

ROLE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY TO FIND UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE CONTEMPORARY BEERALU LACE OF SRI LANKA TO RAISE THE VALUE AND PRICE OF GOODS

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to investigate unique features of the contemporary beeralu lace that affect the value and price of goods.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Magalle, Galle District is the selected study setting. This research uses a qualitative data analysis approach. Craftsmen, foreign customers, sellers, instructors and designers of NCC 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data was then analyzed to identify the factors that affect pricing.

Findings: The research found several factors that affect to maintenance high price of the beeralu craft. The first is the inherited traditional knowledge of art and craft, which generates the unique identity of the craft. Moreover, it was found that Beeralu lace has been utilized as fashion value additions, which affects the price of the product. Also, collaboration between craftsmen, designers, retailers, and the National Craft Council, along with government involvement the craft has been systematically evaluated and then modified to a wide variety of customer needs.

Practical Implications: Develop training programs for traditional beeralu craftsmen, fashion designers, suppliers, and manufacturers, and encourage market-driven production strategies to optimize product portfolios and boost competitiveness.

Research Limitations: Craftsmen have identified the value of their traditional knowledge. They hardly expose the knowledge to outside people, providing little information.

Originality/Value: This research aligns with SDG 01, which focuses on enhancing people's skills for improved livelihoods. The research shows the potential of collaboration between traditional artists and professional designers to address the needs of the customers in a wider context.

Keywords: Beeralu lace, Culture, Design application, Local and international customers, Value addition, SGD 01.

1. Introduction

The art of beeralu lace in Sri Lanka has a rich history dating back to the 16th century when it was introduced during the Portuguese colonial occupation. Over the centuries, this traditional craft has evolved to meet the demands of both local and international customers. Beeralu lace is not just a heritage craft but also a valuable fashion addition that adds uniqueness and elegance to garments.

The significance of beeralu lace lies in its cultural and historical value as well as its contribution to the contemporary fashion industry. Craftsmen and designers have managed to preserve traditional techniques while incorporating modern influences to cater to diverse customer demands. Beeralu lace has gained recognition as a symbol of culture and status, attracting both Sri Lankans and foreigners alike. The craft's survival also relies on the efforts of the National Craft Council, which works towards safeguarding traditional knowledge and promoting these crafts.

This investigative study aims to explore the unique features of contemporary beeralu lace in Sri Lanka and its role as a fashion value addition. By conducting qualitative data analysis through semi-structured interviews with craftsmen, fashion designers, instructors, and customers, the research seeks to identify the factors driving the demand for beeralu lace, the challenges faced by the industry, and the innovative ways craftsmen and designers adapt to the evolving market needs. The findings of this study will shed light on the significance of beeralu lace in the fashion industry and provide insights to raise the value and price of these exquisite products in the market.

2. Literature Review

What is Value Addition?

Value addition is when a processed product is upgraded with new characteristics that make it more valuable than the raw materials used to create it. It is used to make a product or service more appealing to consumers so that it can command a higher price or a larger market share. It may also have extra or unique features to raise the price of the good. (Adam, 2022), (Bridson, & Evans, 2004, p.410), (Tran, Hsuan, & Mahnke, 2011, p.87,88). (Bertolini., Romagnoli & Weinhard, 2017, p.161-163).

Background of the Lace Industry

Lace, according to Anne Kraatz, "creates empty space around a selected contour" (Gormally, 2017, p.02). Since the 18th century, lace has been in use. They are used in aristocratic portraits and royal costumes. Even lace added to the ends and decorations, the gowns are prohibitively expensive. (Debackere, 2022, p.5-7) There are several lace varieties that compete with bobbin-made lace. Both machine-made lace and lace created on bobbins are derived from embroidery techniques. There is therefore mass-produced, less expensive lace as well as expensive lace created by a bobbin. Hand-made lace in a fashion known as the "gold standard" among all these types of lace construction. (Gormally, 2017, p.06)

History of the World Beeralu (bobbin) Lace Industry

The origin of bobbin lace comes from braid making and passementerie in Italy, and with the Spanish troops, it came to Europe. Earlier, coarse passement threads and silk threads were used, and gradually they became finer, and later bleached linen yarns were used. (Fuhrmann, 2012, p.13). 16th-century women throughout Europe grabbed this art quickly because of the inexpensive raw materials and ease of learning. Pillows, pins, bobbins, and pricking are major tools. The shape and type of the bobbins and pillows are changed into areas and eras. The bobbin lace is also known as pillow lace and bone lace because earlier they used animal bones. (Goldenberg,2012, p.2,3)

History of Sri Lankan Beeralu Industry

The beeralu industry was established in Sri Lanka after the invention of the Portuguese in 1600. Women's servants and slaves in Portuguese houses thought of this art and spread it among the local houses. This industry develops rapidly around the southern coastal area. At first, they were used as decorative undergarments, but soon they became a luxury product popular among both men and women. (Wimalaratne & Gomes, 2001, p.49-52).

According to the legendary story of Sri Lanka, a worrier Queen Kuweni had a stone lace pillow on Ahangama, Kuweni Duwa Island. (Algewatte, 2019) Table clothes, narrow, doily, jug covers, table mats, daring for kabakaruttuwa, saree borders, collars for women's dresses, insertions for night dresses, full table mats, and curtains are the earlier products used to make beeralu. Craftsmen in Magalle have sent Beeralu laces and products to Queen Elizabeth, such as sarees, jackets, pillows, serviettes, etc. Pottu, agili paha, amabagediya, ali adiya, and vee karala are popular designs. The original laces had strong white cotton threads, and with the trends, they became soft colors like pink, blue, and light beige. (Wimalaratne & Gomes, 2001, p.49-52)

Value Adding by Lace in Hi-Fashion

Lace is a popular material used in high fashion to add value and enhance the appeal of garments. Famous fashion designers did the collections using these high-ended lace to do masterpieces. "Alexander McQueen S/S 2020", "Christopher Kane Spring 2023 ready to wear", "Christopher Bailey Burberry Prorsum Spring 2016 Menswear", "Simone Rocha Fall 2012 Ready-to-Wear" The use of lace in clothing has long been a standard at royal weddings, christenings, court occasions, and festivities. Visitors can learn more about the significance of lace in a royal dress by viewing the "Royalty" vitrine at Bath's Museum, which features four gowns (1805–1958) with markedly different styles, silhouettes, and applications of hand- and machine-made lace. The centerpiece of the exhibition is an 1805 cream Empire lace dress with an integral train, made entirely by hand from the highest quality European silk net and bobbin lace. (Gormally, 2017, p.2,3)

Craft Sustainable Development Goal 1 in the Craft Industry

"Traditional crafts contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs)". (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022, p.11). Case studies show that traditional crafts contribute to SDG 1 by empowering marginalized families and alleviating poverty. These crafts, despite disruptions, offer resilient livelihoods and preserve cultural heritage, highlighting the importance of policymakers' support. Niche tourism markets like rural, medical, pilgrimage, and eco-tourism provide new opportunities for the tourism industry and the craft industry. Tourism in rural areas can positively impact locals by creating employment opportunities and providing a direct sales platform for craftsmen (Saad,2021, p.95). Globalization significantly influences innovative ideas, as it influences the existence of commodities in a liberalized market, where competition and innovation determine the existence of a particular commodity. (Batt, p.7) The Indian government organizes national-level exhibitions for artisans and provides short-term loans for their sustainability. The state trains thousands through training centers and provides monthly income to workers. The Craft Development Institute (CDI) in Srinagar, established in 2004, adopts a holistic approach to handicraft development, drawing inspiration from Jammu and Kashmir's rich arts and crafts heritage. It encourages creative exchange and knowledge creation, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in the sector. (Batt, p.10) Most customers today care a lot about the emotional value that binds them to the product and also gives a special place for the effort behind the whole process, while they are impressed by hearing facts behind the scenes. (Perera & Ranaweera, 2023,p.11).

3. Methodology

Data Gathering Techniques

Data were gathered from Primary and Secondary sources. Primary data were gathered by observational studies by visiting shops, craftsmen's working areas, and workshops in the National Craft Council. Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews. Secondary data were gathered from referring books, research journal articles, newspapers, and websites.

Table 01: Summary of the interview

Code	Interviewee Details	Purpose of Interview
Interviewee 01	Designer	Market demand in the Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu
Interviewee 02	Craftsman	History of the beeralu industry. Market demand in the Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu. Products
Interviewee 03	Craftsman	History of the beeralu industry. Market demand in the Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu. Products
Interviewee 04	Craftsman	Design techniques
Interviewee 05	Craftsman	History of the beeralu industry. Market demand in the Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu. Products
Interviewee 06	Foreign customer	Bobbin lace industry in their country. Products.
Interviewee 07	Seller at fort	Market demand in the beeralu industry.
Interviewee 08	Customer	Products. Their perspective on the industry.
Interviewee 09	Craftsman	Design techniques
Interviewee 10	Foreign craftsman	Bobbin lace industry in their country. Products. Techniques in their country
Interviewee 11	Instructor in beeralu industry in National Craft Council (NCC)	Design techniques and design motifs. Steps that are taken to industry by NCC
Interviewee 12	Designer	Market demand in the global Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu Price ranges.
Interviewee 13	Designer	Market demand in the Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu Price ranges.
Interviewee 14	Designer	Market demand in the global Beeralu industry. Placements of beeralu Price ranges.

Observational Studies

Observational studies were carried out in beeralu shops in Magalle and Good Market in Galle Fort, craftsmen's houses, and hands-on experience from a workshop at National Craft Council. The observations are useful to get an understanding of the daily routine and get hands-on experience from the viewers' perspective. Product category, materials, design motifs, and techniques were observed. Visited 4-5 inherited beeralu families whose main income is the beeralu. They are based on the local tourism industry and local market.

Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview method involves a set of prepared questions based on identified themes and encourages detailed responses. (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.243,244) (Nathan et al., 2019, p.393,394). The data gathered from the literature review focused on how people learn beeralu lace making, whether they make it for VIPs, what products are made from beeralu lace, the materials used in beeralu lace, the special techniques used in beeralu lace, and the differences between placements in terms of selling. The key questions were related to history, product demand, methods, and design themes, which were answered by their styles. Interviewees were chosen from industry professionals with extensive experience in conducting interviews. Two series of interviews were carried out. The first is a pilot survey. For further clarification, the same person was interviewed twisted. 5 craftsmen, 1 instructor, 4 designers, 2 customers, 1 foreign craftsman, and 1 seller are included in the interview group. The study also focused on investigating the industry's challenges and recent advances. It discussed a wide range of issues with the industry's employees. Interviews were conducted during March and April 2023.

4. Research Findings

International / Local Customer Demand for Beeralu. Customized Beeralu Productions. Why Customers Appreciate Beeralu

It was found that there had been a considerable demand for customized beeralu productions in Magalle for years. According to this research, the customer selling point of beeralu is the demand for customized beeralu productions.

"In the past, people in Magalle have produced beeralu lace for Queen Elizabeth II's wedding gown" (interviewee 3).

Famous Western pop artists also bought these masterpieces of Galle at a stall at a handicrafts arcade in New Delhi on October 28, 2011, as shown in Figure 1.

"American Lady Gaga also bought products from us."(interviewees 3)

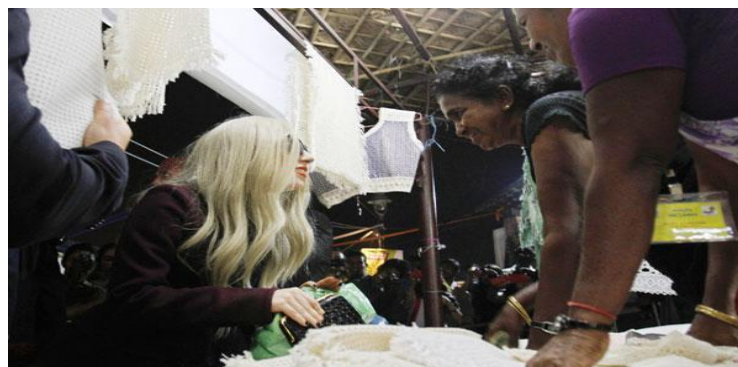


Figure 1 Sri Lankan craftsman sells beeralu to Lady Gaga

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/entertainment/images/attachement/jpg/site1/20111030/00221917e9c41016e65021.jpg>

Politicians in Sri Lanka used beeralu for their wedding dresses (interviewees 3, 4, 5). Beeralu acts as a symbol of culture and status. Most Sri Lankans wear these beeralu garments to showcase their culture and social status, and it was found that some buy beeralu to sell in foreign countries (interviewees 03, 4). Magalle artisans are suppliers, dress/costume designers, and house whole-item producers. Foreigners who visit Sri Lanka are attracted to these beeralu garments and products. There is demand for full lace garments, normal garments, and off-white color beeralu garments are high, but the demand also depends on the price. (Interviewee3,5).

Inherited Traditional Knowledge Is Protected by Families.

The Natives in the Southern coastal area learned beeralu lace production from the Portuguese in the 16th century AD, since then the knowledge has been passed from generation to generation. (interviewee 2,3,4,5)

"One of our grandmothers learned from the Portuguese and the Dutch. Then my mother learned, and we also learned it." (Interviewee 05)

However, it is seen that the new generation of these families is not interested in this industry because of their financial problems.

"The Young crowd doesn't like this. They look for a job and take a salary." (Interviewee 05)

"Craftsmen in the Weligama area started to sell fruit juice and foods" (Interviewee 05)

The National Craft Council tries to protect these cultural craft industries in Sri Lanka. They conduct Beeralu classes free of charge and there is an annual Presidential award ceremony to motivate people who are in these industries. (Interviewee 11)

"The National Craft Council (NCC) is training the students. That is how it protects. This is a dying art, so we train students to protect it. We had a limit age of 18-45 years but now we are out of the limit because the people who remain in this industry are people whose age is more than 50 years." (Interviewee 11)

"Every year there are competitions. Not only for beeralu there is the support from NCC to every traditional craft industry" (Interviewee 11)

Production Priority Is Given to the market/more by Demand Products at the Market

It shows that the market demand is for the off-white gray yarns and the calico fabric. The color, type of yarn, and type of fabric add unique value to these products. Besides, they use other raw materials at the request of the customer.

"I have decided to incorporate the same patterns without damaging the aesthetics of the craft." (Interviewee 12)

Price is a major factor in the demand for the products on the market. In this industry, the price depends on the amount of beeralu laces that are used on the product.

"Some people don't buy it because of the price. But there is demand for whole beeralu garments. Think we do a small frock in full beeralu, we have to sell it for Rs. 7000, but a normal frock we can sell for Rs. 1500-2000." (Interviewee 05)

In the local market and global market, beeralu products consist of both ready-to-wear and custom-made products. The majority of ready-to-wear products are purchased by the customers who randomly come to the shops. Most foreigners are in this category. It takes 1-2 months to make 10 yards of beeralu lace. Custom-made products take

several attempts. People buy custom-made products for special occasions. The prices of custom-made new-design products are higher than ready-to-wear products.

New Technology for Traditional Tasks of Weaving

Fashion designers of Sri Lanka made innovations from Beeralu. They use different types of threads and materials to make the traditional beeralu modern. However, the market demand is still consistent with traditional off-white beeralu laces as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - Bralette, Harshi lace.Craftsmen, Beeralu Products, No. 237, Matara Road, Magalle, Galle(Courtesy Harshi)



Figure 3 - Beeralu Design, Mihirini De Silva. Fashion Designer, Third Year Collection Planning Project 2023, Department of Integrated Design, Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, Sri Lanka. (Courtesy Mihirini De Silva).

Traditional artisans made new machines to approach today's customer demands. They have adjusted the ordinary size of the traditional beeralu pillow. They used a pillow which was made from rigid foam. They use a wooden frame to make a weave more similar to the “Putu Mudda”. It also takes time, but they can create a large weaving by using it.

“Here it is we make this from a wooden frame from some threads. We can’t do this for days. It takes a minimum of two weeks.” (Interviewee 03)

Product category/ Design category

They weave different types of motifs by using traditional weaving design techniques as shown in table 2.

i. Designs and Product Categories

Table 2: Designs And Product Categories

Designs	Product category	Color	Techniques
Yara Pati Pichcha-mala (Jasmin) Bakini mala Kan peththa Maha para Hinni massa Nuul petta Spider Ada liyawela Doilies Pichcha thun kala Pichcha kala Agili doily Ali adiya Disi covers	Tablecloth	Off-white/ white/ Request from other colors	Hatharapata Depata Thani mudda Putu mudda Damwela (chain)
	Table cover		
	Women’s wear Blouses Kaftans Skirts Lungis Kurta tops Trousers Undergarments Dresses		
	Men’s wear		
	Bridal sarees, dresses, and normal sarees		
	Jug covers		
	Curtains		
	Bookmarks		
	Book covers		
	“Buddha Pooja” covers		
	Bags/ purses		
	Pieces of jewelry		
Shoes			

ii. Designs & Design Sheets

The design sheet is called 'Koiruwa'. Sometimes names of the designs are different from craftsman to craftsman.

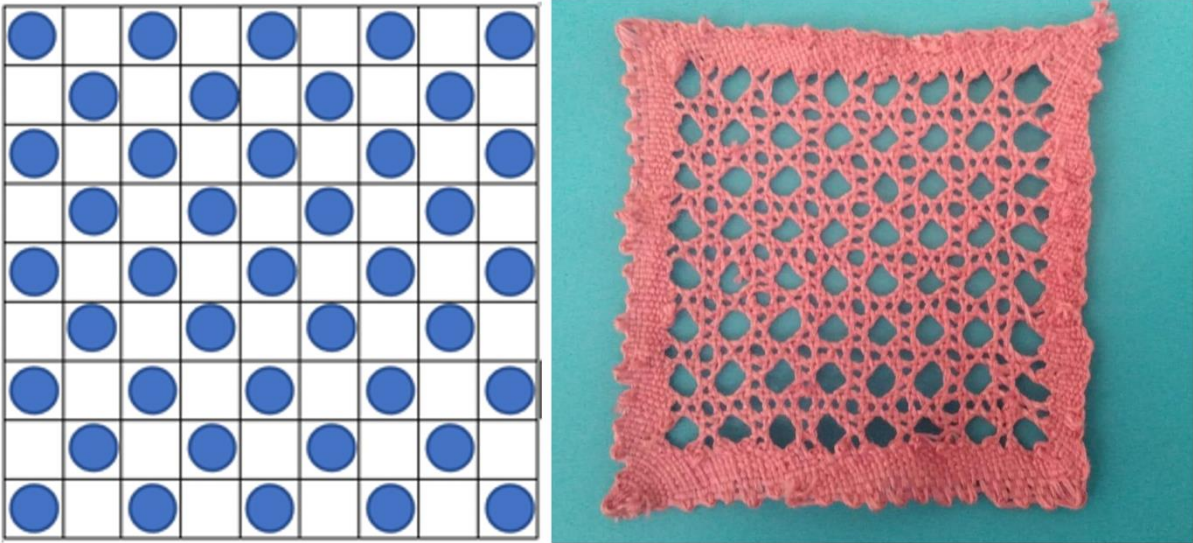


Figure 4 - Thani Mudda, Putu Mudda Design Sheet, Technical drawing by author. H.G.D.T.P. Amarasinghe and 4 Putu Mudda technique, Kanthi lace. Craftsmen, Beeralu sample, 29/1, Gangarama rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)

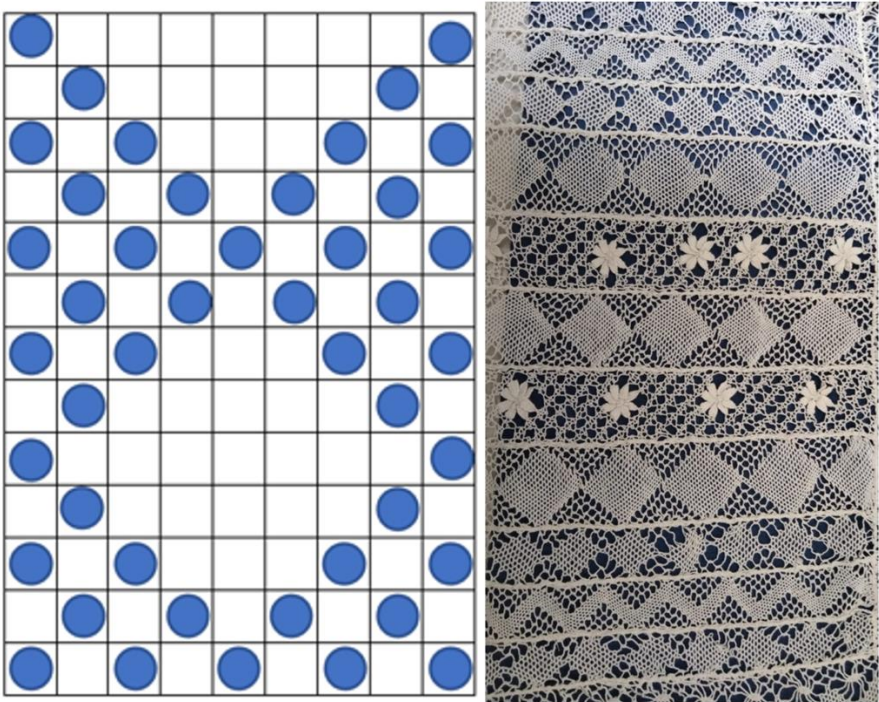


Figure 5 - Nuul Petta Design Sheet, Technical by author. H.G.D.T.P. Amarasinghe, Nuul Petta, Kanthi lace, Craftsmen, Beeralu Yara pati, 29/1, Gangarama rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)

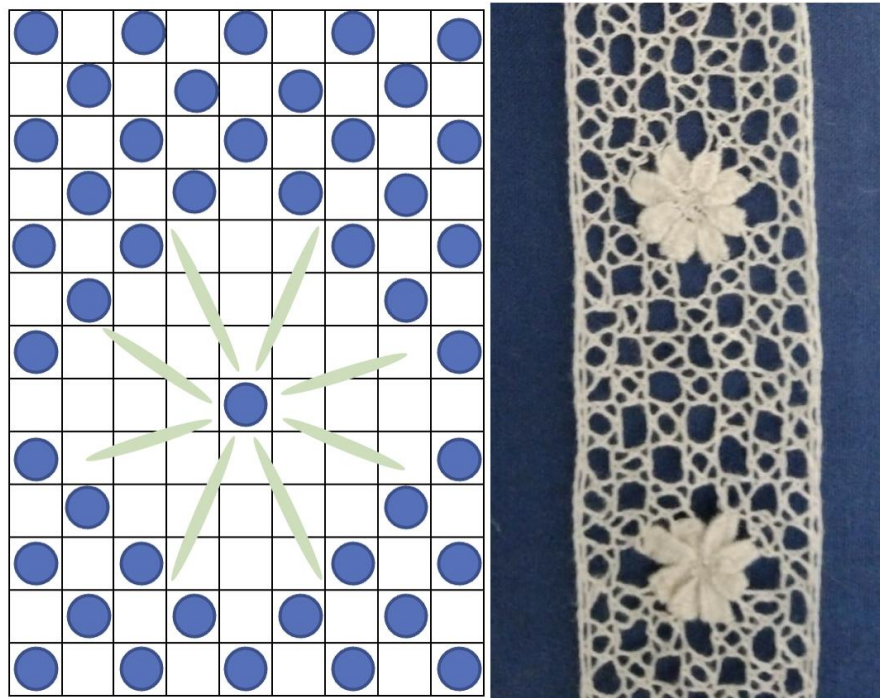


Figure 6 - Pichcha Mala Design Sheet, Technical by author. H.G.D.T.P. Amarasinghe, Pichcha Mala, Kanthi lace. Craftsmen, Beeralu Yara Pati, 29/1, Gangarama Rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)

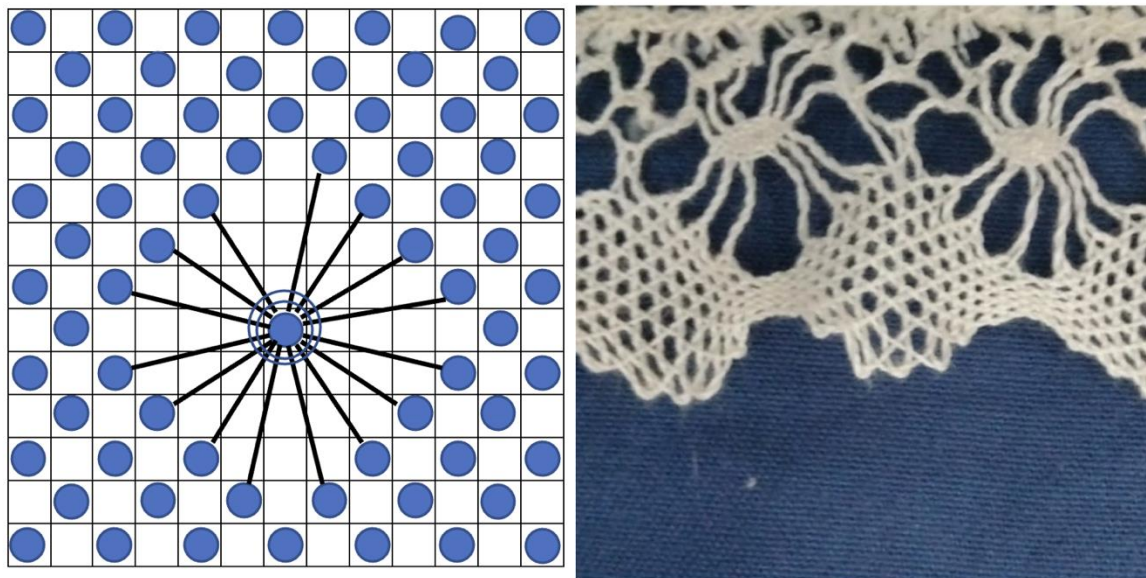


Figure 7 - Massa Design Sheet, Technical by author. H.G.D.T.P. Amarasinghe, Hinni Massa= Massa+ Depata wiyamana, Kanthi lace. Craftsmen, Beeralu Yara Pati, 29/1, Gangarama rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)

iii. Products

Craftsmen have been using traditional beeralu designs for several years to protect the traditional value of these beeralu laces such as table mats as shown in figure 10. Moreover, Bookmarks, pendants, bags, French bands, and such new customer demands came to the market. Furthermore, using these traditional designs and techniques, craftsmen weave different shapes. For example, they create turtles by using traditional designs and techniques as shown in Figure.8. But they only create them for designers' use, and it takes time. The different types of Beeralu

products are now on the market. Identify customer requirements and make products that can reach the market easily.



Figure 8 - Turtle, Kanthi lace. Craftsmen, beeralu products 29/1, Gangarama rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)



Figure 9 - Book Marks, Pendent Kanthi lace. Craftsmen, beeralu products 29/1, Gangarama rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)



Figure 10 - Bag, French band, Jug Cover Kanthi lace. Beeralu products 29/1, Gangarama rd, Magalle, Galle. (Courtesy M.S. Kanthilatha)

Placement of the Garments.

Beeralu laces are woven like straps or pieces of swatches. After that, they made the final product by placing beeralu laces. The placement of beeralu laces varies depending on the designer and the customer. There are several common placements, like the neck, sleeve, and bottom hem, where the laces are used. But to make the garments unique, they are more creative in selecting the placement of the garments as shown in Figure 11.

“This was very challenging and innovative when you use the same craft as is on ready-to-wear without much of a change. But we started injecting the beeralu lace into very unusual silhouettes and patterns.” (Interviewee 12)

“I can’t say, such a placement. Placing it as a designer is also a placement. So, it cannot be said that lace is specially used here.” (Interviewee 01)



Figure 11 - All over lace short sleeves shirt, Puff sleeves shirt, Cosmo shirt, KUR Collection, Designer, 41, Horton Place, Colombo 00700, Sri Lanka. (Courtesy Kasuni Rathnasuriya)

5. Discussion

International / Local Customer Demand for Beeralu. Customized Beeralu Productions. Why Customers Appreciate Beeralu

A beeralu piece, which was made by the Sri Lankan ladies in the southern coastal area, had a huge demand in the past also. These masterpieces were available to high-end customers in both local and global markets. Still in Sri Lanka, they use these traditional crafts on special occasions of their lives to showcase their status to society. The foreigners who visit Sri Lanka buy these beeralu products without arguing over the price. They appreciate the value behind the outcome (Perera & Ranaweera, 2023, p.11)

Inherited Traditional Knowledge Is Protected by Families.

According to their introduction of the art 'A dying art' it is occupied among the older generation. (Interviewee 3,5,11) The young generation of these families is not engaged with this art. and the people who are in this industry are looking for new jobs. With the economic system of the country, they need a proper job to survive. However, the National Craft Council took action to protect these heirloom arts. They conduct a series of workshops and motivate them by giving awards. However, their interest is scanty. The Indian government has also been conducting training programs and national-level exhibitions that encourage creative exchange and knowledge creation, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in the sector. (Bhat, p.10) Most of the craftsmen who are engaged in this industry have carried out since their teenage years.

Production Priority Is Given to the Market/ More by Demand Products at the Market

Off-white gray yarns and calico fabric are in demand in the local and global market, the local tourism sector. However, at the request of the customers, they use colored threads and other materials. But most of them are not designed for everyday wear, like off-white. Sometimes it will depend on the price of that product. The beeralu that uses special thread costs more than the normal beeralu. Also, according to these interviews, when they create a new custom design, it will cost more than normal beeralu.

New Technology for Traditional Tasks of Weaving

According to the Beeralu weavers, the market demand is still there for traditional Beeralu, which is made by using gray yarns; They only use beads in bridal sarees and occasional wear. (Interviewee 3,5) However young designers are using other new materials than the traditional material to gain the uniqueness of the product. Globalization significantly influences innovative ideas and commodity existence in a liberalized market, where competition and innovation determine the existence of a particular commodity. (Batt, p.7)

“The value of beeralu laces gains by making them by hand” (Interviewee 4)

Even though machine-made, Guipure lace prices are low, it can't gain that much value. Craftsmen making small changes get perfect designs even by hand. They can do innovations with materials but not with the way they make beeralu. Otherwise, they will lose their value.

Product category/ Design category

Production categories have been increased. Traditional products are still in the market resembling the retrospective values. New production items reveal the skill and craftsmen's perception of creativity, and his ability to fuse tradition with modern.

Placement of the Garments

Beeralu lace is added to garments as a value-added option. From the past, there were common placement places to add beaded lace to a garment. But these beeralu placements are more important to the marketing of the garment. Customers are always looking for new, unique garments to wear. So, the designer should be more creative when placing beeralu on a garment.

6. Conclusion

Beeralu lace has been utilized as a fashion value addition. The analysis shows how traditional craft has been modified with contemporary influences to facilitate a wide variety of customer needs. But the market demand is still standing with the traditional craft. Inherited traditional skills bring unique value to the craft as shown in the discussion points 5.1 and 5.2. In the market, there is an interesting product range that represents traditional and contemporary developments. It is seen that the craftsmen have successfully adapted to concurrent economic restrictions and fulfilled the current customer demands as shown in the discussion points 5.3, 5.5, and 5.6. Figures 8,9,10 and 11 show that traditional craft can find new destinations in fulfilling customers' desires in a wide range. Even they can experiment with weaving a beeralu portrait art. Placement of the beeralu garments is also an interesting part of marketing. There is a challenge when using the same design in different places while protecting the aesthetic look of the garment. Hence, placement can play a huge part in an outfit. Therefore, Craftsmen and designers should know to emphasize the unique value of their creations. Goal 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 1) is to end poverty in all of its manifestations globally. Achieving this objective in the Sri Lankan craft industry entails giving local artisans access to fair trade markets, empowering them through skill development initiatives, and highlighting the traditional crafts' cultural legacy. Through providing training, market access, and cultural preservation, the craft sector can help artisans establish sustainable livelihoods and reduce poverty in Sri Lanka.

Recommendation

The demand for the beeralu lace has continued since ancient times. Today beeralu utilizes hi-fashion value addition. Government guidance is significant in the development and sustainable survival of the craft. The craft survived finding solutions for timely necessities. The value lies in its inherited traditional art and craft which is handed down and carefully protected from generation to generation. Therefore, the research recommends the government policy implementation and strategic plan for training the younger generation in their inherited craft to suit international and national customer demands.

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