

## **Nudity during the Kandyan period: a social taboo or indication of social status**

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The paper is based on a research carried out regarding the social status of women of the Kandyan Kingdom during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The objective of this part of the research was to formulate a social definition for nudity regarding Kandyan women. In this study historical methodology was used, utilizing primary and secondary sources. Special emphasis was given to Temple murals of the Kandyan Period.

Although nudity is sometimes regarded as an aesthetic phenomenon, it is generally treated at present as something immoral or indecent. The commonly accepted view is that this definition of nudity in the Sri Lankan context is a result of the colonial experience.

In the Kandyan society nudity of the upper body was not regarded as something indecent. In fact it was an indication of social status based on caste. Thus it was considered not as something indecent or improper but a social taboo. It was a social taboo in the sense that only a selected social group practised this habit. Therefore the evaluation of nudity was not done on a moral basis but on a basis of social stratification. Furthermore, it can be assumed that this social taboo although rigid in the public sphere was not so in the domestic sphere, at least among the middle level of the social hierarchy.

**Key words:** Women, Murals, Nudity, Kandyan period, Social stratification.

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