

# A Socio-Historical Analysis of Indigenous Knowledge Systems Reflected in Traditional Pan-Craft Industry in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka: A Qualitative Case Study

**Prof. MKL. Irangani, Dr. MA. Prasad Kumara, Mr. BMC. Madhusankha Bandara, Ms. MAL. Madhushika**

Professor in History, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Senior Lecturer in History, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Assistant Lecturer in History, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Research Assistant, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale Sri Lanka.

[iranganimkl@yahoo.com](mailto:iranganimkl@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract:** Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are an important heritage that represents the long-standing experiences, traditional techniques and cultural values of human society of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan rural communities have developed traditional production methods using natural resources to meet basic needs. The traditional pan craft industry reflects this indigenous knowledge and has a long history among rural communities in Sri Lanka's North Central Province (NCP). The main objective of this research is to analyze the indigenous knowledge systems embedded in the traditional pan craft industry of Kunuragama village in the North Central Province from a social and historical perspective. This study employed a qualitative research approach. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation involving artisans, elderly community members, and knowledge holders in the pan craft industry in Kunuragama village. Secondary data were gathered from literary sources, research books, and reports. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the research revealed that the pan craft industry is not only a simple economic activity, but also a complex local knowledge system linked to a good understanding of the environment, natural resource management, production skills and social relations. It was also revealed that there is knowledge based on experiences transmitted over many generations in the process of selecting, preparing, coloring and creating products. Accordingly, this research shows that the Kunuragama pan craft industry is a unique heritage linked to local cultural identity, rural lifestyle and environmental adaptation. Accordingly, it is confirmed that the traditional pan craft industry is an important field that reflects the indigenous knowledge systems, social history and cultural heritage of Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Pan Industry, Traditional Techniques.

## 1. Introduction

Culture is a fundamental aspect of human society, shaping the identity, values, traditions, and ways of life of communities. Over generations, societies have developed diverse forms of cultural heritage through their interactions with the environment, social relationships, and everyday practices. These forms of heritage include both tangible and intangible elements that reflect the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and experiences passed from one generation to another. Accordingly, culture encompasses various aspects of human life, including ways of living, social organization, economic activities, religious beliefs, customs and rituals, language, art, craftsmanship, and environmental adaptations, all of which function as an interconnected system. As Wimalawansa (1964) points out, culture may be regarded as the totality of spiritual and external aspects of life that human beings inherit and transmit from one generation to another as a heritage. Therefore, culture can be understood not merely as a collection of traditions and practices, but as a complex knowledge system shaped by the history, lived experiences, and environmental interactions of a society. Indigenous Knowledge Systems represent the accumulated expression of experiences, technical skills, social organizations, cultural values, and lifestyle practices that humanity has cultivated over a long period through continuous interaction with the natural environment. Rather than being merely written knowledge, it is best understood as a knowledge system—rooted in practical experience and intertwined with the lifestyle of a specific community—that is transmitted across generations. Culture is defined as the

aggregate of spiritual and material legacies that humanity has amassed and bequeathed to future generations; it is both the outcome of creative human endeavors aimed at the advancement of worldly life and an external manifestation of spiritual and moral existence (Wimalawansa, 1964).

Indigenous knowledge serves as a pivotal element in the continuity and intergenerational transmission of this culture, and virtually every sphere of life has developed based upon this knowledge. Indigenous knowledge refers to the body of knowledge accumulated over a long period by a community living in a specific area as they adapt to their biophysical environment (Purcell, 1999). UNESCO defines indigenous knowledge as a complex and cumulative system of knowledge, practices, beliefs, and representations that has been progressively developed and maintained by communities through long-term interaction with the natural environment (Bandara, 2024). Accordingly, indigenous knowledge is not merely a technical or vocational skill; it is a philosophy of life that integrates an understanding of the environment, the use of natural resources, social relationships, religious beliefs, rituals, folklore, and cultural values.

Sri Lankan rural society is one that organized its daily life based on these indigenous knowledge systems. In Sinhala villages—which were rooted in an agricultural economy—people creatively utilized resources obtained from the natural environment to secure food and produce housing, clothing, agricultural implements, and items for daily use. They possessed the ability to manufacture handicrafts suited to local needs using raw materials such as *wood, vines, cane, pan, leaves, and clay*; these production processes beautifully reflect traditional knowledge, environmental sensitivity, and craftsmanship. Consequently, these folk industries can be regarded not merely as manufacturing activities, but as living heritage that embodies the symbiotic relationship between humanity and the environment, communal experiences, and cultural identity. Among the prominent handicrafts of Sri Lanka that reflect such indigenous knowledge, the traditional *pan* industry holds a unique place. Deeply intertwined with rural life for centuries, this industry produced a wide array of items essential for daily living—including mats, bags, baskets, boxes, decorative objects, and agricultural implements. Flourishing primarily as a cottage industry among women, the *pan* craft not only contributed to the family economy but also served as a cultural medium for preserving artisanal knowledge across generations. The uniqueness of this industry lies in the fact that every stage—from harvesting the *pan* reeds to drying, splitting, dyeing, weaving, and finishing the products—is grounded in specialized local knowledge, experience, and an understanding of the environment.

According to the Mahā Sinhala Dictionary, '*Pan*' refers to a species of long grass used for making bags, mats, and other woven products (Wijayathunga, 2005). Botanically, the Pan plant belongs to the family *Cyperaceae*, which is considered one of the most important groups of wetland plants in the world. Approximately 95 genera and more than 5,600 species belonging to this family have been identified, with *Carex* and *Cyperus* regarded as the major genera (Köbbing et al., 2013). These plants

are widely distributed in wetlands across temperate and tropical regions, except in dry and high-altitude areas, and are commonly found in countries including Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, China, Kenya, Uganda, and Brazil. As Mohlenbrock (1989) points out, Pan is a perennial plant that develops from a strong rhizome, with stems that are smooth, erect, and often triangular in shape, while pollination mainly occurs through wind and insects. The value of the '*Pan*' plant extends beyond its utility as a mere raw material. It performs a range of ecological services within wetland ecosystems, such as conserving biodiversity, providing habitats for birds and wildlife, facilitating sediment deposition, enhancing water clarity, controlling riverbank erosion, and naturally filtering water. Its root system is known to improve water quality by absorbing excess nutrients, heavy metals, and pollutants.

Additionally, the plant contributes to controlling algae growth in rivers and tanks and is utilized for various economic purposes, ranging from roofing materials to the production of diverse handicrafts. Various varieties of Pan found in Sri Lanka have been identified, including *Gallaha*, *Thunhiriya*, *Hambu Pan*, *Havan Pan*, *Telahiriya*, *Boru Pan*, *Gata Pan*, *Elu Pan*, *Watake Pan*, *Heen Pan*, *Path Pan*, *Thunessa*, *Ikiriya Pan*, and *Hal Pan* (Senaratne, 1995; Ihalagama, 1997). These varieties of Pan are selected for different products according to their natural characteristics, strength, softness, and suitability for particular uses. For instance, *Gallaha* and *Havan Pan* are commonly used for making bags, while *Gallaha* and *Thunhiriya* are considered more suitable for weaving mats. *Thunhiriya* Pan is characterized by three sharp edges and is separated from the clump by tearing rather than cutting. *Boru Pan* is relatively weak in strength, whereas *Gallaha Pan*, due to its cool and soft nature, is more widely used for large mats and sleeping mats.

Furthermore, *Gallaha*, and *Thunhiriya Pan* have mainly been used to make grain-storage and lime-storage bags. Indigenous knowledge of *Pan Varieties* and their uses has been preserved through folk poetry and oral traditions, as reflected in the verses, "*Akka waren nane waren pan genenta yan – Thunhiriya kamaranga gallaha pothu pan*" and "*Thunhiriya pan – thunata ira pan – awwe dama pan – pædurak wiya pan*."

Furthermore, the information related to *Gallaha*, *Havan*, and *Boru Pan* found in folk poetry demonstrates that the Pan Craft Industry is not merely an economic activity, but a socio-cultural phenomenon continuously interconnected with the everyday life, literature, culture, and Indigenous Knowledge of the people. However, in contemporary society, the Indigenous Knowledge System associated with the Pan Craft Industry is gradually facing the risk of decline due to globalization, the expansion of industrial production, changes in the market, shortages of raw materials, limited participation of the younger generation, and declining interest in traditional occupations. In particular, documenting the traditional knowledge that continues to remain alive in rural areas such as *Kunuragama*, scientifically analyzing it, and recognizing its socio-historical significance have become timely research priorities. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the Indigenous Knowledge Systems reflected in the *Pan Craft Industry* from a socio-historical perspective, with particular focus on *Kunuragama village in the North Central Province*. For

this purpose, the study provides an in-depth examination of the historical development of the Pan Craft Industry, the indigenous classification of Pan varieties, traditional craftsmanship and knowledge ranging from the selection of raw materials to the completion of finished products, the ways in which such knowledge has been transmitted from one generation to another, and the folklore, folk poetry, and cultural practices associated with the Pan Craft Industry. It also examines the challenges faced by this knowledge system in the context of contemporary socio-economic changes and its prospects for sustainable continuity. Through this approach, the research seeks to scientifically establish that the Pan Craft Industry in Sri Lanka is not merely a handicraft activity, but a living heritage that reflects Indigenous Knowledge Systems, environmental adaptation, social history, and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the study aims to provide an academic foundation for the preservation and documentation of this heritage and for the transmission of such knowledge to future generations.

## 2. Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study. The main reason for selecting this approach was its suitability for deeply investigating the Indigenous Knowledge Systems expressed through the traditional *Pan Craft Industry* in Sri Lanka, its historical development, socio-cultural meanings, and intergenerational craft traditions. As the qualitative approach gives greater emphasis to the analysis of interpretive data rather than quantitative data, it enables a deeper understanding of the Indigenous Knowledge, cultural practices, and community experiences associated with the *Pan Craft Industry*. Field Study was employed as the main research method of this study. Accordingly, *Kunuragama village* in the North Central Province was selected as the research field. A purposive sampling approach was employed to identify individuals who possessed direct knowledge, experience, and involvement in the traditional Pan Craft Industry and its associated cultural practices. Within this approach, participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the objectives of the study and their ability to provide information related to the research topic. Accordingly, a total of 40 data contributors were purposively selected from the rural community. The selected data contributors were categorized into four main groups: 10 traditional Pan Craft practitioners, 10 women engaged in Pan-related production activities, 10 elderly community members and Indigenous Knowledge holders, and 10 key informants with knowledge of the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the Pan Craft Industry. With these selected data contributors, in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain diverse and detailed perspectives on the historical development, traditional production techniques, and intergenerational transmission of Indigenous Knowledge, socio-cultural significance, economic contribution, contemporary challenges, and conservation of the Pan Craft Industry. In addition, Participant Observation was employed to directly observe the preparation of Pan Leaves, weaving techniques, production processes, patterns of use, and everyday socio-cultural activities associated with the Pan Craft Industry. This method enabled the researcher to gain a practical understanding of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems embedded within the Pan Craft Industry and to collect reliable primary data.

In addition to primary data, secondary data were collected through a review of academic books, research articles, journals, theses, government reports, and other documentary sources related to the *Pan Craft Industry*, handicrafts in Sri Lanka, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, cultural heritage, and rural ways of life. These secondary sources provided a broader understanding of the historical development, social significance, and cultural identity of the Pan Craft Industry. Thematic Analysis was employed to analyze the collected data.

Accordingly, the major themes that emerged from the data were identified and categorized and analyzed under the main themes of the historical development of the *Pan Craft Industry*, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, traditional craftsmanship and production, socio-cultural significance, economic contribution, cultural heritage, contemporary challenges, and conservation and sustainable development. Thus, by integrating the qualitative research approach, field study, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and thematic analysis, this study was able to meaningfully analyze the Indigenous Knowledge Systems expressed through the traditional *Pan Craft Industry* in Sri Lanka from a socio-historical perspective.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1 Historical Background of the Pan Industry

Since the dawn of human civilization, people have utilized natural resources to meet basic needs and create a wide array of useful and creative products. Among these, handicrafts made from plant-based raw materials hold a significant place in the history of human creativity and material culture. Products crafted from *Pan Plants* represent one such traditional form of craftsmanship, reflecting the enduring relationship between humanity and the natural environment. Over generations, *Pan-based products* have become deeply integrated into various facets of human life, including daily necessities, economic activities, and cultural practices. Thus, the *Pan Craft industry* can be viewed not merely as a form of traditional handicraft production, but also as an expression of the knowledge, skills, creativity, and cultural practices cultivated by communities through their long-standing interaction with the natural environment. Although the precise historical period marking the inception of the *Pan* industry cannot be pinpointed, archaeological and literary evidence confirms its antiquity. Notably, as early human societies transitioned to an agrarian lifestyle, natural materials like *Pan*—harvested from the environment—were utilized to create items such as sacks for storing harvests, containers for transporting food, and mats for household use. Consequently, the *Pan industry* can be recognized as a craft sector intrinsically linked to early human technological knowledge and the management of environmental resources.

Archaeological evidence indicates that Pan and similar plant species were utilized in various civilizations of the ancient world. Archaeological investigations conducted in the Mesopotamian region have identified evidence suggesting that grasses and related plant species were utilized approximately four thousand years ago. Similarly, grass species resembling Pan were widely distributed in the regions associated with the Euphrates and

Tigris river valleys, where they were used for weaving mats and producing various other products (Nagodawithana, 2010). This evidence demonstrates that Pan-related products held an important place in the everyday lives of people in ancient civilizations. Information concerning the Pan plant and its associated products can also be identified in ancient religious and literary sources. Several references to the Pan plant and its uses can be found in the Bible, the principal religious scripture of Christians and Catholics. The Bible consists of two major sections, namely the Old Testament and the New Testament, and contains various historical accounts and environmental information. In the Book of Exodus, in the account of the birth of Moses, it is mentioned that a basket made from Pan-related material was used to protect and conceal the infant Moses.

*"The woman conceived and gave birth to a son. When she saw that the child was beautiful, she kept him hidden for three months. When she could no longer hide him, she took a basket made of Pan, coated it with tar and pitch, placed the child inside it, and set it among the reeds along the riverbank." (The Holy Bible, 2006)*

This reference indicates that the *Pan plant* and products derived from it were utilized in ancient Egyptian society. It also reveals that various methods were employed to preserve these products. Furthermore, the story of Bildad in the biblical Book of Job mentions *Tunhiriya*, a variety of the *Pan plant*. *"Will the Tunhiriya grow well where there is no marsh?" (Holy Bible, 2006)* This indicates that, by that period, *Pan Plants* and their varieties were present within the natural environment of the regions concerned. Similarly, information relating to the Pan plant is also found in the Book of Isaiah in a reference to Egypt.

*"While the streams of the river dry up and become parched, they will emit a foul smell; the reeds and the Pan plants will wither." (The Holy Bible, 2006)*

*"The parched land will become a pool of water, and the dry ground will be filled with springs. In the deserted places where jackals once rested, reeds and Pan Plants will grow." (The Holy Bible, 2006)*

These references demonstrate that the Pan plant had considerable environmental significance in ancient Egypt and the surrounding regions. They further indicate that Pan and similar wetland vegetation formed part of the natural environment of these regions and were recognized in relation to the ecological conditions of riverine and dry landscapes. The *pan industry* in Sri Lanka can be recognized as a craft tradition with a long history. Since the early stages of human civilization in the country, various handicrafts have been created using natural resources, and products made from pan hold a special place among them. Information regarding the existence of this industry is revealed through oral traditions, literary sources, and dictionaries. In the Sinhala language, this industry is referred to as "Pannam"; according to the Gunasena Maha Sinhala Dictionary, "*Pannam*" denotes the industry associated with pan, including the weaving of mats (Gunasena Maha Sinhala Dictionary, 2005). Literary evidence concerning products made from Pan and similar

materials in ancient Sri Lanka can also be found in the Mahavamsa. According to the Gunaseṇa Mahā Sinhala Dictionary, the term "*pasa*" refers to a basket woven from materials such as rattan, reeds, and Pan (Gunaseṇa Mahā Sinhala Dictionary, 2005). As mentioned in the Mahavamsa, *Prince Pandukabhaya*, the son of Unmadachitra, was carried in a Pasa in order to protect him from his brothers (Mahavamsa, 2004). Furthermore, the Mahavamsa also records an account in which *Queen Anula* went to the residence of *Tanasiva* carrying a *pasa* to obtain rice.

*"Tanasiwa stepped on the basket of Queen Anula, who had gone to the mountain to reside with her husband." (Mahavamsa, 2004)*

Thus, it is evident that *pan* and its associated products represent a significant craft heritage integral to the daily lives, goods transport, storage practices, and household activities of ancient Sri Lankan society. Consequently, studying the history of the *pan industry* is not merely an examination of a single industry; it can also be viewed as a study of the relationship between humanity and the natural environment, as well as of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage. Among the various traditional craft industries that evolved from the use of natural resources within Sri Lanka's traditional way of life, products made from *Pan* (a type of sedge or rush) hold a distinctive place. Ancient Sri Lankans, living within an agrarian social context, created various implements using raw materials sourced from their immediate environment to meet their daily needs. Items such as baskets (*pasa*), winnowing trays (*kulla*), mats, bags, and other household utensils—crafted from *Pan*, cane, bamboo, and other plant-based materials—are of particular significance. These products were not merely items for daily use; they also serve as historical evidence revealing insights into the economic activities, agricultural practices, household organization, and utilization of environmental resources in past Sri Lankan society. Information regarding these *Pan-based products* used in earlier times can also be identified through literary sources.

An analysis of the narratives, character descriptions, and social scenarios found in ancient Sinhala literary works uncovers valuable information about the implements and products utilized during those eras. In this regard, the story of *Dittha Mangalika*—found in the *Amāvatura* authored by *Gurulu Gomi*—stands out as a significant source of early literary evidence concerning *Pan-based products*; it contains a reference to a '*pasa*'.

*"Removing the four ornaments, binding the Chandala mark upon the forehead, having a blue garment made and draping a blue cloth over the arm, adorning the ear with a kumbupata ornament, and handing over a basket to carry out a task" (Amāvatura, 2004).*

The term "*Pasa*" mentioned here refers to a type of woven bag or basket used during that period, thereby providing evidence that containers and implements produced using Pan or other plant-based materials existed within social life. Similarly, important information concerning Pan-related products can be identified in the *Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya*, one of the earliest

Sinhala commentarial works written to explain the *Pali Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*. In relation to the story of Venerable *Āṅgulimāla*, the term “*tasara paccham*” is used, and its meaning is given as “*Teheri Pasa*” (*Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya*). This can be identified as a basket woven from natural materials such as rattan, reeds, or Pan. Furthermore, in the same work, within the *Pañcananam Upāsakānam Vatthu*, the term “*dhañña piṭakam*” is mentioned, and its meaning is given as “*Vee Pasa*” (*Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya*). This is an important literary source demonstrating that Pan-related products were used for collecting, storing, and transporting harvests in the ancient agricultural society. Due to the prominent position occupied by paddy cultivation within the ancient Sri Lankan economic system based on agriculture, special implements were required for storing and transporting grains. To fulfil this requirement, various implements were produced using readily available natural materials such as Pan, reeds, and rattan.

Therefore, products such as the *Pasa* mentioned in literary sources can be regarded as evidence that illustrates the relationship between the utilization of environmental resources and the agricultural economy in the lives of people in the past. The *Pansiya Panas Jataka Potha*, composed during the Kurunegala period, is also an important literary source that provides information concerning such Pan-related products. This work, which contains accounts of exemplary episodes from the lives of the Bodhisattva prior to attaining Buddhahood, reveals information about the implements used in society at that time and aspects of everyday life through certain *Jataka stories*. In the *Sammodamāna Jātaka*, the use of a *Pasa* for collecting quails is mentioned.

“While they were saying, ‘You carry them, you carry them,’ the hunter lifted the net, gathered all the quails together, filled the *Pasa*, and went home, making his wife laugh” (*Jataka Potha*, 2005).

This reference clearly demonstrates that the *Pasa* was a practical implement used for carrying goods or animals. Another important reference to the *Pasa*, a Pan-related product, can also be found in the *Sambhula Jātaka* of the *Pansiya Panas Jataka Potha*. This *Jataka story*, preached in relation to *Queen Mallika*, the chief queen of King Kosala, describes the care provided by *Princess Sambhula*, the wife of *Prince Sotthisena*, when he became ill. In this context, it is mentioned that a *Pasa* was used to bring food materials from the forest.

“Do not be distressed, Your Majesty, I will go,” she said, worshipped by placing the five limbs on the ground, took the *Pasa* for bringing fruits and leaves, the digging stick for uprooting yams, and the tool for bending branches, went into the forest, and filled the *Pasa* with sweet fruits and leaves (*Jataka Potha*, 2005).

This reference demonstrates that the *Pasa* was an implement suited to domestic and environmental needs and was used for collecting and carrying food materials. In particular, it can be identified that such implements made from natural materials were essential to everyday life in a way of living that depended

on forest resources. Information concerning Pan-related products can also be identified in the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, a Sinhala Buddhist literary work composed during the *Dambadeniya period*. The various stories included in this work provide an understanding of the economic activities, everyday practices, and household implements that existed in society at that time. In the story of the *Pehēra Duvaniyan’s Vatthu*, it is mentioned that a *Pasa* was used to carry sticks after they had been gathered.

“Those princesses also gathered the sticks, tied them into bundles, placed the *Pasa* containing the gathered sticks down, and went to the Buddha” (*Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, 2011).

The *Pasa* mentioned here indicates that containers made from Pan or other plant-based materials were used in the society of that period for carrying small materials. Similarly, the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, in the story of the *Næyange Kalahae Sanhiñdu Vastu*, contains references to bags and boxes associated with an agricultural way of life. Based on the conflict over water from the Rohiñī River between the royal families of the *Sakyas* and the *Koliyas*, this story contains information concerning cultivation, the collection of harvests, and storage.

“After you have harvested your paddy, threshed it, and filled your granaries, we will not come to your houses asking for rice, having only gold, bags, and boxes.” (*Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, 2011).

The mention of bags and boxes here reveals that various containers were used to store grain and other goods. This makes it evident that products made from *pan* were closely linked to the agricultural economic activities of the past. Furthermore, evidence regarding the use of the *pasa* (a type of woven basket) can also be found in the religious text *Pūjāvaliya*; the story of the birth of *Queen Mallika*—the chief consort of *King Kosol*—mentions the use of such a basket for gathering flowers.

“When she was sixteen years old, she took a *Pasa* in her hand and went to the flower garden to pluck flowers, taking three bundles of lotuses and placing the flowers she picked into the *Pasa*.” (*Pūjāvaliya*, 1999).

This demonstrates that the *Pasa* was a multipurpose implement used for carrying various materials on different occasions. According to the *Mahā Sinhala Dictionary*, the term “*Malu Pasa*” is defined as a small bag or a small box, while elsewhere the term “*Malla*” is defined as “*A Pasa woven from Pan and other materials for placing goods*” (Gunaseṇa Mahā Sinhala Dictionary, 2005). Based on these definitions, it is evident that the *Pasa* was a container made using natural materials such as Pan, rattan, and reeds. Furthermore, these products can be identified not merely as simple household implements, but also as the outcomes of indigenous technological practices developed according to the creativity, environmental knowledge, and needs of people in the past. In addition to the *Pasa*, the *Kulla* also occupies a significant place among Pan-related products. According to the *Mahā Sinhala Dictionary*, “*Kulla*” is a household implement made from reeds, rattan, and similar

materials and used for winnowing grain (Gunaseṇa Mahā Sinhala Dictionary, 2005). The *Kulla* was an essential implement in the process of paddy processing within an agricultural society and can be identified as a craft product associated with Pan and rattan. In a section of the *Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya* concerning the two monks, the *Pali* term “*katatara suppa*” is interpreted as “*Mahalu Kulla*” (*Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya*). This provides literary evidence that implements such as the *Kulla* were used in ancient society. Similarly, a *Kulla* is also mentioned in the description of the *Asadisa Mahā Dāna Pūjā in the Pūjāvaliya*.

*“If a winnowing basket, a mortar, or a Kulla were requested and given, it was said to be equal to giving all wealth.” (Pūjāvaliya, 1999).*

Here, the *Kulla* appears not merely as an ordinary household implement but as a valuable item associated with the everyday needs of society at that time. Information concerning the *Kulla* can also be identified in the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, indicating that it was an implement associated with the everyday life of ordinary people. In the story of the *Yamaha Mahā Pelahara Vata*, the use of *Kullas* and similar objects by the inhabitants of the city is mentioned while describing an extraordinary incident involving Venerable *Pindola Bhāradvāja*. It states: “*The people of the city, fearing that the stone slab might fall upon us and crush us, became frightened, took Kullas and similar objects over their heads, and hid themselves in various places*” (*Saddharmaratnāvaliya, 2011*).

This reference indicates that the *Kulla* was not used solely for agricultural activities, but was also a household implement commonly present in the everyday life of the people of that period. Among Pan-related products, the *Pedura* can also be regarded as a distinctive product. A *Pedura* is a mat woven from Pan and similar materials and used as a covering for sleeping, sitting, and other domestic purposes (Gunaseṇa Mahā Sinhala Dictionary, 2005). In the *Pali* language, it is expressed through the terms “*kaṭa*” or “*kaṭasāraka*” (Buddhadatta, 1998). Accordingly, mat production can also be identified as an important component of the traditional craft practices associated with Pan. In the *Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya*, the *Pali* term “*kilañjaṃ*” is used in relation to the story of Venerable *Godhika*, and it is interpreted as a mat (*Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya*). This provides literary evidence concerning the use of mats in ancient society. Similarly, references to mats and related products can be identified in the story of the *Mahadhana Setu Puthun’s Vatthu* in the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*. This story, composed to illustrate the consequences of abandoning virtuous ways of life and engaging in undesirable actions, states:

*“Fields, gardens, and other things, silver vessels and other utensils for eating rice, and at least mats, pillows, and similar items” (Saddharmaratnāvaliya, 2011).*

Among the household goods mentioned here, it is evident that items such as mats were essential components of the everyday life of ordinary people at that time. Pan-related products continued to exist in people's lives not only in ancient times but

also up to the *Kandyan period*, as confirmed by foreign documentary sources. In the work *Davy Dutu Lankawa*, written by John Davy, a contemporary writer of Robert Knox, descriptions of domestic life during the *Kandyan period* include references to the goods found in ordinary middle-class houses. Accordingly, he mentions that, together with simple household furniture, such houses contained beds, benches, mats, and other vessels for reclining and resting (Davy Dutu Lankawa, 1967). This demonstrates that Pan-related products such as mats continued to be used in the everyday lives of people during the *Kandyan period*. An analysis of these literary and foreign source materials clearly demonstrates that Pan-related products represent a craft tradition with a long history in Sri Lankan society. Products such as *Pasa*, *Kulla*, and *Pedura* not only fulfilled the daily needs of people in the past but also provide information concerning agricultural activities, food preservation, household organization, and the utilization of environmental resources.

Therefore, the Pan Craft Industry can be identified not merely as a process of producing goods, but as an element of cultural heritage that represents the traditional knowledge of Sri Lankan society, its long-standing interaction with the environment, and its indigenous technological capabilities. The ancient murals of Sri Lanka are also important visual sources that reveal information concerning the Pan Craft Industry and the products produced through it. Murals created during different periods of Sri Lankan history provide insights into the social, economic, and cultural conditions of those periods. In particular, various implements used in those periods can be identified through scenes depicting everyday life, occupational activities, and objects used in daily life. Accordingly, visual evidence relating to Pan-related products can be identified in the murals found at places such as *Medawala Rajamaha Viharaya*, *Lankatilaka Viharaya*, *Danahirigala*, *Telwatta Rajamaha Viharaya*, and *Karagampitiya Subodharama*.

The *Pasa*, baskets, mats, and other woven products depicted in these paintings provide important information concerning the craftsmanship, indigenous production techniques, and everyday way of life of past societies. Accordingly, when literary sources, dictionary evidence, foreign records, and visual sources are considered together, it becomes evident that the Pan plant has been closely associated with the way of life of the Sri Lankan people since ancient times. Pan-related products reflect the environmental knowledge, self-sufficient economic practices, and indigenous craft heritage of people in the past, and this heritage can still be regarded as possessing cultural value that should be preserved in the present. Important evidence concerning Pan-related products in Sri Lanka can be identified not only through literary sources but also through murals considered as visual sources. Murals constitute primary visual sources that provide information concerning the social, economic, religious, and cultural background of a particular period. In particular, scenes depicting everyday life, occupational activities, and objects used in daily life provide an understanding of the implements and products used during those periods. Accordingly, *Pasa*, *baskets*, *bags*, *watti*, and similar objects depicted in ancient Sri Lankan murals can be identified as

products that may have been produced using natural raw materials such as Pan, rattan, and reeds. The murals of *Medawala Rajamaha Viharaya*, which represent an important painting tradition of the *Kandyan period*, provide visual evidence concerning Pan-related products. In a painting depicting an attendant on the southern wall of this historically significant temple, a woven basket covered with a white piece of cloth can be seen being carried on his head (Wutwongs et al., 1990). Considering its shape and manner of construction, it can be assumed that this may have been a basket produced using Pan or a similar plant-based material. This depiction clearly demonstrates that woven implements were used for transporting and storing goods in the society of that period. Similarly, a woven basket can also be observed in a painting depicting *Queen Maddī* going to collect fruits, which forms part of the *Vessantara Jātaka* painting series on the western wall of the same temple (Wutwongs et al., 1990). The painting depicts *Queen Maddī* going into the forest carrying a basket and a hook for collecting fruits. This scene demonstrates that such woven containers were used for gathering forest resources and that they were closely associated with the practical needs of everyday life.

Furthermore, evidence concerning a small bag-like box that can be identified as a Pan-related product can also be observed in the section of the *Medawala Rajamaha Viharaya* murals depicting the *Uraga Jātaka*. The painting depicts the wife and daughter-in-law of the Bodhisattva, together with a female attendant, travelling towards a paddy field. The attendant is depicted carrying on her head a small hand-woven bag-like box covered with a white piece of cloth (Wutwongs et al., 1990). This provides visual evidence that small woven containers were used for domestic and agricultural activities during that period. Evidence concerning Pan-related products can also be identified in the murals of *Lankatilaka Viharaya*, dating to the period of *King Mahā Parākramabāhu* of the Polonnaruwa period. In a painting depicting an attendant on the southern section of the arch of the image house, a person is shown carrying a *watti* filled with flowers in his raised hand (Wutwongs et al., 1990). This *watti* can be identified as an implement made using Pan or other plant-based materials and used for carrying offerings. Similarly, the murals of *Danahirigala Viharaya* contain an image of an attendant carrying a *flower watti* while preparing to make an offering to the Buddha (Wutwongs et al., 1990). The *watti* appears to have been produced with decorative patterns, indicating that Pan-related products were not merely utilitarian objects but also existed as decorative craft creations.



*Painting depicting an  
Athavasiya - Madawala  
Raja Maha Vihara.*

*Three women setting out for  
the paddy field Uraga Jataka*

**Figure 01:** The Products Made from Pan as Revealed through Sri Lankan Mural Paintings

**Source:** (Wutwongs et al, 1990)

Thus, it is evident that the art of Sri Lankan mural painting reveals significant visual evidence regarding products made from pan. These paintings demonstrate that the *pan industry* was integrated into various sectors of society, serving domestic needs, religious observances, agricultural activities, and trade. Historical sources indicate the existence of specialized artisan groups within society dedicated to the creation and maintenance of these *pan-based products*. Within Sri Lanka's feudal social structure, the caste system played a pivotal role in the intergenerational continuity of various professions and crafts. Caste was often linked to an individual's occupation and social role, with specific professional duties assigned to each caste. The origins of the caste system in Sri Lanka are also mentioned in the Mahavamsa, which records that various artisan groups arrived in the country alongside *Theri Sanghamitta* when she brought the southern branch of the *Sri Maha Bodhi* to the island.

*"...Deities of the eighteen clans, ministers of the eighteen clans, Brahmins of the eighteen clans, merchants of the eight clans, as well as herdsmen clans, hunter clans, and weaver clans..."*  
(Mahavamsa, 1996).

This serves as significant evidence of the existence of diverse occupational groups within Sri Lankan society. It is evident that the occupational divisions and caste system inherent in Sri Lanka's social organization provided a crucial foundation for the existence and growth of the *pan weaving industry*. The craftsmanship required to create various items from natural raw materials—such as *pan*, bamboo, and cane—was transmitted from generation to generation, leading to the emergence of specialized occupational groups. The baskets, bags, winnowing trays, mats, shallow trays, and other woven goods created by these artisans were not merely tools for meeting the daily needs of the people; they were also deeply intertwined with economic and cultural activities. Particularly within Sri Lanka's agrarian society, *pan-based products* became essential implements for tasks such as storing paddy, processing grains, and transporting food and other commodities. Consequently, the *pan industry* has functioned not merely as a craft process, but as a livelihood deeply intertwined with the lives of the farming community, household organization, and the local economic system.

Furthermore, artisan groups such as the *Kinnara*, *Panna*, and *Val-wadu*—who engaged in *pan-based production* within the traditional caste structure—represented specific occupational roles in society. The indigenous knowledge systems they cultivated—encompassing weaving techniques, the identification of raw materials, pattern design, and the crafting of goods suited

for practical use—constitute a significant element of Sri Lanka's intangible cultural heritage. An analysis of diverse historical sources—including literary texts, lexicographical evidence, foreign accounts, folk literature, and mural paintings—clearly demonstrates that the *pan industry* was a deeply rooted indigenous handicraft tradition in Sri Lanka's past society. It exemplifies the interconnectedness between production methods based on environmental resources, ancestral craft knowledge, and socio-economic needs. Therefore, the *pan industry* can be recognized as an important historical factor for understanding the lifestyle, occupational organization, and cultural identity of the Sri Lankan people in the past.

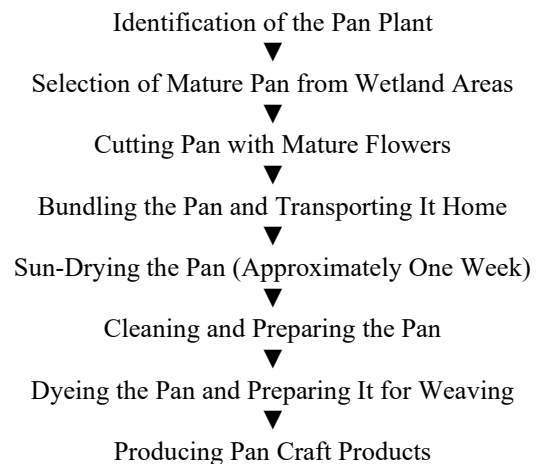
### 3.2 Traditional Pan Products and Craftsmanship

The initial step in the *Pan industry's* production process is harvesting the raw material itself—the *Pan plant*. This plant is distributed across Sri Lanka, particularly in ecosystems associated with water bodies; it grows abundantly in areas surrounding streams, irrigation tanks, paddy fields, marshes, and wetlands. The *Pan plant* possesses several unique characteristics that distinguish it from other plants. A key feature is that, although it produces flowers, it does not yield fruit or seeds. Furthermore, the plant does not grow by branching out; instead, it propagates by producing new shoots from its root system. *Pan* plants intended for the industry are harvested only after reaching the proper stage of maturity. Generally, the plant attains the necessary strength and quality during the period following flowering, as the blossoms begin to wither. Artisans in the industry have observed that the plants usually reach a suitable state for harvesting about one to one-and-a-half months after flowering. Consequently, while there is no fixed date or specific timeframe for harvesting, the optimal time is determined based on the plant's maturity and prevailing environmental conditions. In the past, the harvesting of *pan* was primarily carried out by village women, who would select well-grown stalks after the flowers had shed and withered. The harvesting process involves cutting the stalks in bundles—much like reaping paddy—which are then gathered, tied together, and transported home. While women formerly carried these bundles on their heads, the fact that *pan* sources are now often located far from the villages means that transport—such as tractors—is currently used to bring the harvest back. During a field study conducted in the *Seepukulama Kunuragama village* regarding this matter, a woman engaged in the *pan industry* expressed the following views.

*“There is no specific time or season for cutting Pan. When cutting Pan for the first time, we select the Pan with mature flowers and cut it into bundles, similar to harvesting paddy. Afterwards, the bundles are tied together and carried back on the head. However, nowadays, because we have to travel a considerable distance to cut Pan, we usually go by tractor and bring it back.” (Field Interview, 2026)*

This concept illustrates that harvesting *Pan* is not a simple task but one requiring environmental knowledge, the ability to identify the plant's growth stages, and physical labor. Selecting *Pan* at the right stage of maturity during harvesting is crucial, as

it directly influences the quality of the final products—such as *mats (peduru)*, *bags (malu)*, *baskets (kuda)*, and *floor coverings (athulpath)*. Once harvested, the *Pan* is not used immediately for production; instead, it undergoes a process of cleaning and thorough sun-drying. Typically, after drying in the sun for about a week, the material becomes strong and pliable. Subsequently, it may be dyed using natural or artificial colors before being utilized to craft various *Pan Products*. Thus, harvesting constitutes the fundamental and most critical stage of the *Pan industry*. This process reflects traditional environmental knowledge, the labor contribution of village women, and the traditional techniques essential for sustaining the industry. Therefore, studying the harvesting process offers a clear understanding of the industry's foundational basis and the lifestyle associated with it.



The production of *Pan Craft* products follows a traditional sequence of activities, beginning with the selection and collection of suitable *Pan* as the primary raw material and continuing through several stages of preparation and processing. These stages demonstrate the practical knowledge, skills, and techniques developed by rural communities through their long-term experience with the *Pan Craft Industry*. Thus, the entire production process represents an important expression of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and traditional craftsmanship preserved and practiced across generations.

### 3.3 The Process of Preparing Raw Materials for the Pan Crafts

The *Pan industry* is a traditional craft that integrates natural resources, traditional knowledge, and human labor. The proper selection, harvesting, drying, and curing of the *Pan plant*—the primary raw material for creating items such as mats, bags, baskets, floor coverings, and winnowing trays—are crucial. Since the quality of the finished product depends on how the raw material is prepared, the artisans' traditional knowledge and experience play a significant role in the initial stages of the industry. The first stage of the production process is obtaining the *Pan* required for manufacturing. The *Pan plant* is a species that grows abundantly in areas associated with streams, irrigation tanks, paddy fields, marshes, and other wetlands in Sri Lanka.

A distinctive feature of the *Pan plant* is that, although it produces flowers, it does not bear seeds or fruit, nor does it grow by branching out; instead, it primarily propagates by sprouting new shoots from its root system. These characteristics distinguish the *Pan plant* from other wetland vegetation. The appropriate time for harvesting is determined by the maturity of the plant. Generally, the *Pan reeds* reach a state of sufficient strength about one to one-and-a-half months after flowering, at which point they are harvested.

According to the experience of rural folk, the reeds are considered most suitable for manufacturing purposes after the blossoms have shed and withered. The locations where harvesting takes place vary by region; information regarding areas containing *Pan Marshes* is also revealed through folk poetry. Areas such as *Kurunegala*, *Baminigolla*, and *Weralagala* are cited in folk poetry as renowned locations for sourcing these reeds.

*“Akkaṇḍiye yamu api pan kapannata – okkoma giyai ran minivan Panvilata” (Kumaraswamy, 1962).*

The folk poem illustrates how groups of women would travel to the *pan* fields to harvest the plant. A field study revealed that people engaged in the *pan industry* in the *Seppukulama-Kunuragama village* currently source their raw materials from the *Rotawewa* and *Ambagaswewa* areas (*field discussions, 2026, Kunuragama village*). This indicates that, due to the unavailability of natural *pan* resources in the immediate vicinity of the village, artisans are now compelled to travel to distant locations to procure the necessary raw materials. When harvesting, the artisans—possessing a sound understanding of the plant—select only the suitable stalks. They gather the *pan* into handfuls, cut them from the base, and subsequently tie them into separate bundles; information regarding this process is also found in folk poetry. *“Gosin pan vilata – balamin denna vaṭapiṭa – sondha pan soyā sita – kapamu nanē me pan hanikata” (Kumaraswamy, 1962).*

This indicates that only suitable *pan* reeds were carefully selected and harvested. Although the harvesting of *pan* was a process often involving women, men also participated in the activity on occasion; thus, it can be recognized as a collective undertaking involving the family or the village community. The primary tool used for this task is the *“pan-ketta”* (pan-cutting sickle). According to the *Maha Sinhala Dictionary*, the *pan-ketta* is a curved, serrated, sickle-like implement used for cutting *pan* reeds (Gunaseena Maha Sinhala Dictionary, 2005). It serves not only for harvesting the reeds but also for splitting them. One end of the tool features a sharp blade, while the other is fitted with a spike used for splitting the reeds. Riddles concerning the *pan-ketta* can also be found in folk literature.

*“Vakutu welā danḍu muṇayaka vāḍi wuṇa – nagaṭa gasā paṭiyak ata danaganna - Vakutu welā pana pæna mal geḍi kapana – vakutu vidhānayē tōrā pan onna”*

The answer to this folk riddle is identified as the *Pan Kāththa*, a traditional tool used for cutting *Pan* (Aluthge, 1998). This demonstrates that even the tools associated with the *Pan Craft*

*Industry* have become incorporated into folk literature, reflecting the transmission of indigenous knowledge through oral traditions. After *Pan* is cut and brought home, the most important subsequent process is drying. Proper drying is essential for preparing *Pan* for use in the production of craft products. If *Pan* is retained with excessive moisture, it may become discolored, decay, and lose its suitability for use. Therefore, the drying process is carried out with considerable care. In the past, bundles of *Pan* were carried home on the head; however, at present, as *Pan*-growing areas are often located at considerable distances from the village, transportation is commonly carried out using vehicles such as tractors.

*“Keepa denek ekka gihillā pan kapala miṭa miṭa godagahalā, passe thamange ēvā ven venama goḍagahalā ṭraṭṭare aran enne” (Field Interview, 2026)*

The bundles of *Pan* brought home are dried in an open area under direct sunlight, while taking care to protect them from rain and dew. In many cases, the bundles are arranged in circular, semi-circular, or linear formations in the courtyard for drying. The use of ash during the drying process is also an old traditional practice. Applying ash to *Pan* helps control moisture and protect it from insects.

According to the knowledge of the craft practitioners, the use of ash also helps enhance the white colour of *Pan*. After obtaining *Pan*, which serves as the primary raw material of the *Pan Craft Industry*, various preliminary preparation processes are undertaken to make it suitable for production. Among these processes, *Pan* drying is considered a particularly important stage. Field discussions revealed that after *Pan* is cut and brought home, it is cleaned and placed under strong sunlight for several days to dry thoroughly. *“Pan kapan aran avillā dāvas hata aṭak pamaṇa honḍaṭa thaḍa avvē bima damā velā gannavā.” (Field Interview, 2026)*

The main objectives of this process are to remove excess moisture from the *Pan*, enhance its durability, and prepare it for long-term use. Properly dried *Pan* can be easily processed, dyed, and used to produce various craft products. In contrast, inadequately dried *Pan* may be affected by rapid decay, fungal growth, and discoloration. Therefore, drying has become an essential component of the traditional craft production process. Generally, *Pan* that has been thoroughly dried for approximately one week is stored safely when it is not immediately required for production. According to the experiences of rural *Pan Craft practitioners*, storing dried *Pan* on the *Dumnessa*, above the kitchen hearth, or in other dry locations has been a traditional practice.



**Figure 02:** The Process of Sun-Drying  
**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

Accordingly, the drying process following the harvesting of *Pan Reeds* forms the foundation for the industry's success, serving as a key determinant of the products' quality, durability, and craftsmanship value. The subsequent step after drying is the flattening and conditioning of the reeds; this process softens the material to facilitate weaving and shapes it to the required width. While narrower reeds are sometimes used without splitting, wider varieties are split and prepared prior to weaving. In the past, simple tools were employed to soften coarser reed varieties; the material was softened by pulling it against a flat piece of wood, and subsequently flattened using tools such as the "*Ravana Katta*." Field discussions revealed that the "*Ravana Katta*" was the tool primarily used for flattening reeds in the early days. However, modern machinery has since replaced these traditional methods; field studies indicate that reed-flattening machines are currently in use in the *Seppukulama Kunuragama area*.

"Nowadays, that is done using machines for flattening pan reeds. It is easier because the machine is available" (Field Interviews, 2026)



**Figure 03:** The 'Ravana Kattu' Tool Traditionally Used for Splitting Pan Reeds  
**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)



**Figure 04:** The machine currently used for processing pan and the appearance of the pan plant after processing  
**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

This demonstrates that the *pan industry* is undergoing transformation through the integration of traditional knowledge and modern technology. Consequently, the preparation of raw materials for this industry is not a simple task but a complex process rooted in environmental knowledge, craftsmanship, and traditional techniques. Every stage—from the selection of the sedge plants to harvesting, drying, and curing—determines the quality of the final product, while simultaneously reflecting the traditional knowledge and cultural heritage of the rural community. Dyeing plays a pivotal role in preparing the sedge plant for production. Carried out after harvesting, cleaning, and drying, this process determines the aesthetic appeal, color variety, and market value of the finished goods. Dyeing is an essential step for achieving the patterns and decorative elements required for items such as mats, boxes, bags, winnowing trays, and other sedge-based products. References to the dyeing of sedge can also be found in folk poetry.

The folk poem *Pannan Kathura*, which reflects the craftsmanship and traditions of the Panna community, contains the line "*Filling a mat woven from Pan Reeds—splitting the reeds and dyeing them*" (Kumaraswamy, 1962); this describes the process of splitting, preparing, and dyeing *Pan reeds* to create products such as mats. This illustrates that dyeing served not only to decorate *Pan Products* but also to enhance their artisanal value. Historically, the dyes used for *Pan* were largely derived from natural sources. Various colors were produced using indigenous plants and materials such as *Pathangi*, *Korakaha*, *Ahu bark*, *Jackfruit bark*, *Bombu leaves*, *Heen Bovitiya*, *Rathmal roots*, *Pachcha Kunkuma*, and *lime*. The primary colors used for *Pan* included red, yellow, blue, black, green, and purple. Before the dyeing process began, the *Pan* leaves were arranged into small bundles; this involved gathering several *Pan Stalks*, folding them, and tying them into small knots. The inherent flexibility of the *Pan* plant enabled village women to perform this task with ease.

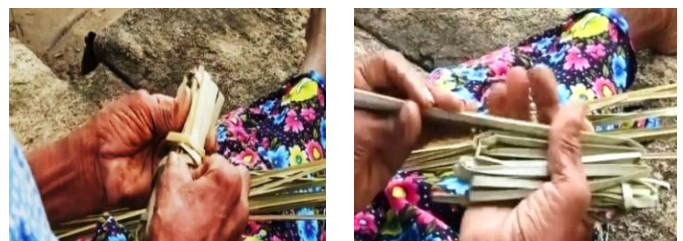


**Figure 05:** Preparation of Pan Bundles Prior to Dyeing  
**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

In the *Seppukulama-Kunuragama area*, the method primarily employed for dyeing pan is the *pathangi* soaking process. According to the Maha Sinhala Shabdakoshaya, *pathangi* refers to a tree with red heartwood; the red solution obtained by boiling this heartwood is known as *pathangi dye* (Wijayatunga, 2005). Information regarding the use of *pathangi* dye is also found in folk traditions; folk poetry reveals that there was a specific method of applying the dye based on the different varieties of pan. "*Pahichcha pan gena wenama damanne – Honda Honda dalu pan katta damanne Katta bandhapu pan wenama damanne – me dewu samagin pathengi powanne*" (Nagodavithana, 2010) to prepare *Pathangi dye*, the heartwood of the *Pathangi* tree is chopped into small pieces and boiled in water. Salt, turmeric leaves, or other plant materials are added as needed to intensify the color. During a field study in the *Seppukulama-Kunuragama area*, an artisan described the process as follows:

"A pot of water must be placed on the hearth and brought to a good boil. Then, *Pathangi* and salt are added; salt is used to ensure the color sets well. Bundles of Pan Leaves are tied and then immersed in the mixture" (Field Interviews, 2026)

This indicates that the method of preparing *Pathangi dye* varied slightly by region. In some areas, materials such as *Ahu bark*, *Jackfruit bark*, *Korakaha*, *Pachcha-kunkuma*, and lime were used alongside *Pathangi*. Coomaraswamy (1962) described the use of *Korakaha*, *Pathangi*, *Ahu wood*, and other plant materials for dyeing Pan in the *Kiriella area* of Sabaragamuwa. Furthermore, the use of natural materials to obtain various colors for Pan showed regional diversity; it is noted that turmeric or Jackfruit heartwood was used to achieve a yellow hue (Nandadeva, 1960). A field study conducted in the *Seppukulama-Kunuragama area* revealed information regarding the use of either soaking pan reeds in paddy field mud or a mixture of *aralu* and *bulu* to achieve a black color.



**Figure 06:** Soaking Pan Bundles, Prepared as Small Sheaves, in Dye

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)



**Figure 07:** Placing bundles of pan into a pot Heated with Pathangi

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)



**Figure 08:** Pan Bundles being dyed in Pathangi dye

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

Thus, it is evident that dyeing *pan* is not merely a simple decorative step in the *pan industry*; rather, it is a complex technical process intertwined with generations of indigenous botanical knowledge, environmental understanding, and the craftsmanship of rural women. The use of natural dyes to color the sedge fostered an eco-friendly production tradition, which stands as a significant element of Sri Lanka's handicraft heritage. However, these traditional knowledge systems are gradually fading away due to the increasing use of commercially available chemical dyes in place of natural dyeing methods. Therefore, preserving this indigenous *pan dyeing* technique and passing it on to future generations is a vital cultural imperative.

The *pan industry* is not simply a process of manufacturing goods to meet daily needs; it is a unique artistic tradition that gives expression to the creativity, aesthetic sensibilities, and cultural identity of rural communities. The beauty, value, and regional identity of *pan products* are largely determined by the various patterns and designs employed during the weaving process. Since ancient times, Sri Lankan women have observed their surroundings, religious beliefs, social experiences, and the natural world, incorporating these elements into their *pan creations* as simple yet meaningful patterns. A distinctive feature of this craft is the use of motifs drawn from daily life—such as natural objects, animal figures, and floral or leaf forms—alongside symbols associated with Buddhist culture. Consequently, these *pan patterns* serve not merely as decorative elements but as a visual language reflecting the environmental knowledge, religious sentiments, and socio-cultural values of traditional village society. Information regarding these diverse patterns can be found in literary sources and folk traditions associated with the ancient *pan craft*.

Accordingly, patterns such as *Adi* (footprint), *Iri* (stripe), *Diyarella* (water wave), *Anda-athirili* (bedsheet), *Katuge*, *Vellavahum*, *Kathira* (cross), *Lensu* (handkerchief), *Pahan-kudu* (lantern), *Hulan-pethi* (wind-vane/propeller), *Pannan-kathuru* (scissors), *Mahalanu-dange* (rope coil), *Makuluwa* (spider), *Kontheru*, *Pana-leli* (comb-slat), *Narammal*, *Kathuru-mal* (scissor-flower), *Piyum* (lotus), *Bo-kola* (Bo-leaf), *Nai-pena* (cobra hood), *Ath-adi* (elephant footprint), *Vajrasana*, *Akuru* (lettering), *Masa-dolaha* (twelve months), *Samadara-mal*, *Iddamal*, *Lanu-gata-pehottu* (rope-knot bud), *Buruthu*, *Uluwahu*

*pethi* (door-frame petal), *Thunpath* (three-leaf), and *Wankagiri* (labyrinth) can be identified (Ihalagama, .(1997) Furthermore, it is noted that patterns such as the eight-petaled flower, lotus flower, *Navam* flower, *Hansa-puttu* (intertwined swans), *Badulu*, and *chili flower* were also utilized in *Pan* products (Nagodavithana, 2010).

A field study conducted in the *Seepukulama Kunuragama* village also revealed that various indigenous patterns are employed in the creation of *Pan* Products. Prominent among the patterns frequently used by women are the *Thunpath* (three-leaf), *Hee* (arrow), *Kanapath* (ear-flap), *Vee Karala* (paddy ear), *Moo* (face/mask), *Kathira* (cross), *Nelum Mal* (lotus flower), *Ath Adi* (elephant footprint), *Piyum Mal* (lotus bloom), *Idal Iththa* (broomstick), and *Kiribath Kate* (milk-rice square) patterns (Field Discussions, 2026). These patterns serve not only to enhance the aesthetic appeal of *Pan* Products but also to showcase the artisan's skill and traditional craftsmanship. The *Pan* industry is not merely a handicraft linked to rural life; it is an artistic tradition that expresses the creativity, aesthetic sensibilities, and cultural experiences of the community. The diverse patterns and motifs employed in these products are considered key elements of this artistic character. Elements from the natural environment—such as flowers, leaves, animal figures, and agricultural motifs—as well as religious symbols, are creatively incorporated into the weaving process. Consequently, these patterns are not simply decorative visual forms; they are cultural symbols that reflect the lifestyle, beliefs, and environmental relationship of the community. Information regarding the various patterns used in *pan* products is revealed through folk poetry traditions and specific anthologies related to the *pan* industry, such as *Pannan Kathura* and *Paduru Malaya*. These folk poems offer insight into the patterns employed by *pan* weavers, their creative nature, and the associated socio-cultural meanings. Thus, it becomes evident that *pan* patterns are not merely a method of ornamentation; they represent a cultural heritage that preserves the character of traditional village society, religious beliefs, agricultural life, and artistic capabilities. Consequently, the study of *pan* patterns provides valuable insight into the aesthetic sensibilities of past folk life and the craftsmanship passed down through generations.

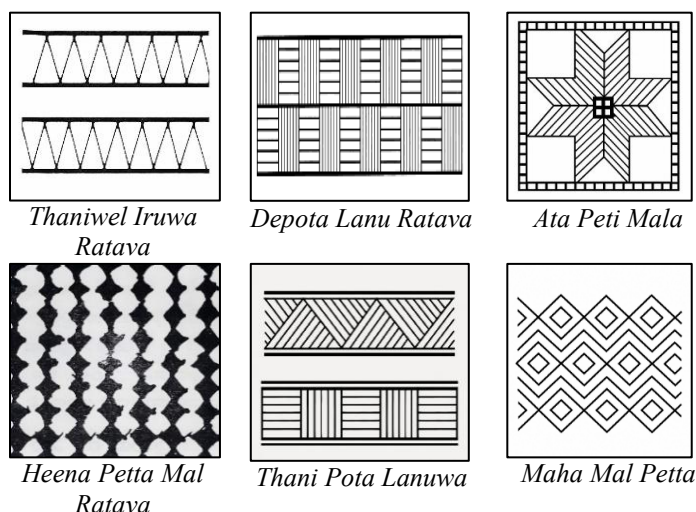


**Figure 09:** Various 'Pan' Pattern Designs

**Source:** Charles S.P (1999); Wijerathna, R. (2001)



**Figure 10:** Mats Designed with Various 'Pan' Patterns

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)



**Figure 11:** *Pan* Craft Products Produced Using Various Traditional *Pan* Weaving Patterns

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

Thus, *pan* patterns and indigenous motifs are not merely decorative elements of the *pan* industry; they represent a significant heritage that embodies the creativity, environmental awareness, religious beliefs, and cultural memory of Sri Lankan rural society. The continued use of these patterns in villages such as *Seepukulama* and *Kunuragama* demonstrates the unbroken transmission of traditional craftsmanship. However, as these indigenous patterns and motifs are gradually declining due to modern production methods and market shifts, documenting, preserving, and passing them on to future generations has become a vital task. Weaving is the primary craft process in the *pan* industry, undertaken after all preliminary steps of raw material preparation are complete.

The *pan* leaves—prepared through processes such as harvesting, cleaning, drying, and dyeing—are woven into various items based on functional needs, including mats, sacks, boxes, winnowing trays, bags, decorative *pan* flowers, and other ornamental products. It is within this weaving process that the artisans' experience, creativity, and ancestral craftsmanship are most distinctively expressed. Traditionally, *pan* weaving was carried out relying on the artisan's hands and experience, without the use of specialized tools. Women would weave using only their hands, working with bundles of dyed and dried sedge placed on the *pila* (raised veranda platform) of their homes or another suitable location. Typically, a woman would sit on a low stool, holding the sedge strips firmly with her toes while skillfully and rhythmically manipulating them with her fingers. Before weaving, the dried sedge leaves required a degree of re-softening; this was achieved by lightly sprinkling them with water to restore moisture.

This process prevented the sedge from snapping and made it easier to bend and weave. Subsequently, various products were

created by systematically interlacing the sedge strips lengthwise and crosswise. Although specific patterns were not pre-planned, beautiful designs emerged naturally through the method of interlacing, color combinations, and the weaving technique itself. By manipulating the sedge strips based on their inherited experience, these artisans were able to produce creative and artistic designs. This transforms *pan weaving* from a mere manufacturing activity into an artistic creative process. A field study conducted in the Seppukulama Kunuragama village revealed that, alongside traditional hand-weaving techniques, new methods are now being employed in the production of *pan-based goods*. Notably, the use of wooden molds to ensure consistent shapes and sizes has become a prevailing trend. These molds facilitate greater production efficiency and enable the creation of uniform products.



**Figure 12:** Use of Wooden Moulds for Producing Pan based Products

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

Accordingly, *pan weaving* is not merely a simple process of joining *pan* leaves together; it is a significant artistic endeavor that embodies artisanal knowledge passed down through generations, female creativity, and rural cultural heritage. The *pan industry* is currently adapting to new trends by integrating traditional hand-weaving techniques with the use of modern molds. Nevertheless, preserving this traditional artisanal knowledge and methodology—and transmitting it to future generations—remains vital.

### 3.4 Pan Craft Industry-Related Products

The *Pan industry* yields a variety of products suitable for both daily use and decorative purposes. In traditional village society, *Pan-based items* were essential to daily life, serving needs related to food storage, agricultural activities, household requirements, and various cultural occasions. Today, however, these products have transcended their traditional roles, gaining new value as eco-friendly goods, decorative items, and commercial products. The flexibility, durability, and malleability of the *Pan plant* enable the creation of products in a wide range of sizes and forms. When crafting these items, artisans incorporate diverse patterns and designs using both natural and dyed *Pan Strands*, lending each product an attractive appearance and a distinct local identity. These products vividly showcase the creativity and skill of village women, who pass down the craft of *Pan weaving* from generation to generation. A field study conducted in the *Seppukulama-Kunuragama village* revealed that *Pan-based products* are currently being created to cater to a variety of specific needs. These products exhibit great diversity, ranging from items for daily use and containers for storage and

transport to products valued for home décor and cultural significance. Items such as *pan mats*, *baskets*, *winnowing trays* (*kulu*), *athulpath* (*flat woven mats/trays*), and *handi-aan* (*ladle holders*) have long held an important place in rural village life. *Pan mats*—crafted with intricate patterns and colors—served various purposes, including sleeping, sitting, and religious observances. *Pan baskets* were used to hold grains, food, and other goods, while the winnowing tray was a traditional agricultural tool used for tasks such as separating paddy. Additionally, items like *athulpath* and *handi-aan* catered to various household needs.

The strength and lightweight nature of the *pan plant* have also enabled the production of various storage and carrying containers. Consequently, items such as small and large *pan bags*, *handbags*, *boxes*, *lunch boxes*, *pencil cases*, and *water bottle covers* are widely produced today. In particular, *pan bags* and similar coverings have gained significant attention as eco-friendly alternatives to plastic products. Furthermore, the *pan craft industry* has currently become linked to the home décor sector. Products such as doormats, wall hangings, hats, and mats are utilized to decorate homes, hotels, and tourist destinations. These products demonstrate how traditional rural artistry integrates with modern market demands. A field study conducted in the Seppukulama-Kunuragama village revealed that local artisans produce a wide range of items, including bags, mats, boxes, baskets, decorative objects, and other creations. In this process, modern design techniques suited to contemporary consumer preferences are employed alongside traditional weaving methods, and the resulting *pan products*—featuring diverse colors and patterns—have gained significant market value.



**Figure 13:** Various Products Made from Pan

**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

Accordingly, *pan products* are not merely items that fulfill daily needs; they represent a significant heritage that embodies the craftsmanship, creativity, and cultural identity of rural communities. The industry is evolving to meet contemporary demands, expanding from traditional products—such as mats, shallow baskets, and winnowing trays—to include items like handbags, wall hangings, and modern decorative pieces.

Therefore, the future of the *pan industry* can be secured by preserving this traditional craft, passing on the artisanal knowledge to the next generation, and fostering its development through new market opportunities.

### 3.5 Economic Contribution of the Pan Craft Industry

Economic activities occupy an exceptionally important position in sustaining and developing human life. The generation of income is an essential factor in meeting daily needs, maintaining family life, and fulfilling social requirements. In the traditional rural society of Sri Lanka, the economic life of the people was primarily based on agriculture. In addition to farming, however, people also developed their livelihoods through various traditional occupations and handicraft industries. Among these handicrafts, the Pan Craft Industry can be identified as an important economic activity that was closely associated with rural livelihoods and the everyday life of local communities. Historically, the Pan Craft industry served not merely as a source of supplementary income for rural populations but, for some families, as a primary means of livelihood. Rural communities—particularly those engaged in agriculture—utilized their leisure time to create *Pan-based products*, thereby earning the income necessary to meet their families' daily needs.

This industry contributed to strengthening the rural economy through the production of items such as baskets, winnowing trays, shallow baskets, bags, and mats. However, field studies indicate that the industry's current contribution to the rural economy is more limited compared to the past.

Specifically, field research conducted in the *village of Kunuragama* revealed that the number of people currently engaged in this industry has declined. Many people have left the village in search of stable income sources and alternative employment, moving away from the *pan industry*, while others have turned to different economic activities within the village itself. Nevertheless, the *pan industry* has not lost its economic significance entirely. Even today, those engaged in this sector produce *pan* goods as a source of supplementary income. Field studies have revealed that there is a demand in the local market for the various products created by *pan producers* in the *Kunuragama area*. The primary *pan products* manufactured in the area and their average selling prices are listed below.

**Table :1** Selling Prices of Pan Products in the Kunuragama

| No. | Pan Craft Products       | Selling Price (Rs.) |
|-----|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 01  | Reed Kulla               | 500.00 – 700.00     |
| 02  | Coloured Reed Kulla      | 800.00              |
| 03  | Small Reed Bag           | 800.00              |
| 04  | Large Reed Bag           | 2,500.00            |
| 05  | Small Reed Bucket (Pasa) | 1,800.00            |
| 06  | Large Reed Wattiya       | 200.00 – 500.00     |
| 07  | Small Reed Wattiya       | 150.00              |
| 08  | Athulpatha               | 250.00              |

**Source:** Field interviews, (2026)

These price figures indicate that it is still possible to generate income from *pan products* today. However, for many families, this has not become a primary source of income but rather serves as a supplementary one. Field data reveals that while some women earn approximately Rs. 10, 000.00 per month from this industry, those engaged in it on a full-time basis earn between Rs. 40, 000.00 and Rs. 50, 000.00 monthly (Field Interviews, 2026). It is evident that women are the primary participants in this industry in the *Kunuragama area*. They carry out *pan production* alongside daily household chores, attending to children's needs, cattle rearing, milking, and assisting with agricultural activities. This enables them to make an additional contribution to the family economy. In some instances, children are also involved in the trade, reflecting an effort to preserve traditional craftsmanship across generations. Regarding the sale of *pan products*, it is evident that many producers channel their goods to the market through middlemen. These middlemen visit villages to purchase the products from makers at low prices and subsequently resell them at higher rates.

Although some traders claim that the products are destined for foreign markets, the producers themselves lack a clear understanding of the goods' ultimate destination. Consequently, the producers do not receive adequate returns reflecting the true market value of their products. However, it is evident that *pan products* command high value in both domestic and international markets.

Current market prices show that a *pan winnowing tray (kulla)* sells for between Rs. 1, 500.00 and Rs. 1,800.00, a large *pan bag* for between Rs. 3, 000.00 and Rs. 4,000.00, and a large *pan basket (vattiya)* for between Rs. 1, 000.00 and Rs. 1, 500.00. Given the growing international focus on eco-friendly products, significant future economic potential for *pan products* can be identified. Yet, due to various shortcomings within the industry, it currently struggles to serve as the primary source of income for many families. Consequently, people in the *Kunuragama area* engaged in the *pan industry* often supplement this work with *farming, chena cultivation, cattle rearing, and other forms of employment*. Thus, while the *pan industry* has become a limited economic activity in the present day, it continues to play a vital role as a source of supplementary income for the livelihoods of the rural population. Furthermore, by introducing appropriate market opportunities, institutional support, and modern marketing methods, the *pan industry* can once again be transformed into a significant sector contributing to rural economic development.

### 3.6 Socio-Cultural Significance of the Pan Industry

The Pan Craft Industry occupied a distinctive place among the traditional industries closely associated with the everyday life of rural society in Sri Lanka. It was not merely an economic activity but also an important cultural heritage practice connected with domestic activities, agriculture, social relationships, rituals, and religious beliefs. Pan-based products such as mats, baskets, winnowing trays, boxes, bags, and *atulpath* were widely used for storing food, processing paddy, transporting goods, and fulfilling

various household requirements. The use of Pan Products extended beyond everyday domestic activities into various social and cultural contexts. For example, sweets and food items were traditionally taken to relatives in *atulpath* or Pan Baskets as part of hospitality and social exchange. Similarly, mats and containers were used in puberty ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, funerary practices, and religious activities. The use of wedding mats during marriage ceremonies and mats during funerals provides further evidence of the cultural significance of Pan Products.

In addition, products such as the *kulla* were used in agricultural activities, particularly in the processing and winnowing of paddy, while Pan mats and other products were also associated with various *shāntikarma* and *folk ritual practices*. Furthermore, Dalupotha (2022) demonstrates that Pan Products were traditionally maintained and reused rather than being discarded after short-term use. Mats, baskets, and other household items were dried, cleaned, repaired, and preserved for continued use. This practice indicates that Pan Products were regarded as valuable and durable household resources within rural communities. Therefore, the Pan Craft Industry can be identified as an important socio-cultural heritage that reflects the traditional lifestyle, environmental relationship, indigenous technology, folk beliefs, and intergenerational knowledge of rural Sri Lankan communities.

### 3.7 The Pan Craft Industry and the Role of Women

The *pan craft* holds a special place among Sri Lanka's traditional handicrafts. It is an industry deeply intertwined with the daily lifestyles, household economies, and cultural identities of women in rural society. Historically, this was primarily a home-based industry sustained by women, with craft knowledge and skills passed down through generations within the family. Mothers, grandmothers, and elderly women played a key role in imparting knowledge to the younger generation regarding the selection, processing, dyeing, and weaving of the sedge, as well as the creation of various patterns. For rural women, the *pan craft* was not merely a meaningful way to utilize leisure time; it was also a medium through which they could express their creativity and contribute to the household economy. Instead of idling while waiting for their husbands to return from the paddy fields or *chena* cultivations, women engaged in producing *pan-based* items. Often, the husbands brought the raw sedge material home, though there were instances where groups of women would visit the wetlands to harvest and collect the material themselves. After that, the palm was dried in the sun and prepared with dyes as needed to create various items.

Women played a particularly significant role in maintaining the *Pan Craft Industry* and transmitting its traditional knowledge from one generation to another. In particular, mothers, grandmothers, and elderly women traditionally transmitted knowledge concerning the selection, drying, dyeing, weaving, and decoration of Pan to younger generations. Folk poems that describe women collectively engaging in cutting and collecting *Pan* further demonstrate that the industry was closely connected with women's social relationships and collective activities. The ability to produce *Pan-based products* was also associated with women's domestic skills and creativity. Skills in producing mats,

bags, handbags, and other *Pan products* were, in certain contexts, regarded as an important indicator of a woman's domestic competence and suitability for married life. Ihalagama (1997) points out that the ability to produce such traditional craft products was associated with women's skills and social recognition.

Furthermore, the income generated through the sale of *Pan Products* contributed to household economic activities. Even today, women in rural communities such as *Kunuragama* continue to engage in the *Pan Craft Industry* as a supplementary source of household income. Field discussions conducted in *Kunuragama* revealed that the production of *pan-based products* requires considerable time, labor, and practical skill. For instance, producing a *Pan bag* may require several days of work, demonstrating the substantial effort involved in traditional craft production. In addition, women's organizations and community-based groups contribute to improving production skills, expanding market opportunities, and preserving traditional knowledge associated with the *Pan Craft Industry*. Accordingly, the *Pan Craft Industry* should not be understood merely as a process of producing household goods. Rather, it represents an important socio-cultural sphere through which Sri Lankan women have expressed their craftsmanship, creativity, contribution to household economies, and role in preserving Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The role of women in the *pan weaving industry* has not completely disappeared today. Particularly in rural areas, women engage in this craft alongside their daily chores, utilizing it as a source of supplementary income. During field studies, women involved in the industry in the *Seepukulama Kunuragama village* stated that crafting a single product requires a significant investment of time and labor.

*"It takes about twelve hours to prepare the inner base (Athulpatha). Crafting a pan bag takes around two days; the handles are made separately and attached to the bag later. Generally, weaving a large pan bag takes about four to five days"* (Field interviews, 2026)

These insights highlight the immense dedication and labor women invest in the *pan industry*. They utilize the income earned from this craft to meet family needs and also strive to pass this artisanal knowledge on to their children. However, the fact that the younger generation is not gravitating towards this industry today poses a challenge to its continued survival. Women in the village of *Kunuragama* have established associations to safeguard the *pan craft industry*, with approximately 54 female members participating in these groups. Such organizations play a vital role in enhancing the women's production capabilities, securing market opportunities, and preserving traditional knowledge.

**Figure 14:** Women Engaged in the Pan Craft Industry  
**Source:** Field Observations, (2026)

Thus, the *pan industry* is not merely a process of manufacturing household goods; it is a significant socio-cultural sphere that reflects the craftsmanship, creativity, economic contribution to the family, and cultural heritage of Sri Lankan women. The role women have played in this industry—from the past to the present—demonstrates their strength, dedication, and capacity to sustain indigenous knowledge systems. Therefore, preserving the *pan industry* entails safeguarding not only a specific handicraft but also the lived experiences, traditional knowledge, and cultural heritage of the women involved in it.

### 3.8 Contemporary Challenges of the Pan Industry

The *pan industry*—a traditional Sri Lankan handicraft—is currently facing a multitude of social, economic, and environmental challenges. Products made from *pan*, which were once essential for household needs, agriculture, and trade, are gradually falling out of use; consequently, the number of artisans engaged in this industry has declined significantly. A primary factor contributing to the industry's current downturn is the difficulty in sourcing raw materials. The areas where the *pan plant*—the essential raw material—grows in abundance have become limited, leaving some producers unable to source the material locally.

As a result, raw materials must be transported from distant locations, incurring additional costs that drive up production expenses. Furthermore, the inability to secure sufficient quantities of the material has made it difficult to maintain continuous production. Another major challenge facing the industry is the decline in the transmission of traditional craftsmanship knowledge across generations. Indigenous knowledge regarding the processing of *pan*, weaving techniques, pattern creation, and the manufacture of various products largely resides with older artisans, yet the successful transfer of this knowledge to the new generation remains limited. In some instances, older artisans lack interest in passing on their skills to their children, while in other cases, even when such efforts are made, the younger generation shows little inclination to pursue this vocation. A primary reason for the youth drifting away from the *pan industry* is the inadequacy of the income it generates. Driven by the current economic climate to seek employment offering a stable income, young people are less likely to become new artisans in this field; consequently, there is a risk that this indigenous craft knowledge, preserved over generations, will gradually fade away.

Furthermore, the prevalence of products made from plastic and synthetic materials in today's market has also contributed to the decline of the *pan industry*. Consumers increasingly gravitate towards plastic products due to their low cost and easy availability. Although *Pan Products* are eco-friendly and durable, they struggle to compete on price with plastic products due to the significant time and labor required for their manufacture. A major issue facing the industry is the failure to secure a fair market value for these products; artisans face



economic hardship because they do not receive fair prices for their creations, while middlemen purchase the goods cheaply and resell them at higher prices. Furthermore, there is a lack of adequate institutional and state intervention to conserve and develop the *Pan industry*. Support systems—such as training facilities, financial assistance, market linkages, and artisan organizations—remain underdeveloped. The industry's decline is also attributed to a lack of social recognition for the artisans' creative talents and indigenous knowledge. Consequently, the primary challenges facing the *Pan industry* can be identified as raw material shortages, the loss of traditional knowledge, low youth participation, market competition, economic difficulties, and a lack of sufficient institutional support.

### 3.9 Preservation and Sustainable Development of the Pan Craft Industry in Kunuragama Village

A systematic plan must be implemented to rescue the *pan industry* from current challenges and foster its sustainable development. A primary priority is ensuring an adequate supply of raw materials. To achieve this, it is essential to encourage *pan cultivation*, identify suitable growing areas, and utilize unused state lands for this purpose; such measures will minimize raw material shortages and ensure the continuity of production. Furthermore, providing modern training programs and technical knowledge to artisans engaged in the industry is vital. Training workshops should be organized to enhance modern design techniques, address market demands, and improve product quality—all while preserving traditional craftsmanship—thereby enabling the development of *pan products* suitable for both domestic and international markets. Additionally, organizing artisans into local-level craft associations is important, as this facilitates the provision of necessary equipment, financial facilities, production centers, and market linkages. Examples of such local-level development initiatives include providing *pan* processing machinery to those engaged in the industry in the *Kunuragama area*, constructing 13 dedicated structures (*Madu*) for production activities, and implementing development programs through the Divisional Secretariat. Ensuring appropriate market value for *pan products* is also essential for the future of this industry. To achieve this, *pan products* should be introduced to both domestic and international markets with the support of institutions such as the Sri Lanka Handicrafts Board, the National Crafts Council, and the Export Development Board. Linking *pan products* with the tourism industry, in particular, can enhance their cultural and economic value. Furthermore, special attention must be paid to engaging the younger generation in this industry. By introducing innovative design concepts, modern

technology, and contemporary marketing strategies, income-generating opportunities within this sector can be created for the youth. This approach not only preserves traditional knowledge but also contributes to mitigating youth unemployment. Accordingly, conserving the *pan industry* is not merely about preserving a single handicraft; it involves safeguarding the traditional knowledge and cultural identity of the Sri Lankan people, as well as an eco-friendly production tradition. Therefore, through a collaborative initiative involving the state, private, and community sectors, the *pan industry* can be revitalized into a robust industry.

#### 04. Conclusion

This research successfully achieved all its primary objectives in examining—from social and historical perspectives—the indigenous knowledge systems embedded in the traditional *Pan industry* of the *Kunuragama village* in the North Central Province. The study revealed that the historical background and evolution of the *Kunuragama Pan industry*—encompassing plant identification, raw material selection, processing, dyeing, product creation, and associated craftsmanship—are the result of a body of indigenous knowledge transmitted across generations. Furthermore, the study confirmed that this industry is not merely an economic activity but an indigenous knowledge system deeply intertwined with an understanding of the environment, sustainable use of natural resources, community cooperation, cultural values, folklore, folk poetry, and the traditional rural lifestyle. Furthermore, the research revealed that this heritage is at risk of gradual disappearance due to modernization, market shifts, the use of synthetic materials, low participation among the younger generation, and the failure to document traditional knowledge. In light of this situation, state agencies, universities, research institutions, and local communities must collaborate to preserve the indigenous knowledge systems associated with the *Pan industry* as a vital component of national cultural heritage. It is essential to systematically document the traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, folklore, and production processes related to the industry, create digital databases, and implement programs to transmit this knowledge to future generations. Additionally, greater emphasis should be placed on attracting young people to the *Pan industry* through vocational training, product innovation, market promotion, cultural tourism, and financial incentives for artisans. These measures would help preserve the *Pan industry* as a living heritage linked to Sri Lanka's indigenous knowledge systems, cultural identity, and sustainable development. Furthermore, documenting traditional techniques and transferring knowledge from experienced artisans to younger generations are essential for preventing the loss of this valuable heritage. Strengthening cooperation among local communities, government institutions, and tourism stakeholders could also create new livelihood opportunities while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the industry.

**Authors:** The authors of this article are Prof. MKL. Irangani, Dr. MAP. Kumara, Mr. BMC. Madhusankha Bandara, and MAL. Madhushika, affiliated with the Department of Humanities,

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.

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