

TIMELESS HERITAGE: INTEGRATING SRI LANKAN TRADITIONAL CRAFTS INTO CONTEMPORARY STREETWEAR INSPIRED BY THE “*SESATH*”

P.A.H.P. Paliawadana
 Department Of Textile & Apparel
 Technology
 Faculty of Engineering Technology
 The Open University of Sri Lanka
 hashpabodha185@gmail.com

H.K.H. Safana
 Department Of Textile & Apparel
 Technology
 Faculty of Engineering Technology
 The Open University of Sri Lanka
 hksaf@ou.ac.lk

D. S. Wijerathne*
 Department Of Textile & Apparel
 Technology
 Faculty of Engineering Technology
 The Open University of Sri Lanka
 dswij@ou.ac.lk

Abstract—The project investigates the creative and economic potential of fusing traditional Sri Lankan cultural heritage with modern urban streetwear aesthetics, to address the critical decline of local textile crafts, such as batik designs, handloom fabrics, and *Beeralu* lace, driven by globalization and mass production. This effort concurrently addresses the increasing demand from consumers globally - for clothing that is sustainable, unique, and culturally authentic.

The study used a mixed-method approach that combined iterative product development with consumer market research. Data collecting methods included holding qualitative focus groups, conducting interviews with local craftspeople, and fashion experts, and distributing online survey to a target consumer demographic of women aged 21-30 to assess style and color preferences. The *Sesath*, a traditional ceremonial parasol, served as the primary inspiration for mood, concept, colour, and trend boards that were created throughout the concept development stage based on the data that was collected. The final clothing was turned into actual prototypes using traditional textile techniques, ethical and sustainable manufacturing processes. Dye testing, wax testing was then conducted on different materials to evaluate to select suitable materials type.

The project effectively created a cohesive six-outfits of contemporary streetwear collection for the Spring/Summer 2026/27 season. The collection includes crop tops, jackets, cargo trousers, and accessories that skillfully incorporate traditional Sri Lankan textile techniques like delicate bobbin lace, handwoven textiles, and wax-resist batik prints-into contemporary, urban designs.

The study concludes that fusing traditional craftsmanship with contemporary streetwear offers a workable strategy to renew fading traditional heritage and appealing to global markets looking for cultural diversity. Additionally, this collaborative model develops a sustainable economic framework that supports ethical fashion industry practices, preserves traditional skills for future generations, and financially empowers local artisans.

Keywords: Streetwear, Batik, Handloom, *Beeralu* Lace, Sustainability, Fusion fashion.

* Corresponding Author: Dr. D.S. Wijerathne:
dswij@ou.ac.lk

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka possesses a diverse textile and craft heritage that includes handloom weaving, batik and other traditional craft practices. These practices have cultural as well as economic significance, while traditional craft sectors also face challenges associated with market access, innovation and changing consumer preferences. Research on the Sri Lankan handloom sector has identified environmentally conscious production and community-based participation as important sustainability characteristics, while limited access to markets and information can constrain innovation and growth (Wanniarachchi et al., 2020).

The integration of traditional craft knowledge into contemporary fashion provides an opportunity to maintain the relevance of heritage practices while exploring new design and market contexts. Research on cultural sustainability in fashion suggests that traditional craft knowledge and material practices can contribute to innovative fashion processes when cultural meanings and embedded knowledge are maintained (Gwilt, 2022). Similarly, studies on traditional clothing and textile heritage demonstrate the potential of modernizing traditional elements while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance (Wu et al., 2025).

The project focuses on creating a streetwear line that incorporates traditional Sri Lankan patterns, textiles, and motifs. The collection includes modern items such as hoodies, t-shirts, jackets, and cargo pants, all featuring unique Sri Lankan elements like batik prints and *Beeralu* lace. The aim of this study is to investigate how Sri Lankan traditional textile crafts can be integrated into contemporary streetwear design through a practice-based design process inspired by the *Sesath*, while considering consumer preferences and sustainable design principles.

The collaboration with local craftspeople allows for the use of traditional materials while providing them with a steady market and fair compensation, thus promoting economic stability in their communities. The project recognizes a growing demand for distinctive,

culturally significant fashion items and seeks to attract consumers who value authenticity and uniqueness by blending traditional craftsmanship with streetwear.

Educational seminars and exhibitions will showcase the importance of these crafts, fostering appreciation for Sri Lankan heritage among the next generation. Key steps include researching traditional patterns and textiles, collaborating with skilled local artisans to ensure authenticity, and merging traditional elements with contemporary styles.

The project emphasizes ethical production and fair-trade principles. A marketing plan will underscore the collection's cultural significance, targeting both local and international audiences through digital channels, fashion shows, and influencers who appreciate Sri Lankan culture. Workshops and educational activities will further promote awareness of traditional crafts, engaging diverse groups to enhance appreciation for Sri Lankan heritage.

This initiative not only aims to preserve and celebrate Sri Lankan traditions but also supports local artisans, addressing the need for culturally relevant fashion while inspiring future generations and promoting sustainable practices in the global fashion industry.

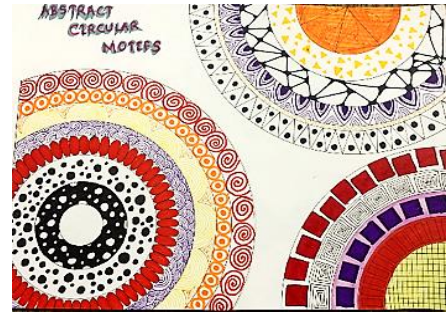
II. METHODOLOGY

To develop a fashion collection merging Sri Lankan traditional textile with contemporary streetwear, extensive research on themes, textiles, and designs was conducted. This involved analyzing historical and modern usages in Sri Lankan fashion by collaborating with cultural historians and local artisans for authentic insights. A niche market analysis targeted culturally significant streetwear, focusing on customer preferences and competitor positioning.

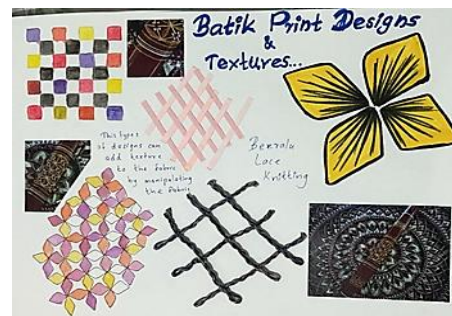
Surveys were created and distributed among 174 foreigners mostly from Italy, UK, Russia and USA to gather data on design, color, and style preferences, utilizing online channels and social media for broader outreach. Focus groups with potential customers provided qualitative insights. Collaborations were established with skilled artists specializing in batik, handloom, and *Beeralu* lace, supplemented by interviews with artisans and experts to explore traditional processes and their modern implementations.

In the inspiration and concept development phase, mood and trend boards were created, reflecting traditional motifs combined with contemporary trends. Preliminary sketches evolved through iterative feedback. Color palettes and fabric swatches balanced traditional aesthetics with sustainable options.

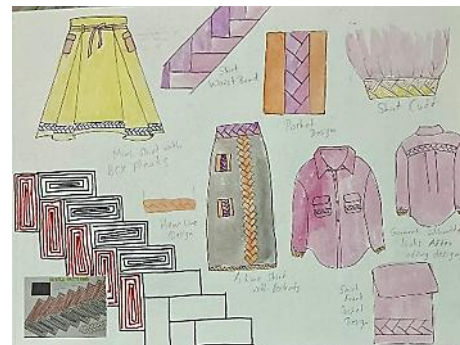
In design development, prototypes were created ethically, followed by wear testing for comfort and durability. Feedback informed final designs that balanced cultural significance with modern appeal. A marketing strategy targeting international audiences was developed, utilizing online platforms and events, alongside an e-commerce platform for global sales.



(a) Concept developments – Shapes & details



(b) Concept developments – print developments



(c) Design developments

Figure 1. Concept and Design Development Boards Inspired by *Sesath* (a), (b) & (c)

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The simple transition from initial concept to final product development proved that incorporating traditional Sri Lankan cultural elements into modern urban fashion is an achievable goal. The first design stage used mood, trend, and colour boards to create an overall visual language that connected heritage and contemporary streetwear, taking inspiration from the geometric and symbolic elements of the *Sesath* (traditional ceremonial parasol). Several variations of preliminary sketches were made in response to qualitative suggestions from fashion experts and design evaluations. In order to ensure that traditional crafts—particularly elaborate *Beeralu* (bobbin) lace, wax-resist batik designs, and handloom textiles—were organically incorporated into contemporary, loose-fitting designs rather than looking superficially attached, this iterative loop was important. The design translation effectively struck a compromise between the large, practical look of contemporary streetwear and historical integrity, opening the door for the creation of ethical and sustainable production process.

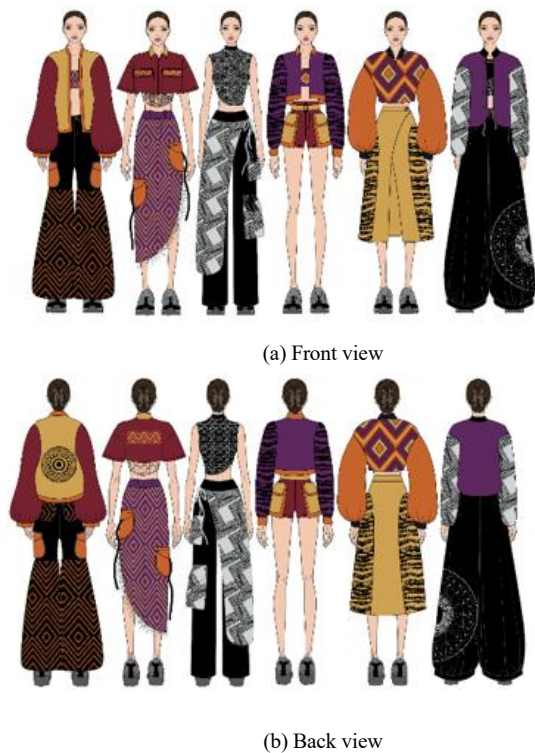


Figure 2. Final fashion range of finalized six-look's illustrations: Front and back views.



Figure 3. Photoshoot of the models wearing the six final designs (a-f).

A cohesive streetwear collection featuring six outfits, including crop tops, jackets, cargo pants, and baggy shirts, was developed through physical prototypes. Selected garments underwent wear testing for comfort, durability, and consumer appeal. Findings indicated that delicate *Beeralu* lace and handloom materials enhanced the clothing's feel and mobility, aligning with urban streetwear's comfort expectations. Feedback from artisans and industry experts confirmed the garments retained authentic craftsmanship while adhering to sustainable production standards. This successful collection illustrates how traditional textile techniques can evolve to attract global interest, benefiting local craft communities economically.

According to the photoshoot presented in Figure 3, the developed collection consists of six distinctive looks that combine traditional textile techniques with contemporary fashion silhouettes, creating a balance between cultural identity, functionality, and modern aesthetics. The six looks of the designs were briefly discussed as below.

Look (a): Features an intricate handloom tube top paired with a bomber jacket with voluminous balloon sleeves and high-waisted flare pants, all incorporating geometric batik motifs.

Look (b): Combines a cropped boxy shirt with handloom detailing, a delicate black lace tube top, and a high-waisted asymmetrical midi skirt, creating a sophisticated, layered appearance.

Look (c): Presents an intricate lace crop top with dramatic wrap-around cargo pants, emphasizing a contemporary and functional silhouette.

Look (d): Includes a cropped structured jacket layered over a bandeau top with a diamond motif, complemented by high-waisted utility shorts, cargo pockets, and a matching belt.

Look (e): Features a cropped pullover with balloon sleeves and multicolored batik, paired with an abstract black skirt.

Look (f): Combines a dark crop top and harem pants enhanced with an intricate batik mandala design, creating a distinctive artistic statement.

IV. CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

"Timeless heritage" is more than just a fashion collection; it's a cultural statement. By combining *Sesath*'s historic symbolism with Sri Lanka's renowned artisanal crafts such as batik, handloom, and *Beeralu* lace, this project redefines streetwear through the perspective of tradition. The collection demonstrates a potential approach for supporting the contemporary application and continued visibility of traditional Sri Lankan textile crafts. Each clothing offers a tale, combining cultural pride with contemporary flair.

Continue to form collaborations with rural craftspeople to ensure authenticity and social effect while also preserving traditional skills. Use social media, influencer collaborations, and e-commerce platforms to market the collection globally. Release

limited seasonal capsules to create hype and exclusivity, while also enhancing brand loyalty and sustainability through conscientious production. Seek eco-certifications and ethical fashion standards to build trust and appeal to conscientious customers. Incorporate instructional content about Sri Lankan crafts into marketing initiatives to increase awareness and appreciation among international customers. Consider expanding into gender-neutral or menswear collections while maintaining the cultural narrative at its core.

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