Handwoven Heritage: Future Foundation

Posted on
Chandramani Thenuwara

Chandramani Thenuwara, a specialist in textile design, through her in-depth knowledge on the art and craft of weaving, presents an invaluable book that delves into a single artefact from a collection at the National Museum. It primarily serves to unravel a complex technique steeped in tradition so that it may inspire designers to be influenced by a rich heritage while innovating for the 21st Century.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara

'Handwoven Heritage – Future Foundation' is an in-depth analysis of a single garment—the *Diyakacci*—which features in a collection at the Colombo Museum that reveals the Dumbara tradition of weaving. The *Diyakacci* is a one-piece bathing attire or undergarment and the museum artefact has been well-preserved from the Kandyan period. Artist and textile technologist, Chandramani Thenuwara draws from her experience with the skilled weavers of Talagune, a little hamlet in

Dumbara, who are adept at this particularly tedious method of weaving fabric. The book documents Chandramani's graph paper analysis of the item, recorded thread by thread, section by section as well as the reproduced results created by the weavers of Thalagune. Not stopping there, she interpreted designs from the original, which could be produced on the normal loom or shaft loom and jacquard loom. Students and designers of the textile industry can be privy to the detailed information in the publication, elucidated in both Sinhala and English. However, Chandramani hopes that designers will utilise the analysis not simply to reproduce but instead to derive new designs that would ultimately translate heritage in to a modern context.

In a brief summary to the book renowned archaeologist Prof Senaka Bandaranayake states, "her detailed reconstruction of the formation of the weave and its elaborate design gives us a rare insight into the highly complex intellectual structure behind the work of a master craftsman or craftswoman."

It was Prof Bandaranayake who first posed the idea of producing a book of this nature seeing that Medieval Sinhalese Art by Ananda Coomaraswamy remains the only text that makes reference to the subject. Chandramani eventually committed to the task focusing on this singular item as an initial step in the hope that it would serve as a starting point for others to carry on.

She succinctly makes clear her intentions in the introduction of the book, "design analysis of National Museum Item 07-97-217 was undertaken as a minute personal contribution, in the hope that this work would prove to be a catalyst toward in-depth study of our textile heritage without which authentic inspiration is not possible."

The publication is available at a price of 600 rupees at the Colombo National Museum Book Shop.