

## RHYTHM IN FASHION: EVOLUTION OF GAMPOLA PERIOD DANCE DRESSES

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### Abstract

Evolving fashion is dynamic and sometimes it is very subtle. Dancing dresses of the Gampola period offer important and unique material to study the evolution of fashion. Gampola was the central phase of a divided kingdom which started in 1335AD and lasted for nearly seventy years (till 1408AD), headed by four kings. By having external political and cultural assimilations from South India the dress fashions evolved from time to time and stage by stage. However while having a sequence of modifications and formulations in dress details the evolution never caused a change in the basic form of the dance dress. Always it intended to keep the form of the dress right through history.

*Key words: Gampola period, Evolution, Dancers, Dress fashion,*

### Introduction

#### Historical background

According to the Lankathilaka and Gadaladeniya rock inscriptions, *Bhuvanekabahu IV* (1341 -51AD) was the first king of the Gampola period (Paranavithana 1960). During his reign the Lankathilaka temple was built with the assistance of a South Indian chief minister and the Gadaladeniya temple was built by a South Indian architect. The other kings of the Gampola (De Silva 1981) period are traced as *Parakramabahu V* (1344-59AD), *Vikramabahu III* (1357-74AD), and *Buwanekabahu V* (1371-1408AD). The kings of Gampola were considered generally weak rulers since their chief ministers assumed supreme power (De Silva 1981). A new literary genre marked a departure from the traditional poetry to Sandesa poetry; *Thisara* and *Mayura* were the first *sandesas* and reached maturity during the Kotte period. Practicing of art in the service of the court of Kotte would have migrated from the Gampola kingdom. Embekke Devale was constructed during the reign of *Vikramabahu III* and was connected to the traditions of god *Skanda*. The *Niyamgampaya* Temple was reconstructed by *Jayamale Sitana* during the reign of king *Vikramabahu III*. In the spaces between the plinth moldings of the old structure are sculptures of musicians, drummers and dancers. *Alavathura* or *Ganegoda* viharaya is also one of the important shrines belonging to this era, having a dado of female dancers and drummers. The author of Gadaladeniya, *Dharmakirthi – Thero* first lived in *Alavathura* and later moved to Gampola.

#### Definition- Evolution

Evolution is a process of gradual development or a gradual change which takes place in a particular situation or thing over a period of time. When evolution takes place in a particular sphere, art and tradition have changed according to human behavior patterns. Behavior patterns changed in history as a social process. Evolution which has taken place in attire can be identified along with influences, inspirations, and social changes in every aspect of human life. Also it connotes the human instinct of acceptance and rejection.

#### Defining inspirations, assimilations and social changes due to political instances

The Gampola period manifested superiority in both art and architecture in history within the seventy year zenith of South Indian influences headed by four kings. The kingdom was filtered through the Divided Kingdom (Schoreder 1990) which was much unstable in sovereignty and had to face many south Indian pressures. Also this period is important because it traces the emergence of new elite (Kulasooriya 19776). Two clans of foreign origin are particularly important: Senadhilankara from the *Mehenavara clan* and Alagakkonara (De Silva 1981) from the *Giri vansa*. Their significance is their active participation and intertwining with the administration of the state which marked the changes that occurred in the later medieval period. Ultimately they held high administrative positions in the kingdom. This resulted in the chief ministers becoming more powerful than the Gampola kings they served. The emergence of these new elite caused changes in politics and further impacted on the culture of that period.

Through their influential careers it is clearly visible that the South Indian inspirations remarkably manifested in art and architecture of the period. *Gadaladeniya* and *Lankathilake* temples are the superior examples of the South Indian inspirations. *Gadaladeniya* (Schoreder 1990) was built by the instruction of and construction under the South Indian chief architect *Ganeshwaracharya* with the patronage of king *Bhuwanekabahu IV* (1341-1351 AD) and *Lankathilaka* was built on *Sthapathi Rayar's* instructions by the chief minister *Senadhilankara* (Mudiyanse, N.D). The sculptors who were employed at *Gadaladeniya* and *Lankathilaka* were imported from India (Mudiyanse, N.D). It is clear that the *Vijayanagar* Empire which flourished with a rich art tradition filtered to *Gampola* by the artisans who came from South India. Dance and music developed in these Hindu temples and started to embody graceful rhythmic figures associated with architecture as narrative freezes in the temples which are unique. This style was merged with Sinhala tradition (Raghvan 1967) and evolved with the rich figures in the freeze of *Gadaladeniya* in a procession of dancers and musicians.

During this period Buddhism confronted powerful pressure from Hinduism. Buddhism has co- existed and interacted with Hinduism and assimilated elements of Hindu culture. This happened three centuries before the Christian era had assimilated some elements of Hindu culture (Pathmanathan 1986/87). The moral deterioration and discipline of the *Sangha* caused decline of the Theravada doctrine (De Silva 1981). Along with the Mahayana deities the worship of Vedic and post Vedic Hindu deities was firmly established as part of the religious practice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Schoder (1990) suggests that the worship of local deities such as *Upulwan*, *Saman*, *Vibhishana* and *Skhanda* became essential deities of Sinhalese Buddhism. Pathmanathan states that the four deities' concept was articulated in much developed form and worship in Devalas or shrines attained considerable importance in the Buddhist tradition. The forms of worship and rituals conducted in those shrines were adopted from Hinduism. They were accompanied as in Hindu temples with music and dancing performed by men and women attached to temples on service or tenure (Pathmanathan 1986/87). Hence, this era shows South Indian inspirations in religion, art, craft, administration and social organization which emerged and influenced behavior patterns of the Sinhalese and made visible in their dresses within a short period of time.

#### **Historical evidences of the dance in the Gampola period**

Like music, dance was also a popular art in ancient Sri Lanka. The kingdom before moving to Gampola, in the previous eras provided sumptuous records of dance patronized by the Sinhala kings. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century the kings of the *Dambadeniya* period spent

their day to day life with dance and music. Their daily routine was well described in the *Kandauru Siritha* a well-known Sinhala text. According to the text, in the morning while seated on the throne, the king enjoyed dance and music. He also had an ensemble of dance and music known as *sringara mandapaya*. In the evening 1800 women performed the light dance in the *alaththimandapaya* and, in the *nataka mandapaya* the king again took his pleasure with sounds of music and the rhythm of dance (Senevirathne 1984). The king also maintained two ensembles of music one for the Tooth Relic called "*Daladagei Vijjatun*" and the other "*Rajagei Vijjatun*" for the services of the court. *Kandavurusiritha* further states that nearly 360 dancing guilds (Gosti) of the country received wages from the Royal treasury. The king conferred with the honorific epithet *Nambara Kalikala Sahitya Sarwangya Panditha Kalikala* which is a title given to musicians' (Kulathilake 1991). During the Gampola period figures of musicians and dancers were very often found in temples on sculptural friezes. Besides these artifacts, there are also historical and literary works that go to support the existence of a developed form of dance in Sri Lanka. Most of the dance forms described in these sources seem to have been of a mimetic nature (Kulathilake 1991). Patronage was provided by the royal court for both secular and religious dance and music. While the royal court employed dancers and musicians for the king's enjoyment, the king himself provided a similar institution for important religious places of worship (Kulathilake 1991). During this period an interesting service was attached to the deistic shrines known as *Alaththi Bema*. This service was not performed at *Embekke* however it was performed at *Alawathugoda Saman Devale* and *Wegiriya Devalaya* in *Medapalatha, Udunuwara* (Manukulasooriya). The *Udawaththa, Ganga Palatha Korale*, and Upper *Hanguranketha Devalayas* had two *alaththi pangu* where a woman from one *pangu* had to perform the services of *alaththi bema* for four months in the year for 30 days (Manukulasooriya). The service was called *alaththi bema* and the performers were called *alaththi ammas* performing in the place called *alaththimandapaya*. However there was a service recorded at *Embekke Devalaya* known as *natun pangu*. But there is no significant information available regarding this dance (Manukulasooriya). The dancing halls in the Devalayas were popularly known as *Digge*. Some of the *Digge* halls are still preserved in good condition in some of the places such as are *Gadaladeniya, Embekke, and Alawathura Viharaya* or *Ganegoda* at *Bulathkohupitiya* in Kegalle (Senevirathne 1984).

### **Some indications of dressing fashions described in Sandesa poetry**

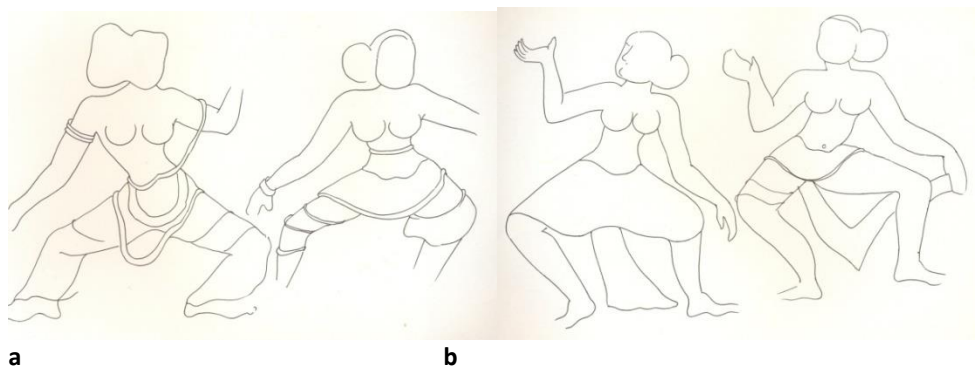
The Sandesa poems of the 14<sup>th</sup> century contain details of dance dresses which were used for rituals of Hindu Gods as well for Royal presence. The *Mayura sandesa* was the first Sandesa written in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Verse 124 states (Wijesooriya 2004) the anklet they wore: it gives a pleasing sound while they dance. Verses 127 and 131 (Wijesooriya 2004) describe some of the ornamentation used by the dancers for their ears. They used gem studded earrings; also it was a fashion of wearing flowers as ear studs. They wore blue lotuses as ear studs.

*Thisara Sandesa* makes some reference to the use of flowers by dancers. It is believed that flowers gained a certain traditional value in terms of dressing women. It was a popular fashion to have flowers for hair decoration in many ways. Verses 169 and 170 (Wijesooriya 2004) indicate some adornments of flowers. They followed several methods of wearing flowers in the hair. Sometimes they arranged flowers as circles and sometimes arranged flowers as they were. Verse 171 (Wijesooriya 2004) gives some idea of their jewelry. It is noted that wearing gem studded jewelry also evolved as a fashion during this period. Wearing jewelry and adorning the body with fresh flowers continued from ancient times in Sri Lanka. Many pictorial references show that it was immersed in the tradition of

the country. The tradition allowed all the categories of people in the society to beautify their body with sumptuous jewelry and exotic flowers. The beauty and scent of flowers and the attractiveness they imparted to the wearer were reasons why flowers were commonly used by the dancers. Flowers have been worn in garlands since ancient times, and they were also used as adornments in the hair and ears.

During the short period of time Sri Lankan dance dress evolved, formed and modified in relation to external influences, inspirations, and assimilations due to several political changes. These fashions can be identified as dress details. Traditionally the lower dress of dancer composed with loose wrapped cloth with wads of pleats. Very often the upper body was uncovered, however used much jewelry to adorn the upper body. The lower dress changed time to time with Zeitgeist of people in society. During the Gampola period there were two main dress details introduced and one detail developed much greater extent. The shawl and the fall emerged as new details. The earliest examples of dance dress belong to Gampola period found from *Alawathura* or *Ganegoda* vihara (Bell 1982) at Bulathkohupitiya, Kegalle. There were four female dancers and five male instrument players shown on the basement of the Devale.

**Figure 1 Emerging of Fall from Ganegoda**



It is clearly visible that the fall has emerged as an extension of wrapped cloth from the waist and function as part of the lower dress. (Fig 1- b)

**Figure 2 Development of Fall with stylized folds from Embekke**



The fall shown here is a much developed form, tightly fitted to the waist with a waist belt and forming layers of folds. The dancer successfully utilizes the fall as means of enhancing the performance. This form of detail was inspired and continued by the dancers of the Kandyan period.

**Figure 3 Continuation of Fall by the dancers in the Kandyan period**



f - Ridi Viharaya-Kurunegala

g- Gangaramaya- Kandy

**Figure 4 Fall developed as Ohoriya during the Kandyan period**



h-Malagammanai-Hindagala

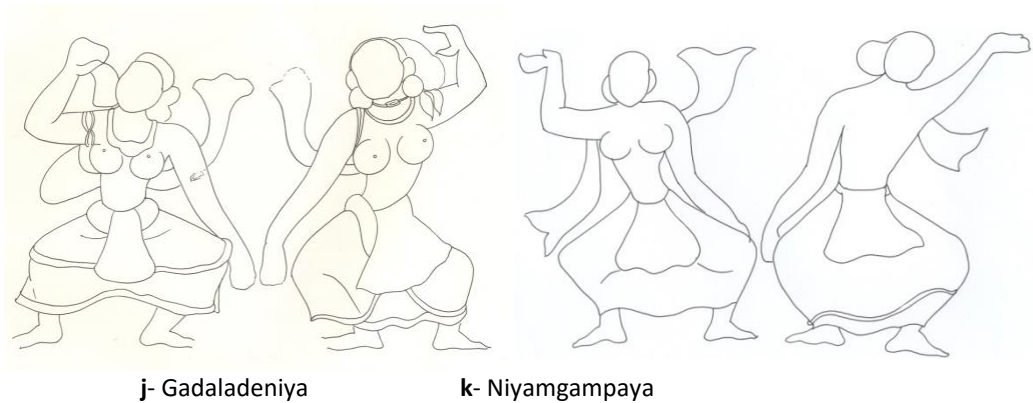
The fall created a new dress form during the Kandyan period. It is very remarkable that the women of the ancient period manipulated one dress detail into another indigenous dress form. The fall generates a new dress form as an “Ohoriya” (Coomaraswamy 1956). According to the Kandyan temple murals it can be suggested that

the extended fall became the ohoriya and thrown across the breasts over the shoulders was used to cover the upper body.

**Shawl as a new dress form**

Although the shawl has been used as a dress detail since ancient times (Ariyapala 1956), it emerged as a new dress detail inspired by South India and gained popularity during this period. The pictorial evidences of Gadaladeniya and Niyamgampaya temples showed the earliest examples of shawls. The dress detail shows the movement of the dance and how it ultimately amalgamated with the rhythm. The methodology of arranging the shawl is very simple. It was utilized in two ways. One way was as a separate light weight cloth (*salupota*) passing under the armpits and blowing over both sides towards shoulders and sometimes it reached to head level, pleated and fan shaped (**fig 6- m, n, o**). The other way was to put around the neck and come down from both shoulders. However the shawl gained much popularity during the Kandyan period and was used by the queens and elite women as “*lansolu*”

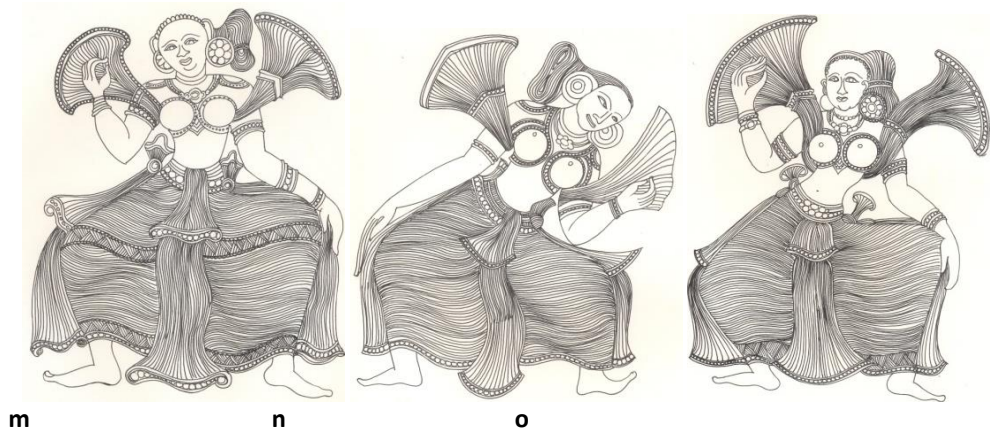
**Figure 5 Emergence of light shawl**



**I – Dancer of the Parsurameswar Temple South India**

The shawl has been depicted as a system of special clips of the dress. It could be shaped into a multitude of permutations by the wearer endlessly, recognizable in a range of shapes. Dancers in Embekke displayed an abstract and stylized form of shawl. The shawl represents the possibility of locating new shapes within the dress form. There is a new idea visible in these dresses; a decorated border finished the edges of the lower dresses and the shawls. It was patterned with traditional geometrical design motifs. Subtle lines created a textured effect on the shawl; sometimes it might have been a pleated shawl.

**Figure 6 Development of light shawl**



**Figure 7 Shawl converted as Lansolu**



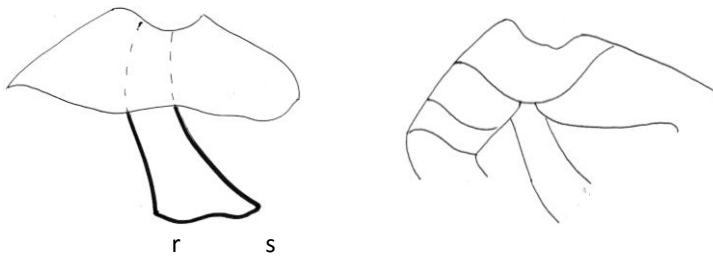
Because of the popularity the shawl gained during the Gampola period it would have been inspired by the woman of the Kandyan period. Queens and the elite women wore it as a fashionable dress detail. During the Kandyan period the shawl (Vangeyzel 2008) was decorated with beautiful traditional design motifs with multiple colours. The motifs are a four-petal flower, *lanuwa*, *panawa* and *gal-bindu* (Coomaraswamy 1956). The

queens shown in the Kulugamma temple paintings are clad in full dress with *mante* jacket and *long cloth*. As a fashionable dress detail they wore a quite long shawl thrown over the shoulder. A queen shown in Hindagala temple wore a shawl over the head.

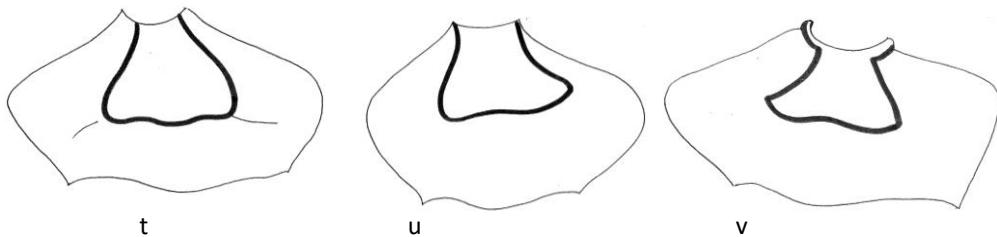
**Evolution of Fold during the Gampola period**

The evolution of the fold in Sri Lankan dress is a unique feature. The arrangements of folds in dancers' dresses are very special. During this period the fold changed to a new form. The arrangement of layering folds was noticeable during the Gampola period. The arranging methodology of layers of folds to the lower dress could be understood by careful observation of these dresses. The lower dress formed more than one piece of cloth to get layers of folds. The dress was fitted to the waist by a belt. The formation of folds seems to have been worn separately. The dancer arranged it according to her sense of dressing. The fold depicted along its pleated texture. The developed form of fold was evident in dresses of *Embekke*. The long layers of folds apparently increase the height of the wearer.

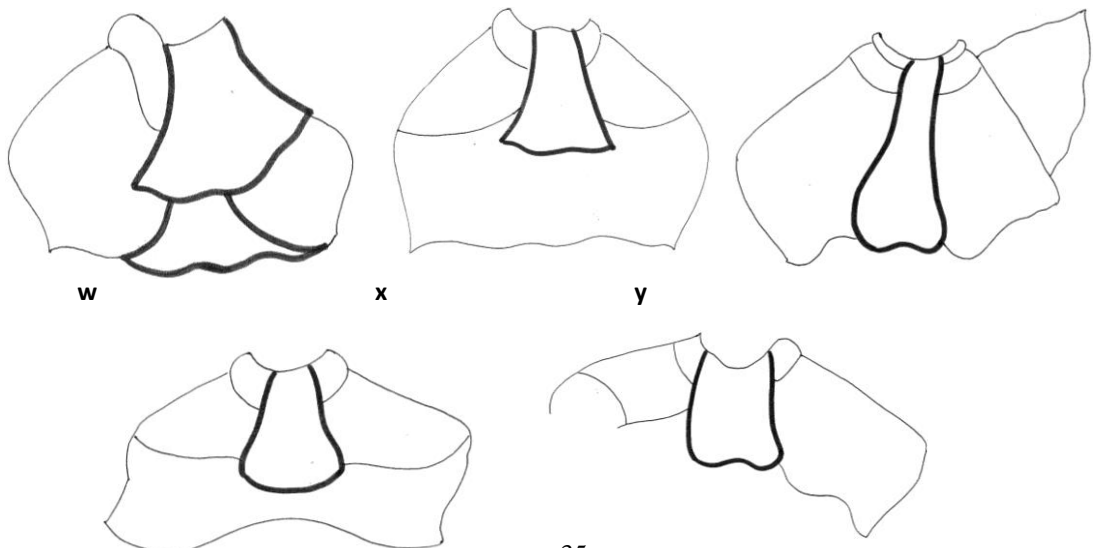
**Figure 8 Basic arrangement of fold in Ganegoga Temple**



**Figure 9 Basic arrangement of fold in Niyamgampaya Temple**



**Figure 10 Basic arrangement of fold in Gadaladeniya**

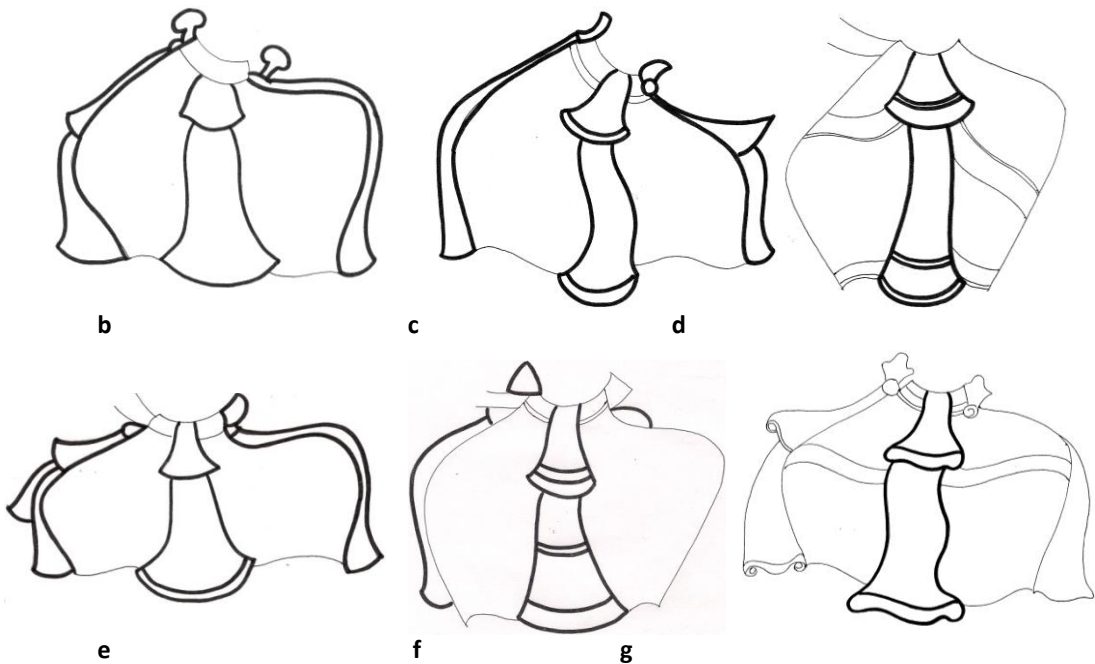




z

a

Figure 11 Development of fold in Embekke Devalaya



The fold in the *Ganegoda* dress was narrower and longer than the lower dress and was very simple. The *Niyamgampaya* dress fold was wider than the *Ganegoda* one; however it was shorter than the lower dress. In both places the formation also seems to be very simple. Most probably it could be done up with the same cloth wrapped around the waist. The fold in the *Gadaladeniya* dress was a developed form. The pictographs show that the fold was formed with the use of a tight waist belt. It would be a cloth belt. Very often the lower dress would be made up with the use of two cloths. The fold would be done up with one of the cloths it used. (Fig 10-w, x, y, z, a) It was also noticed that layers of folds had emerged in the *Gadaladeniya* dresses. The dresses of these three places have not used any folds for their broad hips.

However the *Embekke* dresses show the peak of the evolution of folds. Basically the folds were suggested for both sides of the hip area and below the navel area. The pictographs are evidence that the layering style of folds would have been in vogue. The folds have been set up as a linear ornamental dress detail. It has short and deep folds. Suggestion of fold can be identified as a premised repetitive structure. Central folds are intended to increase the height of the dancer. Exquisite pleats are aligned in folds. These textures generate a sense of continuity. The scale of fold gave the illusion of stretchability of the fabric they wore. Despite its look of rigidity, this has many parts, a stylized border, decorative knot and cadence folds. Timeless and stylistic in its appeal the fold was a visual culture in rhythmic dresses of the Gampola period.

### Summary

Politics influence the evolution of dress. It affects dresses of royalty and the elites. During the Gampola era, South Indian dominance affected directly the administrative politics of the state. Due to this influence, the state religion Buddhism and thinking patterns of the people were also affected. Therefore people tended to adapt to other cultural features. This phenomenon is common for the arts which are linked with religion. As an example, the dance which was connected with religion had an impact on the dresses. Due to this reason, new dress details emerged. Also, sometime the dress details which had already been there disappeared. When examining the dancing dresses of the Gampola period it is apparent that the dresses have evolved step by step within the period in different places as *Ganegoda*, *Niyamgampaya*, *Gadaladeniya* and *Embekke*. It is understood that the evolution took place successfully in dance dresses with the merging of the traditions of the period. It is also noticed that the evolution which took place during the Gampola era was subtle.

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