

Panel II:

Dr. T. Sanathanan

AN INVENTORY OF EPHEMERA: CRAFTING KITCHEN UTENSILS
FROM WOOD & PALMYRAH

Abstract:

Intricacies of food culture have been interwoven with the craft traditions that have produced the kitchen utensils, in Jaffna. The geographical and cultural location of Jaffna has enabled the production of kitchen utensils from a variety of materials such as terracotta, copper, brass, iron, silver aluminum, ceramic, stainless steel, glass, plastic, granite, wood, cane, bamboo and palmyrah leaves. Some of these materials are locally available while others have been imported.

This paper will focus on ephemeral utensils that have been produced within the Jaffna peninsula, by local craftsmen. Therefore, they reflect the social divisions within Jaffna society. An attempt will also be made to map the industry of minor crafts in the Jaffna peninsula.

Biography:

Dr. T. Sanathanan is a visual artist and a Senior Lecturer in Art History at the Department of Fine Arts, University of Jaffna.

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Ninel Fernando

TRADITIONAL KITCHEN ACCESSORIES: DESIGN EVOLUTION
TO SAVE TIME AND SPACE

Abstract:

Traditional village homes in Sri Lanka were small considering the internal floor area with one or two small sleeping rooms. The family interacted in the open verandah *Pila*, and the male head of the house as protector, slept at night. The *Pila* was also used to for entertaining guests, bringing in incompletely dried rice and spices for the night,

and a place to weave a mat or even as a play space for children. The garden was often an extension of the house with basic wooden seating under a tree, which was an ideal situation for a tropical country. Often the kitchen too was limited in floor space. The women therefore had to be innovative in the use of space for maximum benefit, safety and comfort. In times gone by, a woman's ability to weave mats and make her own kitchen accessories with rush, reed, cane and bamboo were well regarded accomplishments. Starting from a young age, a woman fashioned these accessories to be hung away from the ground to conserve space, to protect food from rats and other vermin, to be out of reach of children but most importantly, to be easily accessible to the user by being hung from the rafters at the correct height without interfering with free movement within the space.

Most of these objects were made from freely available raw materials. The user herself harvested and prepared the raw material. Often, mat weaving was done as a communal activity and the knowledge was passed from older to younger women through an oral tradition by the chanting of verse, *kavi* that described the processes. There was also an element of competition where each would try to outdo the other in making beautiful products. This ensured that the craft survived. Over the generations this process would have resulted in products that were refined to conform to the limitations of the raw material, suitable for their specific usages, be in keeping with the proportions of the human form, and to conserve space when in use and even when not in use. Thus, it can be seen that solutions to the problems pertaining to the basic principles of design - Form, Function, Material, Technology and Ergonomics have been arrived at by trial and error resulting in a fully evolved assemblage of products. Remnants of these crafts and craftswomen with the skills survive to this day. This study and recording of the technology and products we hope, will help in a small way in the survival of these crafts. We could help the survival of the products and the livelihood of the producers by using such products in a modern context as space saving, eco friendly devices in contemporary homes.

Biography:

Ninel Fernando is a Textile Designer in woven/ printed / dyed textile media having had her professional education at J.J School of Art, Bombay, India. On her return, Ninel worked in the private and public sectors as a designer gaining experience in designing in the field and in training of trainers in hand crafted textile processes, TOT of craft trainers in several craft media both locally and internationally. Presently she also works as a freelance designer on design projects working with a few architects/ designers. As Senior Designer of The National Design Centre, Ninel's work involved working with traditional craft families involved in diverse crafts to upgrade their products through design input while preserving the identity of these crafts. She has also carried out documentations on traditional textiles and processes in Sri Lanka, traditional jewelry of the Kandyan period and pottery assemblages of the Iron Age burial site in Ibbankatuwa, Sri Lanka. She is a visiting lecturer in Textile Design and Processes as well as Traditional Arts and Crafts to students following the B. Design, Hons course at the University of Moratuwa, Faculty of Architecture. Email:ninelf@yahoo.com