras. Original written sources and true pictorial evidence were used for the research. Besides, the Kandyan tradition has a living culture as well. Museum collections of headgears belonging to the era were observed. Reliability of the data which was incorporated in the research is of much concern. Therefore, pictorial data were cross-checked with different literary sources such as temple murals and particular literature and retrieved artifacts, enabling to build a strong logical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Headgear of the King

The earliest evidence of a headgear is shown in the sketch of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1592-1604). The illustration of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I in figure I, he wore a headdress which had a trident and Buddha figure in the front (Coomaraswamy 1956, 330). When compared to the headdresses of King Bhuvanekabahu VII of Kotte (1521-51) and King Bhuvanekabahu IV of Gampola (1341-1351), it can be suggested that the Sinhalese Kings from contemporary time wore headdresses of conical shapes as shown in King Bhuvanekabahu VII of Kotte (1521-51), plate 145 B, p.468/ the King Bhuvanekabahu IV of Gampola (1341-1351), plate 140 C, p.438 (Schoder1990). Vimala Dharma Suriya I's headdress is a too conical shape. However, the headdress of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I seem to have been made of fabric because clear woven patterns can be seen in the headdress. And it is more like a cap. According to early record caps was an essential sartorial item of Portuguese dress. It is said that in 1498 Vasco da Gama presented fifty scarlet *barret* caps to the king of Calicut (Codrington 1910, 26). In 1506 Dom Lourenco da Almeida gave six scarlet *barret* caps to one of the state officers of Ceylon (Ferguson 1907,355). Therefore Codrington (1910, 26) suggests that “early Kandyan hat is not unlike the *barret* caps of the early Portuguese period”. Therefore it can be suggested that the king would have used to wear a headdress which was arranged as Portuguese caps. According to literature descriptions and rare sketches, Portuguese dress items can be identified. Caps, coat, *kastane* sword (ceremonial sword), *kamesa* (shirt), *beeches* were mostly influenced dress items. Two important Portuguese dress items are described da Silva (1967, 48) as *cabaya* and *barrette*. *Cabaya* means a long coat worn by men. *Barrette* is a cap of European style. da Silva (1990,490) in his ‘Fidalgos in the Kingdom of Kotte’ has identified five kinds of Portuguese caps as Chapeo, Sun- hat – the author suggested that this may be the cap with a wide brim called the *sombreiro*, *Barrette*, *Carapuco* and *Night cap*. Portuguese, Dutch and British

dress patterns, designs, materials, and trimmings exerted influences on Kandyan royal costumes. Portuguese influences are more prominent on Kandyan royalty costumes than Dutch and British influences. Portuguese were the first European nation who was able to build a solid image in the East for the first time. Therefore, their varied dress patterns, sewing methods, techniques for embellishing the dresses have fast influenced the natives and westerners were the long-lasting fashion trend setters for Sri Lankans from the 15th Century AD. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his careful observation of textiles, embroidery, and costume of India and Ceylon says that before the arrival of Portuguese; people were not very much used to readymade garments (Coomaraswamy 1913,194).

The crown of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I is a combination of Hindu and Buddhist and western traditions. The successor of King Vimala Dharma Suriya I was King Senarath (1604-1635). A royalty who is possibly believed to be king Senarath depicted in a scroll painting (*pethikada*) of Aradhana Viharaya (Dissanayaka 1997, plate 20). There are similarities can be seen in the cap of Senarath and 'Ispiya' cap (Conical hat made out of fabric. Colombo Museum display). The successor of king Senerath was King Rajasimha II (1635-1687). According to Robert Knox's description, his costume is described as 'on his head, he wears a cap with four corners like a Jesuits three tear high, and a feather standing upright before. Like that in ahead of a four -horse in a team, a long band hanging down his back after the Portuguese fashion' (Knox 1966,62). As Robert Knox claims the headdress indeed is not a crown but a cap. In the statue of King Kirthi Sri Rajasimha (1747-1782) in the Dambulla Temple, the royal attire is well depicted. He is shown, wearing an eight-cornered crown made of gold. At the peak of the crown, a five-branched gold flowering tree is fixed. This is traditionally called *borale* or *malgaha* (Cordrington 1910, 22). According to Cordrington (1910,22) this is similar to the headgear which was used after 1833. According to Pybus's embassy to Kandy in 1762, he carefully describes the king's headgear as 'He had upon his head a cap of scarlet cloth embroidered with gold, much in form of an Armenian's cap, upon the top of which was a small crown set with precious stones, (Reven-Hart 1956,57). King Sri Vikrama Rajasimha's (1798-1815) royal style of headgear is a result of the continuous tradition of former king's dress. He is shown, wearing an eight-cornered crown in sketches of Davy (Davy 1821 p.107) and image of D'Oyly (D'Oyly 1975, (sec.edit.),p.10).

One interesting aspect of the headgears of kandyan kings is that they were all different from each other. Each headgear was a silent indication of their personal traits and particular fashion preferences. Moreover, according to early records the king had many headgears instead of the crown. Even though King Senerath in murals of Aradhana Vihara was depicted with a cap, he possessed three crowns of Gold, Silver, and Bronze (Goonaratne 1995, 227). Those were royal insignias of Kumarasimha Mahastane, Vijayapala Mahastane, and Rajasimha II. It can be believed that as the heirloom of the Kandyan Kingdom Rajasimha II would have been given the gold crown. Robert Knox states too that King Raja II wore a gold crown at court ceremonies. Lawrie states (1898,175) that King Raja II's golden crown was now a possession of Dodanwela Maha Dewale. Moreover, Lawrie (1898) explains that the crown was of thin plain gold. However, Robert Knox (Knox 1966) further says that the King always preferred to wear a cap except for his crown. Coordrington (1910, 26) suggests that this cap had similar features of Portuguese *barret* caps. Davy (1821, 116) expresses that the ordinary dress of King Sri Vikrama Rajasimha was consisted of a high four-cornered cap of a particular form and ornamented with tussles. Moreover, Davy (1821,123) explains that the golden crown was seldom worn "but a cap, for superstitious motives, was generally substituted for it". Coordrington (1910, 26) states that a small square hat of Kirthi Sri Rajasimha is still preserved in the Dalada Maligava. Therefore, it is evident that instead of the crown all Kings wore multi fashioned caps.

Headgear of Elite

The Kandyan elites were other powerful distinguish group which was completely different from their dress etiquettes from the Royalties. Kandyan nobles were Sinhala speaking, Buddhist, sons of the soil and traditional leaders of the people (Dewaraja 1985/86, 127). The elites were consisted of highrank officers at the Kings service. Higher administrative officers were drawn from a few families of *radala* rank. They were powerful civil group since the beginning of its origin and commonly known as '*Bandaravaliya*'. They had a constant contest between each other for the throne (Lankananda 1996, Verse 428). Lorna (1988, 55) suggests that the title of *Bandara* was borrowed from the Tamil *pandaram*, priest of *vellala* cast officiated in Siva Temple in South India and immigrating to Sri Lanka and then they were absorbed into high cast called *govikula*. Lorna (1988, 66) suggests that birth, office, wealth and military authority combined with a specific style of living and conspicuous status symbols made the *radala* a socially privileged group.

Kandyan Aristocrats extensive luxurious costume signifies their dignity, power, and high social standard. State hat was an important accessory which essentially worn with the state dress. Many types of hats were worn with the dress. Those were known as red tunic hat, *sudu wata toppi* (white round hat), *jagalath toppi*, *hatara mulu toppi* (four cornered hat) and *ata mulu toppi* (eight cornered hat). Designs, silhouette, fabric, color and even names of the hats would have been exerted considerable foreign influences. According to a sketch of Robert Knox a nobleman of king Rajasimha II's reign wore a conical shaped hat which might have been the red tunic cap as Knox mentioned. Knox (1966,129) says that this is a country cap which two flaps tied up over the top of the crown. Coomaraswamy (1959,239) suggests that this could be the *ispayya* hat. He describes that "*Ispayya* is an embroidered cap, with quilted flaps, worked with colored silk" (Coomaraswamy 1959, 333). Codrington (1910,34) also agrees with Coomaraswamy and further he includes that *ispayya* means 'head-bag'. The name and the shape of the hat resemble foreign influences. Codrington (1910, 26) claims that early kandyan hat is not unlike the *barrette* caps of the early Portuguese period. Conical hats were continued until the reign of king Narendrasimha. Heyt states that officers of king Narendrasimha's reign wore red conical caps, with the bottom turned up allround (Codrington,1910,17). Coomaraswamy (1959,34) claims that these caps were no longer worn, and they were already out of fashion in the eighteenth century.

In the time of king Kirthi Sri Rajasimha's reign a new form of hat could be seen in state officers dress. The hat was known as *sudu wata toppiya* by Codrington (1910,17). In Madawala temple murals Molligoda Adigar is depicted with such hat. Codrington (1910,17) cites that 'tradition says that this round white hat was introduced in this reign.

The most popular state hat was square, red in color, embroidered and surmounted by *borale (mal- gaha)*. Coomaraswamy remarks that chieftains and palace officers wore a four-cornered hat with a tussle (*boralaya*) instead of the *mal- gaha*. He states that '*mal-gaha* was reserved to royalty, however nowadays the etiquette is not strictly observed, and Kandyan chiefs generally wear the *mal-gaha* and other parts of the royal costume. Codrington (1910,22) confirms the idea stating that '*mal-gaha*' or '*borale*' which stands upright on the hat appears to have come into use suddenly after 1833. Codrington suggests that a small square hat of Kirthi Sri which is still preserved in the Dalada Maligawa shows similarities to above-discussed hat.

Jagalath toppiya is another variety of state hat; a well-conserved hat is displayed at the Museum of Kandy. Codrington (1910, 26) suggests that the hat was possibly introduced to Kandyan chiefs during the reign of Vijaya Raja Sinha (1739-1747), the first monarch of the Tamil dynasty. Codrington (1910, 34) states that the word of *jagalath* is derived from a Tamil term of *sakalattu* which gives the meaning of 'thick bright-red cloth'. He (1910, 26) also suggests

that “it is possible however that the square hat may be a development of the *jagalat toppiya*”. People of Galgano village of the Matale south in Yatinuwara area made Kandyan hats and jackets (Lawrie 1898. Vol.1. p.243).

During the last phase of the Kandyan kingdom, various types of hats would have been worn by state officers. D’Oyly in his diary under date June 16, 1812 records that the king had presented eight-cornered hats to the *Adigars*, four-cornered hats to the *Disawas*, and *karupuss topping* or white round hats to *dukannaralla* or countries to preserve the proper distinctions. Codrington (1910,19) further states that *Adigars* alone could wear green velvet hats. *karupuss topping* shows a possible trace of western influence. Robert, Raheem, and Colin (1989, 3) remark that when the native male is converted to Christianity had to ensure that they adopted the ‘*carapuca*’, a kind of cap, on baptism. Coomaraswamy (1959) also concerned on affecting western influences on state dress of Kandyan kingdom. He (1959,33) remarks that “European costume is being generally adopted, with painful effects”.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural customs, values, norms are sturdier in their perception over the traditional notion of tradition. State and religion were key tools for accepting or rejecting new cultural habits. Approval of upper strata was the key in exerting considerable foreign influences on the culture. Foreign influences directly affected on royalty then trickled down to elite. Foreigners brought their own cultural habits from the same reign. Multicultural values were well evident through literature, dance, drama, music, art, and crafts, architecture, sculpture, painting, food, clothing and games of the society. One of the most noticeable features is headgear, arguably the most enduring cultural signifier which is visualized in the dress of the Kandyan Kingdom.

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