



The Dumbara Craft Tradition and the Craftsmen (Kinnaras): An Ethnoarchaeological Investigation

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Abstract

Dumbara Kalala (ornamented mats) and accompanying crafts (*Chamara*, *Havari*, and *Kasa*), made of *Hana* or *Niyada* fibre, are a distinct tradition of art, which colonial records link with the Kinnaras, who provided those crafts to the Kandyan Court. These crafts and their craftsmen have been studied from anthropological and sociological perspectives since the 19th century. However, ethnoarchaeological studies on them have only been conducted in 2021. Since Kalasirigama (Henawala) in Kandy District is considered the main centre of these crafts, an ethnoarchaeological survey was conducted there in November 2022. Recording craft traditions and craftsmen is necessary because this community's lifestyles and cultural practices are rapidly changing due to socioeconomic transformations in society. The key research questions addressed here were: What is the historical significance of the Dumbara craft and its craftsmen in the larger context of Sri Lankan culture? And how do they deal with contemporary social transformations? The objectives of this research were to record the process of craft making, including the equipment and materials used, as well as the social aspects of the Dumbara craft tradition. Ethnoarchaeological field methods were employed in this research. Research revealed that it is still the same primitive loom, noted by Raghavan in 1951, that is used for weaving. Kinnaras seem reluctant to adopt new technology and diversify their craft. However, new raw materials are used to make non-traditional items. New designs are added to traditional motifs. Production of *Chamara*, *Havari*, and *Kasa* is rare at present. The number of families that practice the craft has drastically declined, despite incentives provided by the state to promote the craft and uplift the craftsmen's living standards. This is primarily due to the loss of pride in their traditional craft, which provided them with a livelihood and an identity. The continuity of certain aspects of Dumabara art amid socio-economic transformations provides ethnoarchaeological analogies to study the community and the craft from a historical perspective.

Keywords: *Dumbara craft, Craftsmen, Kinnara, Kalasirigama, Ethnoarchaeology.*

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