

STUDY ON PICTORIAL EXPRESSION OF THE MURAL PAINTINGS AT SUBODHARAMAYA TEMPLE MURALS OF KARAGAMPITIYA, DEHIWALA

D. S Wijerathne¹, S. A. Ariadurai¹ and Nimal De Silva²

¹ *Department of Textile and Apparel Technology, Open University of Sri Lanka*

² *Department of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka*

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the visual expression of mural paintings at the *Subodharamaya Temple* in Karagampitiya which belong to 19th century. This study analyses the painting arrangements, scale of drawings, line and shape of the elements and colours of murals as evidence to derive conceptual framework to develop a fashion illustration system with a Sri Lankan identity. Line drawings are done to study style and rhythm of the drawings.

This study is an extension of the work done at the *Gangarama Temple* which represents the Kandyan art tradition. Karagampitiya murals paintings represent the Southern art styles, which show elements of western influence. These painting show the transitional process of the society including behaviour patterns, likeness, and social classifications. It also shows changes from caste system to class system in the society. The composition of the drawing is more complex than Kandyan art. Different incidents in the story flow in the same band with separating them with buildings and trees. Spaces are filled with many items including flowers and trees. The drawings are more of natural forms than graphic look, with incidents being expressively visualized with interest.

METHODOLOGY

The main method of study is the visual examination of the mural paintings of the *Subodharamaya Temple* and contemporary mural paintings related to southern art tradition by making several site visits. Drawings are analyzed with reference to line drawing techniques, painting arrangements, scale of figures, shape of elements, figure proportions, drawing composition and colours.

MURALS OF SUBODHARAMAYA TEMPLE

It is believed that the *Subodharamaya Temple* of Karagampitiya was established as early as 1820s (Chutiwongs, *etal*, 1990). The layout of the temple is fairly wide and consists of several sand terraces and buildings. The main shrine room is a rectangular building located in the centre of the upper terrace. It has two portions: inner shrine room and ambulatory. The main reclining Buddha sculpture in the inner shrine room was completed in 1795 (Chutiwongs, *et.al*, 1990). Around the inner shrine, an ambulatory was built up to convey the Buddhist philosophy through murals. In this work only the murals in the ambulatory are discussed.

The walls of the ambulatory, with the exception of the southern wall, are painted with murals as a decoration representing the 19th century southern province drawings. The spaces of the walls are divided into five similar horizontal bands of nearly 26 inches in height. These narrow bands are filled with drawings related to the Buddha image and eight *Jathaka* stories. The bottom bands of the walls are painted with flower and flower petal decorations.

VISUAL OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Outside walls of the inner shrine are painted with a range of *Jathaka* stories and Buddha figures in *Suvisvivanaya*. These paintings depict figure drawings from different social categories, buildings, trees, animals and other contemporary items related to that society. The drawings show some relationship to the Kandyan art style but the detailing part seems to be different and unique to the southern style. With reference to the social classification, figure drawings are studied

according to four main categories - Buddha and figures of devotees, male figures, female figures and the figures of celestial beings.

Buddha and devotee figures

Buddha images have been drawn in many places around the eastern, western and northern walls, on the outer side of the middle shrine. Twenty-four identically seated Buddha images in *Suvisivivaranaya* and other Buddha images are seen through the drawings of *Jataka* stories. Seated, standing, reclining, and walking Buddha figures are drawn according to the incidents of the stories. Buddha figure is not drawn using an exact system but prominence is given to size, shape, appearance and colours. At the back of the Buddha drawing, an intricately decorated large aura (*Prabamandala*) can be seen. Flowers, garland designs, ribbons and different motifs have been used to decorate the aura. Halo has been drawn in the back of the Buddha's head. *Ushnisha* symbolizes the enlightenment. It is placed on top of the Buddha head in a cone shape spiral movement. Robe is used as clothing for the Buddha and *Bikkhus*. It covers from shoulder to ankle with the right shoulder and arm uncovered. Lines have been used to fill the space of the robe in continuous waves parallel to each other. *Gatotuwa* which is used to tighten the robe to the body is placed under the left arm pit and over the arm. Figure 1 shows one of the Buddha figure seen in the temple.

Celestial figures

Figures of Gods and goddesses represent celestial power and glory. Stance and gestures of the figures show spirituality and the stability. Majority of the gods and goddesses are drawn with the same dress silhouette. Appearances of them are different with the colour of clothing and design details. Lower body is covered with a cloth and upper body is covered and decorated with jewellery only. In god figures, the lower garment is drawn as a wrapping cloth around the body. The wrapping cloth covers up to the ankle of the figure. Goddess figures are drawn with two different styles. Familiar goddess images like *Bumidavatha* and *Samudradavtha* show traditional clothing to cover the lower body and shawls and jewellery to cover the upper body. Some of the goddess figures are drawn with western looking clothing styles of long sleeved jacket and long skirt with a decorative shawl. The headgear show more western look with its short and wide form. In some drawings, goddesses are shown with *Mottackiliya* indicating Moghul and South Indian influence.

Men's clothing

The paintings indicate that during the middle and later part of the 19th century men's clothing was influenced by western fashions. Some fashions have been directly adopted from the west fashions while others appear as hybrid styles. They show tendencies to wear trousers, coats, shirts, towels and handkerchiefs (Wright, 1907). A straight silhouette can be seen in clothing. Instead of the two traditional draping around the body, two garments for lower and upper bodies have been used.

Commoners have used a cloth to cover the lower part of the body and the upper body is left bare. Elite men have covered the lower part of the body up to the ankle level with a wrapping cloth and have worn soft looking shawls over the upper body as a decoration. Different ornaments and items worn represent their positions. Hair, sideburns, moustache, and beard have been drawn to show their manhood.

In the murals of the early 19th century, elite men of the royal family are not shown with western influenced clothing. Instead royal clothing shows more influence from South India in relation to the appearance of the last kings of the Kandyan Kingdom (Hettiarachchi, 1967). King's clothing shows hybrid fashions with eastern and western clothing. Figure hugging short sleeve jacket at the top and loose trouser and shawl show more influence from South India. Wider flat crown looks more western. Decorative belts, earrings, necklace, jewellery and hand ornaments have been used as figure decorations. Shawl is draped on a shoulder around the upper bodies in

stylistic ways. Figure 2 illustrates the King's figure seen in the temple paintings.

Lower body wrapping cloth shows different decorations. Sometimes more pleats are used at the front like *Dothiya* and more decorative edges at the front like *Somana*. Lots of decorative fabrics are used in the design. Shawl put over the upper naked body is of different styles. Some are draped on one shoulder, while some are draped on arms around the back and put over both shoulders making a cross at the front. *Vapanaya* is a type of circular shape fabric used as a Shawl to put over the upper part of the body. Lower grade officers in the king's authority have been drawn with official uniforms and caps related to their position. Commonly, a belt or a fabric piece has been used to wrap around the waist over the lower garment. Some lower grade people do not use Shawls.



Figure 1: The Buddha image



Figure 2: King



Figure 3: Queen

Women's clothing

In the past, women's social behaviour was somewhat restricted by colonial influence. Women did not attend social activities like dancing. Some system of mannerism was accepted by the elite society with western influence. It was used to maintain the class formation and classification in the society.

Figures of women show their interest for different clothing styles. Vast variations in clothing styles of elite women can be seen with decorations, which show a mixture of Western and South Indian influence (Wijerathna, 2004). European and Sinhalese traditional clothing have been used on the same series of painting.

Queen figure shows wealth and prestige with the clothing and figure pose. Queen's clothing covers her figure from shoulder level to ankle. Upper body is covered with a jacket called *Hattaya* and the lower body is covered with a cloth or a skirt. Jackets are with long and short sleeves and go up to the waist level or little longer with a loose fit. Loose fitted, V-neck lace jackets were known as *Kabakuruththuwa*. Cloth for the lower body is known as *Reddha*. It is in three different types - *Cheththaya*, *Kambaya* and *Somanaya*. *Cheththaya* shows spreading flower decorations all over the cloth, *Kambaya* shows striped designs and *Somanaya* has a broad decorative vertical border in the edge. Cloth or a skirt is worn under the jacket at the waist level. Jacket or *Hattaya* loosely falls over the lower body covering. Body is not revealed in-between these two garments but give space for comfortable body movements. Shawl is used in a stylistic

way to put over and around the body. Different draping styles were used. Shawl draped over the head forming a head cover called *Mottakkiliya* has South Indian influence. Crown is used to symbolize the queen. Veil had been worn under the crown or head ornaments and draped over the body. It slightly covers the body up to below the waist level or more. Figure 3 shows a figure of a queen from the temple drawings.

CONCLUSIONS

The style of illustration seen in the *Subodharamaya Temple* in Karagampitiya successfully communicates through visual information. Their social statues and process of transformation in lifestyle specially related to the clothing. Colours, lines, forms, shapes, composition of drawing and rhythm of the art are the main attributes of visual communication. The mural shows the influence of western art style. Sri Lankan Southern art is a style based on the Kandyan art tradition but shows more complicated style features and details than its parent art tradition.

The paintings representing southern art styles were developed in the 19th century. During the period of colonization, mural paintings represented the evolutionary process of the society in many areas and the transition in clothing styles of that era vividly. Clothing is the main communicator showing pride, status and wealth of the characters. Gestures and postures graphically represent the mood and situation of the times.

The illustrations that are seen in the *Subodharamaya Temple* thus differ from the illustration system that is currently practiced by the Sri Lankan fashion designers. The fashion illustration system that is currently practiced in Sri Lanka is one that is adopted from the West and consists of mainly straight lines and depicts well proportioned figure types. However, the illustration system used in the temple drawings of *Subodharamaya Temple* uses lots of curved and wavy lines, and belongs to a hybrid style.

REFERENCES

- Chutiwongs, Nandana, Prematilleke, Leelananda & Silva, Roland (1990), *Paintings of Sri Lanka – Karagampitiya*, Centenary Publications, Sri Lanka.
- Hettiarachchi I.D, (1967), *Sinhalese Encyclopedia – Volume 03*, Cultural Department Publications
- Karunarathne, N (1999), *Kandy Past and Present*, Central Cultural Funds
- Wijerathna D.S (2004), *Analysis of the dress in relation to the Sri Lankan female form in during the colonial occupation*, University of Moratuwa
- Wright, A (1907), *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, Lloyd's Greater Britain publishing (Ltd)