



THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA LECTURE ON
THURSDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2019

“INDIAN DANCE INFLUENCE ON POLONNARUWA PERIOD SCULPTURES”

By Dr. Subashini Pathmanathan

The 121st Session of the Monthly Lecture Series of the National Trust - Sri Lanka will be held at the HNB Auditorium, 22nd Floor, HNB Towers, 479 T.B. Jayah Mawatha, Colombo 10 at 6.30p.m. on Thursday 31st October 2019.

Dance historians focus on the study of evolution and development of dances. The historical approach emphasizes the process of changes and transformation of dances following the social and cultural changes. Dance is a human activity which is deeply imbued with numerous other aspects and factors of culture. The influence of dance could also be traced out on various other visual cultural aspects including literature, poetry, rock inscriptions and paintings. The historical approach of dance mentions that dance originated before the origin of any other art forms. The dance sculptures are embodied in the form of living human bodies. In other words, it could be explained that the impact of dance embodies in the sculptural assemblages. Dance became a sculpture and also a form of the visual image.

For the dance sculptural research, the body becomes an objective and sculpture becomes subjective. The dance was differentiated by scholars in two forms or angles. One is secular dance and the other is a religious dance. The art of dance permeated many aspects of life in ancient India. A variety of different Hindu bronze and stone sculptures are found in numerous Hindu temple vicinity and archaeological sites of Polonnaruwa. Most of these sculptures belong to the Polonnaruwa period of Sri Lankan history. Out of plenty of sculptures, the Polonnaruwa period was taken into account.

Different variety of bronze sculptures, variety of stone sculptures, and stucco sculptures could be analysed with the Indian Aesthetic theory and Indian Visual Art theory. The stances, foot positions, body positions, hand gestures, ornamental decorations and costume decorations of the Polonnaruwa sculptures are systematically analyzed with the above mentioned two outstanding theories of India. The Hindu bronze sculptures and decorative bronze sculptures of the Polonnaruwa period are directly or indirectly connected to Indian Aesthetic theory and Indian Visual Art theory.

The Hindu bronze sculptures of the Polonnaruwa period could be categorised into different categories. Ancient chain lamp dancing figure, ancient chain lamp male cymbal player and ancient chain lamp dancing drummer are some of the foremost important sculptures of Polonnaruwa reveal the Indian dance influence of that era. Meanwhile the nature, structure and style of Polonnaruwa period Hindu icons and decorative sculptures also deeply reflect the Indian Aesthetic essence. Moreover, many of them provided valuable information about how the beauty of dance guided and impressed the sculptors in their productive sculptural creations. The information produced by numerous researches on ancient oriental sculptures provided a considerable amount of supporting evidence for one to carry out this dance-related sculptural research in Sri Lanka.

Dance iconography, Karana dance sculptures of India, Indonesia and Bangladesh and the scholarly views and interpretations expressed by the scholars on dance and dance-related sculptural studies further enable a researcher to proceed this kind of research in Sri Lanka. Besides the South Indian Hindu, decorative dance sculptures and Hindu temple icons were strongly influenced by the traits of dance especially by the Tamil classical dance form of Bharata Natyam. Further, this study deals with the written historical evidence expressed by numerous scholars, researchers and archaeologists about the nature and style of the sculptures produced during the Polonnaruwa period.

Further, it deals with the earlier documentary and textual evidence expressed by different scholars. All the historical evidence proves the researchers to understand how the aesthetic essence of dance and its nuances influenced minds and the creations of the sculptors. For the need of this research study, the researcher of the selective study has to focus on two varieties only.

One is in the form of Hindu icons and the other is in the form of decorative sculptures. Both these sculptures reflect the influence of Indian dance traditions. Yet it should be noted that the decorative dance sculptures of oriental tradition were created based on the guidelines given in the Natya Sastra and Silpa Sastra. The Silpa Sastra could be considered as an aspect of Visual arts. Meanwhile, the creation of the Hindu icons is more or less based on Hindu Agama Sastra, Natya Sastra and Silpa Sastra principles.



Dr. Subashini Pathmanathan studied at the Government College for Women in Chandigarh, India. She graduated and received her Master's degree from Punjab University, India. She studied Bharata Natyam under the great Bharata Natyam maestro Padmashree Vazhuvoor Ramiahpillai and completed a Diploma from Vazhuvoor Classical Bharata Natya Centre, Mylapore, Chennai. The great maestro Padmashree Vazhuvoor Ramiahpillai conferred upon her the title 'Natya Kala Shikamani'. In 1984 she participated in the All India Cultural Festival and won the Best Performer Award for Bharata Natyam. She also completed a Diploma course in Bharata Natyam and Master of Fine Arts in Bharata Natyam at Bharathidasan University, Thiruchirapalli. She is the first Sri Lankan to complete her Doctoral degree on Bharata Natyam from a Sri Lankan university on Sri Lankan resources. Her PhD thesis topic is "Impact of Bharata Natyam on ancient Sri Lankan Hindu temple sculptures and architectural decorative sculptures of the Polonnaruwa period in Sri Lankan history". She has been teaching at numerous higher educational institutions as a Visiting Lecturer. As a performing artiste she has performed Bharata Natyam performances in numerous countries around the globe.

She is a well-known writer on dance and related topics. She has been writing to the foreign and local publications since 1983. So far she has written more than 18 books and hundreds of articles. In 1991 she won the Esmond Wickermesinghe Award for Journalism.

Subashini joined the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo as the first Bharata Natyam teacher after its inauguration in 1998. In 1991, she founded her own Bharata Natya Centre known as Vimalothaya Classical Bharata Natya Centre in Colombo. And in 2018, she established the research wing of her institution under the name of Vimalothay Lalitha Kala Kendra. She is also one of the foremost performing Bharata Natya exponents of Sri Lanka.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the public at a nominal fee. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel 2682730 / 0778081214 at the Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology, 407 Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7. Members please bring your Membership Card and Invitation if available.