

**Heritage dress reveals fashion ideologies:  
Elite change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Sri Lanka**

**Gayathri Madubhani Ranathunga**

Senior Lecturer, Fashion Design and Product Development, Department of Textile and Clothing  
Technology, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka  
gayathrir@uom.com

Heritage as a social action is more concerned with practices. The premise of this paper is that heritage has always been with us and has always been produced by people according to their contemporary concerns and experiences. It is expected to build logical and reliable narration of how the ideology of elite changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with British imperialism and how this change visualized in a new format of dress which is recognized as heritage dress by Sri Lankans. Sketches and descriptions made by participants observer of the period were studied. Original written sources and true pictorial evidences were used for the research. Museum collections were observed. Besides, Sri Lankan heritage has a living culture as well. Socio-cultural and political factors that affected the dress have been discussed. The sources which were used for this research showed that there was a direct correlation between administrative structure and the ideology of the elite. The economic and social transformation affected the new national elite. Significant education and social change in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the emergence of the new elite. When the administrative structure changed traditional customs, norms and values, the ideology of the elite was also changed. The new structure expected the elite with new ideology. Full costumes of *Mudaliars*, the *Muhandiram*, *kaba kurutthu* jacket, elite female dress of bodice and skirt and wedding dress of Sri Lankan Law country ladies are explained in this research.

Findings of the research are very much vital for the stakeholders of the fashion entrepreneurs of Sri Lanka. Findings give insight opinion on the fashion direction in the context of Sri Lankan heritage. Factors that affect the fashion trend, characteristics of the hybrid fashion of the period, dress categories, dress items, occasion of the dress were found out. Moreover, it was found out that silhouette ideas provide unique fashion sense. It was revealed that the heritage enables the production of identity and it has the potential to transform society. Therefore, we should be cognizant of the fact that the heritage dress discourse enables one mode of conceiving historical persons and events.

**Keywords:** *Heritage, Ideology, Fashion, Law country elite*