

HANDLOOM ECOSYSTEM: REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL TEXTILE CULTURE OF SRI LANKA THROUGH MAINSTREAM FASHION TRENDS

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KEYWORDS

Handloom ecosystem, creative practice-based design research, mainstream fashion trends, traditional crafting techniques, artisanal skills, Sri Lankan Handloom industry

ABSTRACT

Sri Lankan handloom culture boasts a history spanning over 300 years, establishing itself as one of the world's oldest textile manufacturing industries. Over time, this sector has been enriched by the contributions of migrating artisans and traders, evolving in tandem with socio-cultural developments. Distinct regions within Sri Lanka have cultivated unique handloom practices, giving rise to significant traditions and cultural expressions within the sector. The illustrious history of the Sri Lankan handloom industry saw substantial impact during the 1970s, when the country adopted open economic policies and simultaneously witnessed the rapid growth of the Export Apparel Sector. Nevertheless, in the present day, handloom continues to play a pivotal role in the income of many rural families. To sustain an industry's existence, it must adapt to current market trends while preserving its originality and key characteristics. Globally, traditional craft practices are increasingly intertwined with mainstream fashion trends, particularly those driven by sustainability and localization. Sri Lanka's rich craft culture offers the potential to align with the mainstream fashion trends while retaining its traditional essence. This study seeks to explore and analyze the intricate traditional crafting techniques and artisanal skills within the Sri Lankan Handloom industry. Its ultimate goal is to create innovative handloom aesthetics that meet the demands of the contemporary fashion industry. The study adopts a creative practice-based design research approach, structured into two main phases. The initial phase involves an extensive literature review, participatory observations, and semi-structured interviews. This phase serves to delve into the history, contextual factors, and technical intricacies of the Handloom industry, while also considering global fashion trends. The second phase integrates the research findings from the first phase, focusing on materials, processes, and principles. It applies these insights to craft Handloom textiles that exemplify novel aesthetic textures with distinctive tactile qualities. This is achieved through the development of a series of prototypes that embody these characteristics. This holistic approach to study harmoniously merges the rich traditional crafting techniques and artisanal skills embedded in the Sri Lankan Handloom industry with contemporary fashion movements. By doing so, it responds to the growing demand for this indigenous craft within the dynamic landscape of the fashion industry.