

# Historical Influences on Kandyan Dance in Sri Lanka: Comparative Analysis of Indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist Elements

H. Tharanga Sampath Disanayaka

*University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka*  
*tharangadissanayake86@gmail.com*

## **Abstract**

*This abstract presents a research study on the historical influences that have shaped Kandyan dance, a significant traditional dance form in Sri Lanka. This research aims to explore how these historical influences have contributed to the evolution of Kandyan dance, with a specific focus on the indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements. Employing a diverse methodology involving the analysis of primary sources, anthropological studies, and expert interviews, the research delves into the origins and early development of Kandyan dance, compares it with Hindu dance forms, and investigates the incorporation of Buddhist symbolism and narratives. By uncovering the intricate interplay between cultural and religious influences, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how Kandyan dance has evolved, showcasing its unique amalgamation of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements. The findings highlight the significance of these influences and underscore the cultural and religious diversity of Sri Lanka, illustrating their profound impact on the development of traditional dance forms. Through the preservation and appreciation of Kandyan dance as a valuable cultural heritage, this research contributes to fostering a deeper understanding of the historical roots and cultural richness of Sri Lanka. This research presents a valuable contribution to the field of dance research and cultural preservation.*

**Keywords:** *Historical influences, Indigenous element, Hindu influence, Buddhist element, Cultural heritage*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Background and significance of Kandyan dance**

Kandyan dance holds a prominent position as one of the major traditional dance forms in Sri Lanka. Rooted in the rich cultural heritage of the Kandyan kingdom, this dance style encompasses a captivating blend of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist influences. The origins of Kandyan dance can be traced back to ancient times when it served as a form of artistic expression, religious ritual, and entertainment.

Kandyan dance is characterized by its vibrant costumes, intricate footwork, rhythmic drumming, and graceful movements. It has evolved over centuries, absorbing influences from various cultures and religions that have shaped the socio-cultural landscape of Sri Lanka. The dance form reflects the diverse history and multi-ethnic nature of the island nation.

The significance of Kandyan dance lies in its role as a repository of Sri Lankan culture, preserving traditions, and promoting cultural identity. It serves as a powerful medium for

---

#### **Article History:**

Received (July 4, 2023), Review Result (August 10, 2023), Accepted (September 19, 2023)

storytelling, transmitting myths, legends, and historical narratives through its intricate choreography. Kandyan dance also serves as a bridge between different communities, fostering cultural understanding and appreciation.

Moreover, Kandyan dance plays a crucial role in religious ceremonies and festivals, particularly those associated with Buddhism. It serves as a means of spiritual expression, allowing dancers to embody religious teachings and pay homage to deities and sacred symbols. The dance form embodies the spiritual essence of Sri Lanka, reflecting the deep-rooted connection between dance, religion, and cultural practices.

Understanding the historical influences that have shaped Kandyan dance is essential for appreciating its cultural significance and preserving its heritage. This comparative analysis of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements aims to shed light on the intricate interplay of these influences, unveiling the evolution and transformation of Kandyan dance over time.

By delving into the historical and cultural dimensions of Kandyan dance, this research contributes to the broader field of dance studies, cultural anthropology, and Sri Lankan heritage preservation. It enhances our understanding of the complex dynamics between indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist influences, highlighting the diverse tapestry of Sri Lankan cultural traditions.

## **1.2. Overview of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements**

Kandyan dance, as a traditional dance form of Sri Lanka, encompasses a rich tapestry of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements. These elements have played a significant role in shaping the aesthetics, movements, and cultural significance of Kandyan dance. This section provides an overview of these elements:

**Indigenous Elements:** The indigenous elements in Kandyan dance reflect the deep-rooted cultural traditions of Sri Lanka. These include unique dance movements, costumes, and musical accompaniments that are distinct to the local communities. Indigenous rituals, folk dances, and storytelling traditions have influenced the symbolism and narrative themes depicted in Kandyan dance performances.

**Hindu Elements:** Hinduism, with its diverse deities, myths, and dance forms, has exerted a profound influence on Kandyan dance. Elements such as rhythmic footwork, hand gestures (mudras), and facial expressions have been borrowed from classical Hindu dance styles like Bharatanatyam and Odissi. Hindu epics, such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have also provided inspiration for storytelling and choreography in Kandyan dance.

**Buddhist Elements:** Buddhism, being the predominant religion in Sri Lanka, has significantly shaped the philosophy and symbolism of Kandyan dance. Buddhist narratives, teachings, and iconography find expression in the movements, postures, and gestures of Kandyan dance. The incorporation of Buddhist symbols, such as the lotus flower and the Bodhi tree, and the depiction of Jataka tales and the life of the Buddha, contribute to the spiritual and moral dimensions of Kandyan dance.

The interplay of these indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements creates a unique blend within the realm of Kandyan dance. These elements not only contribute to the aesthetic beauty and artistic expressions of the dance form but also reflect the cultural diversity and religious harmony of Sri Lanka.

By exploring these indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements, this research aims to unravel the intricate connections and influences that have shaped the evolution of Kandyan dance. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the cultural heritage and significance of this dance form within the broader socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka.

### **1.3. Research objectives**

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyze the historical influences on Kandyan dance, with a specific focus on the indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements that have contributed to its evolution. By delving into these influences, the research aims to shed light on the cultural and religious diversity of Sri Lanka and highlight the interplay between different traditions in the development of Kandyan dance. The research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these historical influences have shaped the form, content, and aesthetics of Kandyan dance over time.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Overview of existing research on Kandyan dance**

Previous research on Kandyan dance has provided valuable insights into its history, significance, and cultural context. Scholars and experts have documented various aspects of Kandyan dance, including its origins, development, stylistic features, and performance traditions. These studies have contributed to a foundation of knowledge and understanding of Kandyan dance, forming the basis for further exploration of its historical influences.

### **2.2. Historical records and cultural artifacts**

Historical records and cultural artifacts play a crucial role in uncovering the historical influences on Kandyan dance. These include ancient texts, inscriptions, manuscripts, and visual representations such as paintings and sculptures. By examining these primary sources, researchers have been able to trace the origins and early development of Kandyan dance and identify the cultural and religious elements that have influenced its evolution. We used Mahawansaya, Thupawansay, Pujaawaliya, Dalada Siritha, and Rajawaliya as historical books.

### **2.3. Studies on indigenous dance forms and rituals**

Indigenous dance forms and rituals of the Kandy region provide important insights into the indigenous elements of Kandyan dance. Ethnographic studies and anthropological research have documented the diverse dance traditions and rituals practiced by the local communities, exploring their significance, symbolism, and connection to Kandyan dance. These studies help to understand the indigenous roots of Kandyan dance and its integration of local cultural practices.

### **2.4. Comparison of Kandyan dance with Hindu dance forms**

Comparative analysis of Hindu dance forms, such as Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, has been instrumental in identifying the Hindu influences on Kandyan dance. Scholars have examined the stylistic similarities and differences between these dance forms, exploring the influence of Hindu aesthetics, movements, and storytelling techniques on Kandyan dance. These comparative studies contribute to a broader understanding of the cultural exchanges and artistic borrowings that have shaped Kandyan dance.

## **2.5. Buddhist influences on Kandyan dance**

Buddhism, as a dominant religion in Sri Lanka, has deeply influenced the symbolism, philosophy, and rituals of Kandyan dance. Scholars have explored Buddhist scriptures, iconography, and religious practices to analyze the incorporation of Buddhist elements into Kandyan dance. These studies have revealed the spiritual dimensions of the dance form and the portrayal of Buddhist narratives through movements and gestures.

The literature review demonstrates the existing body of research on Kandyan dance, highlighting the significance of historical records, indigenous traditions, comparative analysis, and Buddhist influences. By building upon these previous studies, the current research aims to deepen our understanding of the historical influences on Kandyan dance, particularly about indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements.

## **3. Methodology**

The research design encompasses the examination of primary sources, anthropological studies, and expert interviews. Primary sources such as historical documents, manuscripts, and archival materials are analyzed to uncover insights into the origins and early development of Kandyan dance. Anthropological studies involve fieldwork and ethnographic research, allowing for firsthand observations and documentation of Kandyan dance performances, rituals, and associated cultural practices. Expert interviews are conducted with scholars, practitioners, and custodians of Kandyan dance to gain in-depth knowledge and perspectives on the historical influences and the integration of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements. The data collected through these methods are subjected to qualitative analysis, involving the systematic examination and interpretation of the gathered information. The analysis aims to identify patterns, themes, and key findings related to the historical influences on Kandyan dance, as well as the cultural and religious factors that have shaped its evolution. By employing this methodology, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical influences and the intricate dynamics between indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements in Kandyan dance.

## **4. Origins and early development of Kandyan dance**

### **4.1. Indigenous dance forms and rituals as precursors**

Kandyan dance, a significant traditional dance form in Sri Lanka, has its roots in indigenous dance forms and rituals that date back centuries. These indigenous practices played a crucial role in shaping the early development of Kandyan dance.

The indigenous people of Sri Lanka, known as the Vedda community, have a rich cultural heritage that includes unique dance traditions. These dances were performed as part of their rituals and ceremonies, serving as a means of expressing their spiritual beliefs and connecting with the natural world. The rhythmic movements, vibrant costumes, and symbolic gestures of these indigenous dances laid the foundation for what would later evolve into Kandyan dance.

Over time, as different communities and cultures interacted with the indigenous population, various external influences began to shape the development of Kandyan dance. These influences came from the influx of Indian immigrants, particularly from South India, bringing with them their dance forms and traditions.

The interaction between the indigenous dance forms and the influx of Indian cultural practices resulted in a fusion of styles and techniques. The indigenous dance elements merged

with the stylistic features of South Indian dance forms such as Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, creating a unique blend that is characteristic of Kandyan dance.

Additionally, the influence of Buddhism played a significant role in the early development of Kandyan dance. As Buddhism became the predominant religion in Sri Lanka, its principles and teachings were integrated into various aspects of the society, including the arts. Buddhist symbolism, narratives, and philosophical concepts found their way into Kandyan dance, adding another layer of depth and meaning to the dance form.

The early development of Kandyan dance was a gradual process, with indigenous dance forms, South Indian influences, and Buddhist elements intertwining to create a distinctive dance style that is recognized and celebrated today.

Studying the origins and early development of Kandyan dance not only provides insights into its cultural heritage but also sheds light on the broader history and cultural interactions of Sri Lanka. It showcases the dynamic nature of artistic traditions, the cross-pollination of cultural practices, and the enduring spirit of creativity that has shaped the evolution of Kandyan dance over time.

#### **4.2. Cultural and historical context of Kandyan dance's emergence**

The emergence of Kandyan dance is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of Sri Lanka. Understanding this context is crucial to comprehending the development and significance of this traditional dance form.

During the 16th century, Sri Lanka was under colonial rule, first by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch. However, it was during the Kandyan Kingdom (1592-1815) that Kandyan dance flourished and reached its zenith. The Kandyan Kingdom, located in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, became a hub of cultural and artistic expression.

The Kandyan Kingdom's patronage of the arts provided a fertile ground for the development of Kandyan dance. The royal court became a center of artistic innovation and refinement, attracting talented dancers, musicians, and choreographers. The kings and nobility played an essential role in the promotion and preservation of Kandyan dance, elevating its status and encouraging its practice.

The emergence of Kandyan dance was also influenced by the socio-cultural fabric of Sri Lanka. The caste system, prevalent at the time, played a significant role in shaping the dance form. Different castes had their distinct roles and responsibilities in the performance of the Kandyan dance. The Radalas (nobles) were the custodians of Kandyan dance, while the Navandanna (lower castes) provided the musicians and drummers who accompanied the dancers.

Furthermore, Kandyan dance was closely intertwined with religious rituals and ceremonies. It was performed in sacred spaces, such as temples and shrines, as offerings to the deities. The dancers, known as Nilames, held a sacred and revered position in the community, and their performances were seen as acts of devotion and spiritual expression.

The cultural and historical context of Sri Lanka also influenced the themes and narratives depicted in Kandyan dance. It incorporated stories from ancient epics like the Ramayana and the Jataka tales, as well as historical events and folk traditions. These narratives were brought to life through the expressive movements, intricate gestures, and elaborate costumes of Kandyan dance.

Accordingly, the emergence of Kandyan dance was shaped by the cultural and historical context of Sri Lanka, particularly during the era of the Kandyan Kingdom. The royal patronage, caste system, religious rituals, and cultural expressions of the time all contributed

to the development and preservation of this unique dance form. Understanding the cultural and historical context adds depth and meaning to the study of Kandyan dance, allowing us to appreciate its artistic richness and significance in Sri Lankan culture.

## **5. Comparative analysis: Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms**

### **5.1. Similarities and shared elements**

Kandyan dance, a traditional dance form of Sri Lanka, shares several similarities and elements with Hindu dance forms, particularly those from South India. The comparative analysis between Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms reveals the interconnectedness and commonalities that exist between these dance traditions.

One of the prominent shared elements between Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms is the emphasis on intricate footwork and rhythmic movements. Both dance forms exhibit a high level of technicality, precision, and synchronization in their footwork patterns. The dancers of both traditions showcase their virtuosity by executing complex and rhythmic footwork sequences that are integral to the performances.

Another shared element is the use of symbolic hand gestures, known as mudras, to convey meaning and emotions. Kandyan dance, like many Hindu dance forms, incorporates a wide range of mudras that have specific meanings and represent various aspects of the narrative or the character being portrayed. These mudras enhance the storytelling aspect of the dance and allow for nuanced expressions.

Costuming is also an important shared element between Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms. Elaborate and vibrant costumes play a significant role in both traditions, reflecting the cultural aesthetics and traditions. Intricately designed traditional attire, adorned with jewelry and accessories, adds visual splendor to the performances and creates a captivating visual spectacle.

Furthermore, both Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms often draw inspiration from mythological and religious narratives. The stories from epics and religious texts serve as a foundation for the choreography and thematic content of the dances. The portrayal of gods, goddesses, and mythological characters is a common theme in both Kandyan and Hindu dances, infusing the performances with a sense of spirituality and reverence.

Despite these shared elements, Kandyan dance also possesses distinct characteristics and styles that set it apart from Hindu dance forms. The incorporation of indigenous elements, such as indigenous rhythms and movements, gives Kandyan dance its unique identity and flavor. The fusion of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist influences in Kandyan dance creates a synthesis of diverse cultural expressions.

The comparative analysis of Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms sheds light on the interconnectedness and cultural exchanges that have shaped these traditions. It highlights the universal aspects of dance as a form of artistic expression and the ability of dance to transcend boundaries and foster cultural understanding. The exploration of similarities and shared elements between Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms contributes to a broader appreciation of the richness and diversity of dance traditions in South Asia.

### **5.2. Influence of Hindu dance on Kandyan dance**

The influence of Hindu dance on Kandyan dance is significant and can be observed in various aspects of its form and structure. The historical and cultural interactions between Sri

Lanka and South India, particularly the Tamil region, have contributed to the assimilation of Hindu dance elements into Kandyan dance.

One of the primary influences of Hindu dance on Kandyan dance is the incorporation of specific dance techniques and movements. Kandyan dance exhibits similarities with classical South Indian dance forms, such as Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi. These shared movements include graceful hand gestures, rhythmic footwork, intricate body postures, and fluid body movements. The adoption of these dance techniques from Hindu dance forms has enriched the vocabulary of Kandyan dance and added a layer of sophistication to its execution.

Furthermore, Hindu dance forms have influenced the choreographic structure of Kandyan dance. Similar to Hindu dance, Kandyan dance follows a structured format, comprising distinct sections such as nirtha (pure dance), nritya (expressive dance), and natya (dramatic dance). These sections allow for a seamless integration of rhythmic movements, storytelling, and emotional expressions, creating a holistic performance experience. The influence of Hindu dance forms in shaping this choreographic structure is evident in the coherence and narrative flow of Kandyan dance performances.

The musical aspect of Kandyan dance also reflects the influence of Hindu dance. Traditional Hindu music, with its melodic scales and rhythmic patterns, has had an impact on the musical compositions and accompaniment of Kandyan dance. Instruments such as the mridangam, veena, and flute, commonly used in Hindu music, have found their way into the orchestration of Kandyan dance performances, enhancing the auditory experience and evoking a sense of cultural fusion.

It is important to note that while Hindu dance has influenced Kandyan dance, Kandyan dance has also retained its distinctiveness and incorporated indigenous elements. The incorporation of indigenous rhythms, costumes, and symbolic gestures adds a unique flavor to Kandyan dance, setting it apart from its Hindu counterparts.

The influence of Hindu dance on Kandyan dance showcases the dynamic nature of cultural exchange and the ability of dance forms to evolve and adapt over time. The assimilation of Hindu dance elements has enriched the repertoire and artistic expression of Kandyan dance, contributing to its aesthetic appeal and cultural significance.

Overall, the influence of Hindu dance on Kandyan dance highlights the interconnectedness and cross-cultural fertilization that characterizes the development of dance traditions. It exemplifies the ability of dance to transcend boundaries and create a shared cultural heritage that celebrates diversity and artistic exchange.

### **5.3. Cross-cultural exchanges and impact on choreography**

Cross-cultural exchanges have played a pivotal role in shaping the choreography of Kandyan dance. The interactions between different cultural and artistic traditions, particularly with Hindu dance forms, have influenced the movement vocabulary, thematic content, and choreographic innovations of Kandyan dance.

One of the significant impacts of cross-cultural exchanges is the enrichment of movement vocabulary in Kandyan dance. The exchanges between Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms have resulted in the assimilation of new dance techniques, postures, and gestures. The intricate hand gestures, known as hasta mudras, in Kandyan dance exhibit similarities with those found in Hindu dance, illustrating the cross-pollination of movement vocabulary. These exchanges have broadened the range of movement possibilities and added intricacy and expressiveness to Kandyan dance choreography.

Moreover, cross-cultural exchanges have influenced the thematic content and storytelling aspects of Kandyan dance. The encounters with Hindu dance forms have exposed Kandyan dancers to different mythological and narrative traditions. As a result, Kandyan dance has incorporated stories and characters from Hindu epics, such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, expanding the repertoire of narratives and enhancing the richness of performances. This cross-cultural exchange of stories and themes has broadened the thematic scope of Kandyan dance, creating a dynamic fusion of cultural narratives.

In terms of choreographic innovations, cross-cultural exchanges have sparked creativity and experimentation in Kandyan dance. The encounters with diverse dance traditions have inspired choreographers to explore new movement combinations, spatial arrangements, and staging techniques. The cross-pollination of ideas has led to the development of innovative choreographic structures and sequences in Kandyan dance, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression and aesthetic possibilities.

The impact of cross-cultural exchanges on Kandyan dance choreography demonstrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of dance forms. It reflects the dynamic nature of artistic evolution and the ability of dancers and choreographers to draw inspiration from diverse cultural sources. The cross-cultural influences have contributed to the evolution and growth of Kandyan dance as a vibrant and ever-evolving dance form.

However, it is essential to recognize that while cross-cultural exchanges have influenced Kandyan dance, the dance form has also retained its distinct identity and indigenous elements. The incorporation of Hindu dance influences into Kandyan dance has been a process of adaptation and transformation, resulting in a unique synthesis that reflects the cultural heritage of Sri Lanka.

Accordingly, cross-cultural exchanges have had a profound impact on the choreography of Kandyan dance. The assimilation of movement vocabulary, thematic content, and choreographic innovations from Hindu dance forms has enriched and expanded the artistic repertoire of Kandyan dance. The cross-cultural influences in choreography highlight the fluidity and adaptability of dance as an art form and demonstrate the power of cultural exchange in shaping artistic traditions.

## **6. Buddhist elements in Kandyan dance**

### **6.1. Buddhist symbolism and narratives**

Buddhist elements hold a significant place within the fabric of Kandyan dance, contributing to its spiritual and cultural essence. The infusion of Buddhist symbolism and narratives adds depth and meaning to the performances, creating a unique blend of religious and artistic expression.

In Kandyan dance, Buddhist symbolism is intricately woven into the movements, gestures, and overall choreography. Various hand gestures, known as mudras, are employed to depict Buddhist concepts and teachings. Mudras symbolize attributes such as compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment, enabling the dancers to embody and convey profound philosophical ideas through their movements. The precise execution of these mudras enhances the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of the dance, captivating the audience with their symbolic significance.

The use of sacred objects and props associated with Buddhism is another prominent aspect of Kandyan dance. Items such as the Buddhist flag, incense, and symbolic artifacts are incorporated into the performances, adding visual elements that evoke a sense of reverence



and spirituality. These props serve as reminders of the connection between Kandyan dance and Buddhist rituals, creating a bridge between the dance form and its religious roots.

Buddhist elements in Kandyan dance not only enrich the aesthetic experience but also contribute to the preservation and promotion of Buddhist traditions and values. The incorporation of Buddhist symbolism and narratives in the performances helps in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Buddhism among the audience. It serves as a vehicle for cultural transmission and the perpetuation of religious and moral teachings.

It is important to note that while Buddhist elements play a significant role in Kandyan dance, the dance form also encompasses diverse influences, including indigenous and Hindu elements. The incorporation of Buddhist elements within the broader context of Kandyan dance reflects the religious and cultural syncretism that characterizes Sri Lanka's history and traditions.

In conclusion, Buddhist symbolism and narratives form an integral part of Kandyan dance, contributing to its spiritual significance and cultural heritage. The incorporation of Buddhist elements in the choreography and performances enriches the artistic expression, deepens the connection with religious traditions, and fosters a sense of cultural identity. The interweaving of Buddhist elements with other cultural influences within Kandyan dance highlights the diverse and dynamic nature of Sri Lankan cultural traditions.

## **6.2. Incorporation of Buddhist philosophy and rituals**

Kandyan dance, as a traditional dance form of Sri Lanka, embraces Buddhist philosophy and rituals, infusing them into its essence and performance practices. The incorporation of Buddhist philosophy and rituals adds a spiritual dimension to the dance, shaping its symbolism, movements, and overall artistic expression.

In Kandyan dance, the principles and values of Buddhism are interwoven into the choreography and performance elements. Buddhist philosophy, with its emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and moral conduct, serves as a guiding framework for the dancers. The movements and gestures in Kandyan dance are executed with grace, precision, and a sense of mindful awareness, reflecting the ideals of Buddhist practice.

Ritualistic elements derived from Buddhist traditions are also integrated into Kandyan dance. The performances often begin with an invocation or offering, where dancers pay homage to the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and seek blessings for a successful performance. This ritualistic opening creates a sacred space and sets the tone for the spiritual journey that unfolds throughout the dance.

Furthermore, Kandyan dance incorporates rituals associated with Buddhist festivals and ceremonies. For example, during the Esala Perahera, a grand procession held annually in Kandy to honor the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha, Kandyan dancers play a prominent role. They perform intricate movements and symbolic gestures, accompanied by traditional music, as they parade through the streets. This integration of dance into Buddhist rituals highlights the deep connection between Kandyan dance and religious celebrations, further emphasizing the cultural significance of the dance form.

It is important to acknowledge that while Kandyan dance draws inspiration from Buddhist philosophy and rituals, it also encompasses other cultural influences, such as indigenous and Hindu elements. The incorporation of Buddhist philosophy and rituals within the broader context of Kandyan dance reflects the cultural diversity and religious harmony prevalent in Sri Lanka.

Accordingly, the incorporation of Buddhist philosophy and rituals in Kandyan dance adds a spiritual and cultural depth to the dance form. The integration of Buddhist principles and practices guides the movements and gestures of the dancers, creating a dance experience that resonates with the values of compassion, mindfulness, and moral conduct. The inclusion of Buddhist rituals further strengthens the connection between Kandyan dance and religious traditions, contributing to the preservation and promotion of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage.

### **6.3. Role of religious ceremonies and festivals**

Religious ceremonies and festivals play a significant role in the expression and preservation of Buddhist elements within Kandyan dance. These ceremonies and festivals provide a platform for the performance of Kandyan dance and serve as a cultural backdrop for showcasing the rich tapestry of Buddhist traditions.

Kandyan dance is intricately linked to religious ceremonies and festivals in Sri Lanka, particularly those rooted in Buddhism. It is during these occasions that the dance form takes center stage, captivating audiences with its vibrant movements and symbolic gestures. The dance becomes a visual representation of devotion and reverence towards the Buddhist faith.

One of the most prominent religious ceremonies that prominently features Kandyan dance is the Esala Perahera. This annual festival, held in Kandy, celebrates the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha. Kandyan dancers, adorned in elaborate costumes and jewelry, perform captivating routines during the grand procession. The rhythmic beats of traditional drums and the melodic tunes of accompanying instruments create an atmosphere of spiritual fervor. The dance performances during the Esala Perahera are a testament to the fusion of Buddhism and Kandyan dance, showcasing the importance of religious ceremonies in promoting and preserving the dance form.

Other Buddhist festivals and ceremonies, such as Vesak and Poson, also provide opportunities for Kandyan dancers to showcase their skills and pay homage to the Buddha. These festivals serve as a backdrop for cultural displays, where Kandyan dance takes center stage alongside other traditional art forms. The dancers, through their graceful movements and symbolic gestures, depict Buddhist narratives and teachings, contributing to the religious and cultural significance of the festivals.

Religious ceremonies and festivals not only provide a platform for the performance of Kandyan dance but also serve as a means of cultural transmission and preservation. They offer an opportunity for the younger generation to learn and engage with the dance form, ensuring its continuity and relevance in contemporary times. The involvement of Kandyan dance in religious ceremonies and festivals strengthens the cultural fabric of Sri Lanka and reinforces the connection between Buddhism and the performing arts.

Accordingly, religious ceremonies and festivals play a vital role in the integration of Buddhist elements within Kandyan dance. These occasions provide a cultural backdrop for the performance of the dance form, allowing it to flourish and thrive. By participating in religious ceremonies and festivals, Kandyan dance becomes an integral part of the cultural and spiritual fabric of Sri Lanka, contributing to the preservation and promotion of Buddhist traditions and values.

## **7. Findings and analysis**

Type In conclusion, our investigation into the historical influences on Kandyan dance has unveiled a captivating tapestry of cultural elements that have shaped this unique art form. The

study has underscored the intricate interplay between indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions in Kandyan dance, showcasing how each has contributed to its movements, symbolism, and evolution. Moreover, our findings emphasize the resilience of Kandyan dance, as it has adapted and transformed over time while retaining its distinct identity. These discoveries underscore Kandyan dance's rich cultural heritage and its significance as a fusion of diverse influences. As we move forward into the discussion section, we will delve deeper into the implications of these findings for the preservation and appreciation of Kandyan dance, as well as their broader implications for understanding the cultural and religious diversity of the region.

## **8. Discussion**

Building upon the discussion of our research findings, we can derive valuable recommendations for practical implementation and further research in the context of Kandyan dance and beyond:

### **Cultural Education and Training Programs:**

It is imperative to establish and support educational programs that focus on Kandyan dance. These programs should target both aspiring dancers and the broader public to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of this art form. Encouraging educational institutions to incorporate Kandyan dance into their curricula can help preserve and propagate this traditional dance form.

### **Cultural Exchanges and Collaborations:**

Facilitating cultural exchanges and collaborations with international dance communities can promote a deeper appreciation of Kandyan dance on a global scale. These interactions can lead to cross-cultural pollination, enriching Kandyan dance while fostering greater cultural understanding.

### **Preservation of Traditional Dance Costumes and Instruments:**

Efforts should be made to preserve and document the traditional costumes, musical instruments, and other paraphernalia associated with Kandyan dance. Museums and cultural institutions can play a vital role in safeguarding these artifacts, ensuring their availability for future generations.

### **Support for Traditional Dance Troupes:**

Financial and logistical support should be extended to Kandyan dance troupes and artists. This can include funding for performances, access to practice spaces, and opportunities to showcase their talent both nationally and internationally.

### **Research and Documentation:**

Further research should be encouraged to delve deeper into specific aspects of Kandyan dance, such as its regional variations, historical evolution, and the influence of individual choreographers and artists. This research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the art form.

### **Cultural Policy Formulation:**

Governments and cultural authorities should consider formulating policies and initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting traditional dance forms like Kandyan dance. These policies can include incentives for practitioners, support for cultural festivals, and the integration of traditional dance into national cultural celebrations.

#### **Interdisciplinary Studies:**

Encouraging interdisciplinary studies that explore the connections between dance, music, history, and anthropology can provide a holistic perspective on Kandyan dance. Such studies can shed light on the broader cultural context in which this art form thrives.

#### **International Collaboration:**

Collaboration with international scholars and institutions in the field of dance anthropology, cultural preservation, and heritage management can offer fresh insights and best practices for preserving traditional dance forms.

In essence, our discussion underscores the need for concrete actions to preserve, promote, and celebrate Kandyan dance as a valuable cultural heritage. These recommendations can serve as a roadmap for practitioners, cultural enthusiasts, policymakers, and researchers to ensure the continued vitality of this art form and, by extension, contribute to the broader discourse on cultural preservation and heritage management.

## **9. Conclusion**

### **9.1. Summary of key findings**

In conclusion, this research on the historical influences on Kandyan dance has uncovered significant findings. The examination of indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements in Kandyan dance has revealed a complex interplay of cultural and religious influences. The research has traced the origins and early development of Kandyan dance, highlighting the influences from indigenous dance forms, the impact of Hindu dance traditions, and the incorporation of Buddhist symbolism and narratives. The comparative analysis has shown the shared elements and cross-cultural exchanges between Kandyan dance and Hindu dance forms. The findings underscore the evolution and transformation of Kandyan dance over time, showcasing its unique amalgamation of diverse influences.

### **9.2. Implications of the research**

The implications of this research are manifold. Firstly, it contributes to the preservation and appreciation of Kandyan dance as a valuable cultural heritage of Sri Lanka. By understanding the historical influences on the dance form, efforts can be made to safeguard its traditions, promote its practice, and raise awareness about its significance. Additionally, the research highlights the cultural and religious diversity of Sri Lanka, emphasizing the importance of intercultural dialogue and understanding. It promotes the recognition and celebration of the country's rich artistic traditions and fosters a sense of cultural pride and identity.

### **9.3. Closing remarks on the significance of Kandyan dance as a cultural treasure**

In conclusion, Kandyan dance is more than just a dance form; it is a cultural treasure that encapsulates the essence of Sri Lankan heritage. Its historical influences from indigenous, Hindu, and Buddhist elements have shaped its distinct character and contributed to its enduring legacy. By appreciating and preserving Kandyan dance, we not only honor the artistic achievements of our ancestors but also pass on a valuable legacy to future generations. Kandyan dance serves as a bridge between the past and the present, connecting us to our cultural roots and providing a source of inspiration and pride.

As we move forward, it is crucial to continue supporting research, education, and initiatives that promote the preservation and appreciation of Kandyan dance. By doing so, we ensure the longevity of this cultural treasure and contribute to the broader understanding and celebration of diverse dance traditions worldwide. Let us cherish and nurture Kandyan dance as a testament to the beauty, resilience, and cultural richness of Sri Lanka.

## References

- [1] D. Amarasekara, Samakaleena Sri Lanka Samajaya Samaja Widyatmaka Vighrayak, Warakapola: Ariya Publication, (2012)
- [2] K. Bandara, Udarata Bera Wadana Kalawa, Colombo: S Godage & Brothers, (2000)
- [3] A. Dayarathna, Narthana Kala Adyana Praweshaya, Colombo: S Godage, (2008)
- [4] M. Disanayaka, Kohomba Yak Kankariya Ha Samajaya. Colombo: S Godage
- [5] M. Disanayaka, Sinhala Narthana Kalawa. Colombo: S.Godage, (1993)
- [6] T. Kariyawasam, Srilankeey Narthanaye Wikashanaya. Colombo: S.Godage, (2013)
- [7] W. Rajapaksha, Baudha Puda puja Saha Bheree Wadana Kalawa. Colombo: S.Godage, (2002)
- [8] W. Rajpaksha, Udarata Thurya Wadana Puranaya, Colombo: S Godage & Brothers, (2002)
- [9] J. Sedaraman, Udarata Natum Kalawa, Colombo: M.D Gunasena & Co, (1999)
- [10] J. Sedaraman, Nruthya Chinthamania Colombo: Associated Newspapers of Celone Limited

## Author



**H. Tharanga Sampath Disanayaka**

***This page is empty by intention.***