



# THE FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION

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TRADITIONAL MASKS OF SRI LANKA

*History, functions and present use*

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Sociology & International Studies  
5<sup>th</sup> Annual History Symposium  
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# METHODOLOGY

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- I visited three museums in Sri Lanka in the summer and winter of 2018.
- Captured images of the masks on display.
- Attended “Guru Gedera” mask festival held in Colombo.
- Researched about the masks from books and online resources.
- Interviewed a Professor from University of Aesthetic arts Sri Lanka.
- The photographs were displayed in an exhibition at the view point gallery from 29<sup>th</sup> April to 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019.







# HISTORY



- Masked are used in traditional Healing Rituals and Folk Plays in Sri Lanka
- Masked carving emerged in low country coastal belt in Ambalangoda, Galle, Mathara and Mirrisa.
- Mythology & Legends
- Classification



# HEALING RITUALS AND FOLK PLAYS

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## Healing Rituals

- Bali – *Relief from negative effects from planets.*
- Madu – *Worship the gods in return for peace and prosperity.*
- **Sanni – *Curing illnesses by giving offerings to evil spirits.***

## Folk Plays

- **Kolam – *Low country comic stage plays.***
- Sokari – *Up country comic stage plays.*





# SANNI MASKS

DAHA- ATA- SANNIYA : *curing illnesses*

Includes eighteen distinctive masks representing eighteen evil spirits responsible for creating and curing illnesses.

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- The most famous healing ritual.
- This ritual use Ayurvedic and psychological manipulation in curing disease.
- Although an exorcism ritual has its own dialogues, music and dance routines.
- There are 18 masks under sanni masks ritual.
- The masks of the 18 spirits are studded in the masks of the chief evil spirit “Maha Kola”.

# 18 SANNI MASKS

EACH INDIVIDUAL MASK REPRESENT AN ILLNESS



**Jala Sanniya**  
excess of phlegm  
dysentery



**Golu Sanniya**  
Dumbness



**Gini Jala Sanniya**  
Malaria



**Maru Sanniya**  
Delirium



**Butha Sanniya**  
Nonsensical



**Demala Sanniya**  
Bad dreams



**Gedi Sanniya**  
Causes  
furuncles



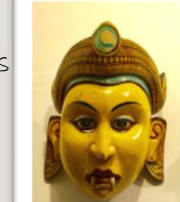
**Naga Sanniya**  
Poisoning



**Ammuka Sanniya**  
Vomiting



**Vatta Sanniya**  
Shaking limbs



**Deva Sanniya**  
Epidemic  
disease



**Veddi Sanniya**  
Bubonic plague



**Kana Sanniya**  
Blindness



**Kora Sanniya**  
Paralysis



**Beeta Sanniya**  
Confused  
Behavior



**Pissu Sanniya**  
Craziness



**Bihri Sanniya**  
Deafness



**Kola Sanniya**  
Black death



# PICTURES OF SANNI RITUAL PERFORMANCES

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**Performance of Healing Ritual**



**Devil Mahasona**



**Performance of Healing ritual**

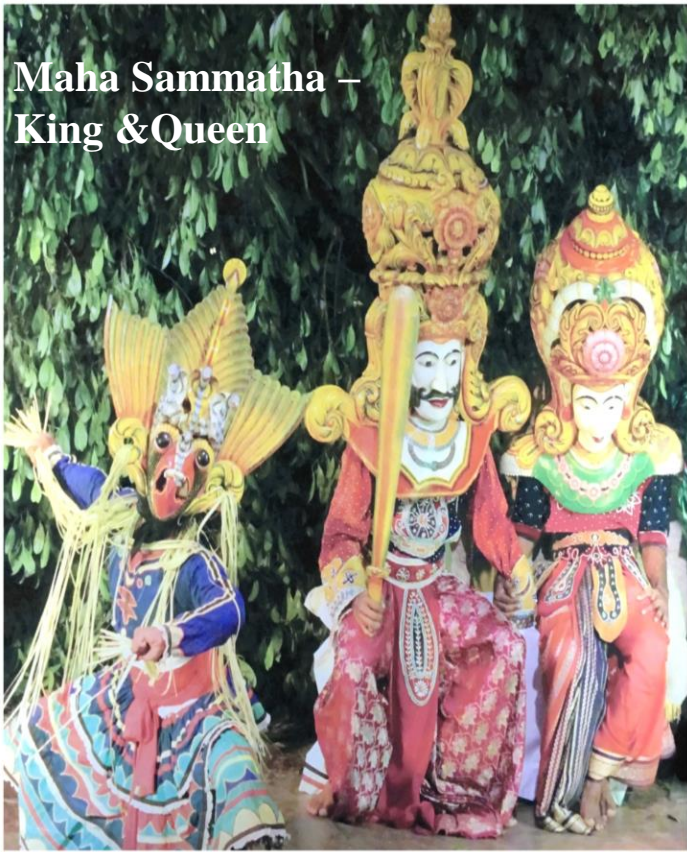




# KOLAM

## COMIC FOLK PLAY

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Maha Sammatha –  
King & Queen

- It is a traditional folk play in the west and south coast of Sri Lanka.
- “Kolam” refers to the masks in Sinhala language.
- According to legend , the low country theatrical dances originated to mitigate pregnancy cravings and desires.
- Arrival of king and queen is a significant act in Kolam relating to the mythological story behind kolam.
- Performances begins at sunset and continue till dawn.
- Kolam performances are rich with music, dance acts and folk dialogues.
- Raksha (Demons) masks are also used in Kolam.



# KOLAM MASKS

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**Hewa Kolam (Soldiers)**



**Maname Kolam**



**Police Kolam**



**Drummer**



**Drummers**



**Village Chief**





# KOLAM MASKS

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**Fox**



**Sinha Kolam**



**Kapiri Kolam**



**Police Kolam**



**Muslim Kolam**





# RAKSHA MASKS

## DEMONS



**Naga Raksha**  
*Cobra*



**Rathnakuta Raksha**



**Maru Raksha**



**Gurulu Raksha**  
*Bird*



**Poornaka Raksha**



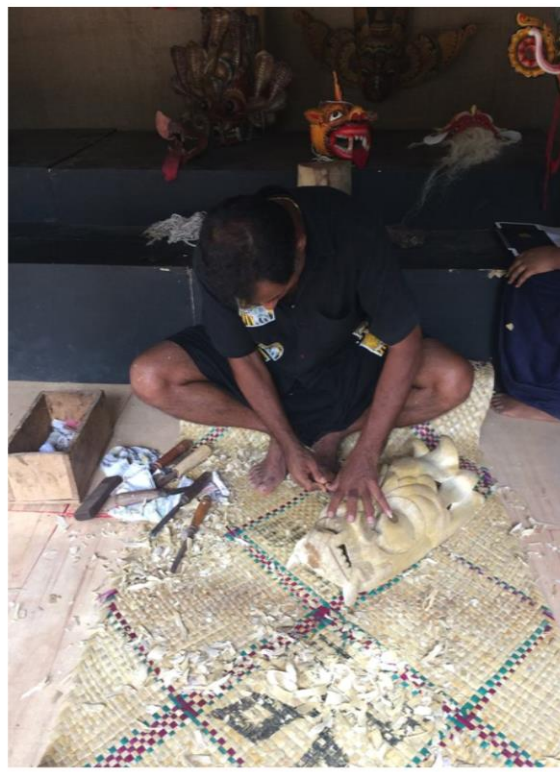
# MAKING OF MASKS

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Setting of the stage



Carving masks



Painting of masks





# THE DYING TRADITION

*The reason for decline*

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- Introduction of new media and western style entertainment forms.
- The time duration of the ritual process and drama performances.
- Modernization of people have distance themselves from folk rituals and belief systems.
- Introduction of western medicine reduce dependency on Ayurvedic medicine.
- The cost involved in the performances was not economically feasible after colonization.
- Masks declined during colonial times without the support of the village elites.
- Colonizers discouraged ritual performances.



5000



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இலங்கை மத்திய வங்கி  
CENTRAL BANK OF SRI LANKA



රුපියල් පන්දහසි  
ஐயாயிரம் ரூபாய்  
FIVE THOUSAND RUPEES 5000

# CURRENT PRACTICE

## *PRESENT USE AND PURPOSE OF THE MASKS DISCUSSED IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT*

- Academic research on folk rituals, religion and plays.
- Performances at cultural events and tourism.
- Souvenirs for tourists.
- Artifacts and interior designing of building restaurants.
- Magazine designs and emblem for t-shirts and mugs.
- On the face of currency notes and stamps.
- Display in museums.





# QUESTIONS & CLARIFICATION

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