

# KANDYAN JEWELRY

## Traditional Jewelry of Sri Lanka

*Ellen Dissanayake\**

Fabulous jewelry must surely rank with spices, perfumes and silks as one of those exotic artifacts that have been associated with "the Indies" from earliest times. Even today some Indian women continue to laden themselves with a surfeit of heavy jewelry that represents their worldly wealth. Indian sculpture and painting show women (and men) wearing incredible necklaces, girdles, ear and hair ornaments, bracelets and anklets, even when they wear very little else.

In Sri Lanka, so greatly influenced by Indian culture, the love of ornament is also highly developed. Traditional Sinhalese jewelry, now known as "Kandyan" jewelry, shares inescapable affinities with that of India. Yet in its own right it comprises a distinctive body of South Asian jewelry which is of considerable interest not only for its beauty but as a reflection of a now vanishing traditional agricultural society in which aesthetic and practical considerations were inseparable. Something so apparently superfluous as jewelry contributed to the lives of its makers and wearers in numerous ways and was considered to be essential to their lives.



It was only in 1815, when the Kandyan Kingdom finally fell to the British, that the whole of the country of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) was finally opened to foreign occupation and domination. From 1500 the coastal and low-lying areas of the country had been successively occupied by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British. The Kandyan Kingdom, however, because of its hilly remoteness and isolation, had been able to preserve what might be called authentic Sinhalese arts, crafts, and customs unaffected by European influence. To say that a tradition or motif is "Kandyan," then, is in general to imply that it was characteristic of the Sinhalese before European contact, although "Kandyan" is a modern adjective that strictly refers to a specific geographical-cultural area.

### TAMIL INFLUENCE

Compared to the five centuries of foreign domination during which most traces of Sinhalese culture vanished from the Low Country, the 170 years since Kandy fell to the British is not such a long time. Yet already 80 years ago Ananda Coomaraswamy was deploring the loss of tradition in the Kandyan areas. In 1985 it is not easy to identify or reconstruct indisputably or purely Kandyan elements. Fortunately we have good museum collections in Kandy and Colombo, a few historical accounts, and Coomaraswamy's own writings and investigations to assist us. Kandyan jewelry is one area of art and craft that maintained a kind of integrity until the present century, and pieces one or two hundred years old remain in Kandyan families as heirlooms.

Although true Kandyan artifacts are free of European influence, the same cannot be said for the influence of South India which is pervasive<sup>1</sup>. It is easier to distinguish Kandyan from Low Country Sinhalese jewelry than from Tamil jewelry of the same period. Other evidence of close linkage can be found in recognizably Dravidian terms used today to refer to Kandyan jewelry and in the South Indian origin of the names of some contemporary Sinhalese craftsmen in Kandyan villages. Indeed, already in the Gampola period (fourteenth century), South Indian architects and craftsmen were constructing temples near present-day Kandy town. It is recorded that Sinhalese kings brought Pandyan and other Indian craftsmen to Lanka during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In the eighteenth century, when from 1737 to 1815 the Kandyan provinces were ruled by South Indian Tamil kings, artificers, who in many cases ultimately intermarried and settled down, were brought from the subcontinent. We can further assume that ruling families governed fashion then as now, so that Dravidian influences were not insidious but rather deliberately sought and willingly accepted.

These South Indian kings are known for their willingness to promote the indigenous Buddhist culture which had been in decline. They built and repaired temples and shrines, restored the debilitated priesthood, and patronized local art forms and local religion. During the period of their reign one of their main concerns was to safeguard Kandyan territory from foreign domination, and to this end local culture was preserved perhaps to a greater

degree than it would have been without the threat of external occupation.

Coomaraswamy emphasizes that even while admitting the South Indian influence on all aspects of Kandyan life, it is necessary to acknowledge the continuity and vitality of the local tradition, and to give the Sinhalese full credit for the fact that their arts as a whole are distinct in style and feeling from those of South India. To borrow a zoological metaphor, one might say that although the "species" was South Indian, the "variety" was Kandyan with certain characteristics and even unique forms, omissions, and emphases. Yet the felicity of the entwining of South Indian Tamil and Sinhalese Buddhist culture should be noted, particularly since in the present civil strife between the two groups, their long, close, and fruitful historical association has been, regrettably, forgotten.

### ROYAL PREROGATIVE

At the time of the coming of the Portuguese (1506), metalwork in the area which now comprises the Kandyan provinces was highly developed — with wrought and cast vessels and implements in iron, steel, brass, bronze, and *pas-lo* (a combination of five metals: gold, silver, copper, lead or bronze, and iron). Gold and silver articles were rare, but there are preserved in museums today a few examples of gold and silver plate, vessels, betel stands, lamps, fans, and writing styluses, and of course the King's golden throne.

It is recorded that the wearing of gold and gems was officially permitted only for the King, yet we are also informed that certain high officials such as Chief Ministers might wear ceremonially a gold dagger with inlaid gems as a mark of their high office. The earliest English language account of Kandyan social and cultural life (1681) also gives several indications that at least some non-royal persons wore gold and had the right to commission the making of gold articles.

According to this account, nobles and governors of the various districts customarily paid a new year's visit (*Dākim*) to the King, bringing presents of "Gold, Jewels, Plate, Arms, Knives, Cloth," each according to his status and rank. Also it is mentioned that the noblemen wore brass, copper and silver rings on their fingers, and "some of the greatest Gold."

Because the historical record is not completely clear about the extent of the exceptions to the rule of gold being confined to royal or at least ceremonial use, it is difficult to say whether the antique gold and gem-studded jewelry possessed by numerous noble Kandyan families today is post-1815 (that is, after the fall of Kandy when royal sanctions no longer prevailed) or whether indeed there were frequent exceptions to the recorded exclusivity of the owning and wearing of gold and precious stones by royalty alone.

Sinhalese kings traditionally were known for their interest in the arts such as music and dance, and in quality craftwork, taking the best exponents of these directly under their patronage: it was surely the loss of this patronage that accounted for the decline Coomaraswamy noted a century after British occupation. A hereditary corpora-





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**FIG. 1** Pair of *kankanada valalu* (bracelets); gold with pressed-in cabuchon rubies. Photograph: Mark Sheldon.

**FIG. 2** Gold *sari valalu* (bracelet). Photograph: Mark Sheldon.

**FIG. 3** A *kankanada valalu* (bracelet) with dark blue glass. Photograph: Mark Sheldon.

**FIG. 4** A gold *konda mala*, circular hair ornament, with Kandyan *liya vela* motif. Photograph: Mark Sheldon.

**FIG. 5** *Tahadu kola bamma* jewelry which uses the traditional South Indian method of setting cabuchon stones. The gems are pressed into soft gold over wax so that only a small rounded area protrudes above the surface. Clockwise from upper left: ear ornaments (*dimbithiya sahadu thodu*) with cinnamon stones; necklace of pearls and pink garnet beads with *talla* and *botu petta* pendant with pearls (on red string); neckbelt (fingernail paring type) with *botu petta* pendant with pearls on green string. In center, pendant of *bherunda pakshiya* (double-headed eagle) type; small chief's ring in lotus design with cinnamon stones, central moonstone, and foil. Photograph: Dominic Sansoni.



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tion of gold-and silversmiths called the *pattalhataré*, or Four Workshops, worked immediately for the king. Of higher caste than other artificers, and rewarded with land and other gifts, these craftsmen produced the king's crown, throne, and other fine goods such as his gifts to visiting dignitaries and offerings to temples. In the Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth Relic) repose priceless ornaments, gifted by Kings, that adorn the reliquary, which unfortunately is itself too sacred to be photographed or otherwise disturbed although the jewelry upon it would be our best examples of the Kandyan style.

A partial inventory of the King's jewels and other precious ornaments that were found in temples is listed in the diary of the First Commissioner of the British Government in Kandyan Provinces at the time of the fall of Kandy. These consisted of:

...Gold Toppiya (hat), Do. Ruff, Jacket, Greaves  
— Variety of Massy Gold Ornaments set with Valuable precious Stones — Particularly Padikkan (pendants) & Breast Ornaments — 2 with large Center Emeralds — 1 with large Center Ruby 1 1/10 Inch long — set round with 10 large Diamonds etc. — 1 large Weirodi (cat's eye), nearly round — 1 1/2 In. long Diamr. ...A small Dakshina Sank'ha (chank shell) set in Gold — & in a Gold Case, an Ear of Paddy...producing a Pearl — All these 3 Curiosities said to have been produced in the Reign of Rajasinha.

In the Temple of the Tooth was "a Gold elegant Ornament set with Emeralds, Diamond & Rubies in imitation of a Bird," which was said to have been made and offered to the Temple by Kirthi Sri Rajasinha (1747-81).

### JEWELRY FOR VILLAGE AND TOWN

Certainly on ceremonial occasions both Kandyan men and women put on fine ornaments as essential parts of their costume. Still it was never the practice in Sri Lanka, as in so many parts of India, for the jewelry of women to represent their entire wealth, nor except for the king did people advertise their material wealth by a display for dazzling splendor. We know that apart from the king, Kandyans — even the noblest families — lived and dressed simply. Robert Knox, a young British sailor who spent nineteen years as a captive of the King of Kandy, recorded: "In their houses the women regard not much what dress they go in, but so put on their cloths as is most convenient for them to do their work." But, when they go out "and make themselves fine," they put on silver bracelets, silver rings on fingers and toes, necklaces of beads or silver "curiously wrought and engraven, gilded with Gold," ear ornaments of silver set with stones, and a hair ornament of engraved and gilded silver. Still:

It is in general a common custom with all sorts of People, to borrow Apparel or Jewels to wear when they go abroad, which being so customary is no shame nor disgrace to them, neither do they go about to conceal it. For among their friends or strangers where they go, they will be talking saying, This I borrowed of such an one, and this of another body...

The practice of borrowing jewelry from members of the family is remembered, and continued, by present-day Kandyans.

As gold and precious gems were the prerogative of the King, lesser Kandyans seem to have made a virtue of the necessity of using lesser metals and stones. Much fine craftsmanship, including decoration with stones, was expended on ornaments of silver or brass. The restriction on wearing gold and gems probably also accounts for the prevalence in traditional Kandyan jewelry of stones of the semi-precious garnet family (including "cinnamon stones," an orangey version which is highly characteristic) and of silicates such as carnelian and glass.

Interestingly, these inferior stones and metals were made as beautiful as possible within the limitations of the materials. Transparent semi-precious stones and glass might be set over colored paste or foil to provide or enhance their color. As Coomaraswamy says of this type of jewelry in general, the craftsmen gave "to the least possible weight of metal and to gems, commercially absolutely valueless, the highest possible artistic value," a characteristic which is in decided contrast to other jewelry traditions, including much modern work where "the object is to bestow the least amount of work on the greatest amount of metal."

The practice of gold-dipping silver ornaments mentioned by Knox suggests that gilding was not included in the royal prohibition against "wearing gold." The characteristic color of many antique silver pieces one sees today, which is that neither of silver or gold, results from their having once been gold-dipped, but now the gilding has partially worn away. The motive for gilding was probably more aesthetic than pretentious: modern jewelers say that the character and color of gold are considered to be more attractive than silver in combination with the red stones that are so frequently used in Kandyan ornaments.

The silver used for Kandyan jewelry was of very high quality — usually about ninety percent silver, ranging rarely lower than sixty percent (with copper as alloy). There is no Kandyan metal jewelry other than gold, silver, brass and copper. "German silver" (an alloy of nickel, zinc and copper) may be used in modern adaptations of older prototypes.

### CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

As in India, but to a lesser extent, the wearing of jewelry was ritualized. It is an integral part of important social occasions. Jewelry is traditionally passed on as family heirlooms by parents to sons and daughters, often at important occasions such as marriage (perhaps as part of a girl's dowry), and this is said today to be an "old Kandyan custom." Still, although jewelry is a vital part of the bride's costume in Kandyan weddings today, it is difficult to say how much of present custom originated with the early inhabitants of the Kandyan Kingdom whose marriages were less marked by ceremony. Knox does not mention the wearing or giving of jewelry, though he does state that cattle, slaves, and money were given at marriage and returned again if the marriage was dissolved as apparently



frequently occurred. Certainly today it is often customary for a girl's father to give her a necklace (either an heirloom or a new one) at the time of her marriage, and not so long ago special bracelets were commissioned for a bride of the nobility by her father.

It is also usual today for a Kandyan bride at her wedding to wear seven pendants now rented from jewelers but in earlier days borrowed from members of the wider family. It is interesting that as part of the higher-ordination ceremony for Buddhist priests, three or more pendants (up to seven, which is considered a "good" number) are worn as part of the worldly finery that is going to be permanently renounced. Perhaps when European-style weddings became part of local custom, Kandyans found in their own "rite of passage" for monks the ornaments to deck their brides.

In Indian tradition metals and gems have magical, astrological and medicinal properties. This belief is also held by the Sinhalese, and even today astrologers advise that certain stones or metals be worn to counteract specific bad influences. The Tamil custom for males to wear a pair of leopard's claws on a string as an amulet seems to have been adapted by Kandyans for their *di(vi)ya niya potta* (or "leopard's claw" pendant, wrongly called "cheetah's claw" by Coomaraswamy) which is considered today to be "typically Kandyan." It was traditionally given only to children, usually at weaning (which was frequently also the ceremony at which the child says the letters of the Sinhala alphabet) as a protective device to keep away illness. Two actual leopard's claws were mounted in silver, splayed out symmetrically from the bottom of a characteristic box-like form, the whole pendant suspended on a plain silver chain. Similar pendants are still being made today, though for the tourist trade, and leopards' claws are now being replaced with teeth from dogs, crocodiles, or boar, and even with plastic, and the silver is heavily alloyed. Another recent invention is the single "claw" (also a tooth of some sort) mounted in metal. This is entirely modern.

#### AUTHENTIC AND ERSATZ TODAY

It is possible to find genuine Kandyan pieces in Sri Lankan antique jewelry shops today, but prices reflect their rarity and the cost of precious metal in the international marketplace. Some acceptable adaptations have been made and frequently old pieces have been converted so that their original components go as far as possible. A few old beads may be strung on a necklace with new beads copied from old models or even, in a particularly jolting combination, with beads of brightly-colored plastic. A number of the old metal-working traditions have been abandoned as being too complicated and labor-intensive for the cash return.

Pieces of Moslem, Tamil, Low Country Sinhalese and Kandyan jewelry may be combined, and hybrid forms are common. In some "Kandyan" jewelers' shops one can find two anklets joined to make a necklace, an earring attached to a chain to serve as a pendant, or toe rings made into finger rings. These may be attractive but are not traditionally Kandyan even though they may be worn by

modern Kandyans. Ankle bracelets and nose ornaments were not part of the Kandyan tradition, although Low Country or Tamil women may have worn them in emulation of Indian prototypes. As Knox mentions toe rings, they must have been worn in the seventeenth century, but modern Kandyans do not remember them as being worn traditionally. They are of Hindu origin, as is the *thali* (Sinh. *tālla*), a type of necklace given by a Hindu bridegroom to his bride at the time of marriage; although adapted and worn by Sinhalese women, the *tālla* does not possess ritual significance (Fig. 5). Similarly, amulets (*keccagama*), which contained charmed oil or written mantras might be worn by adults (usually on waistchains or armbands) or the *panchayuda* (lit. five weapons, or protective symbols) tied round the neck of an infant by its grandmother. In these latter instances the design never became distinctively Kandyan and in fact the Dravidian prototype was unchanged, so they are not included here. The same applies to the pubic plate or fig leaf, which was worn by children on a string around the waist with the intention of diverting the Evil Eye. The clasp which fastens the saree, *harichchi* (etym. unknown), is ubiquitous today, but does not seem to be indigenous. Though worn by Kandyans, particularly in recent times, all of these forms of jewelry should not be considered authentically "Kandyan," although they may have considerable interest and beauty in their own right.

#### SIMPLE BEAUTY

The few lavishly gem-studded ornaments that belonged to Kings should not mislead us; in general, the Kandyan Sinhalese, unlike some other peoples in Asia, did not possess vast wealth. In fact, they were a relatively poor peasant society which required no coercion to follow the ideals of moderation implicit in a Buddhist way of life. The psychological temper which found the simplicity and decorum of their lives satisfying is echoed by their jewelry. On materials that possessed little intrinsic value the Kandyan metalsmith gave as much attention to detail and craftsmanship as was in his ability, often finding inspiration for prototypes of beads in humble and familiar seeds, fruits and flowers.

These and other characteristic types of ornament are described and illustrated.

#### NECKLACES

Kandyan necklaces are of three main types, chains, sometimes very long, composed of identical small metal links or beads, strung beads of various sizes, materials, and types; and "neckbelts" with pendants.

Kandyan chains (*mala*, *malaya*, lit. garland, *male*) show great originality in their adaptation of local seeds and flower prototypes to stylized renderings in gold, silver and brass. These may be flat, like petals (*pethi mala*) or rounded (*gedi mala*). A few are enormously long, hanging well below the waist, as the gold *bābila āta mala* in the Kandy Museum, or sometimes gathered into five or seven graduated strands as the *siribo mala* in Colombo. Often the links or beads are perforated, thus using relatively little metal.





Ananda Coomaraswamy points out that Kandyan "garland" chains are never simply imitative, but rather suggestive of the prototype, which is usually a very humble plant form. It is interesting, however, that the metal copy of the *gedi* (fruit, nut, seed) is usually almost the exact size of the original form. Some of the individual seeds or fruits can show exquisitely fine workmanship and most of them can be said to be uniquely Kandyan. Common types include:

- aralu*: nut of chebulic or black myrobalans (*Terminalia chebula*)
- nelli*: fruit of emblic myrobalans (*Phyllanthus emblica*), also called *amla* (Pali *amala*) or *amlaka* (*amalaka*)
- pol mal*: (lit. coconut flower)
- bäbila äta*: seed from small shrub, Malvaceae, *Sida* sp.
- wätakeyiya*: pandanus fruit
- kamaranga*: carambola fruit (*Averrhoa carambola*)
- siribo*: pepper (betel) spike of *Piper betle* (from Malay *sirih*)
- karawila*: seed of bitter gourd (*Momordica charantia*)
- vii*: paddy seed, grain of *Oryza sativa*
- satpata*: (lit. seven petal)

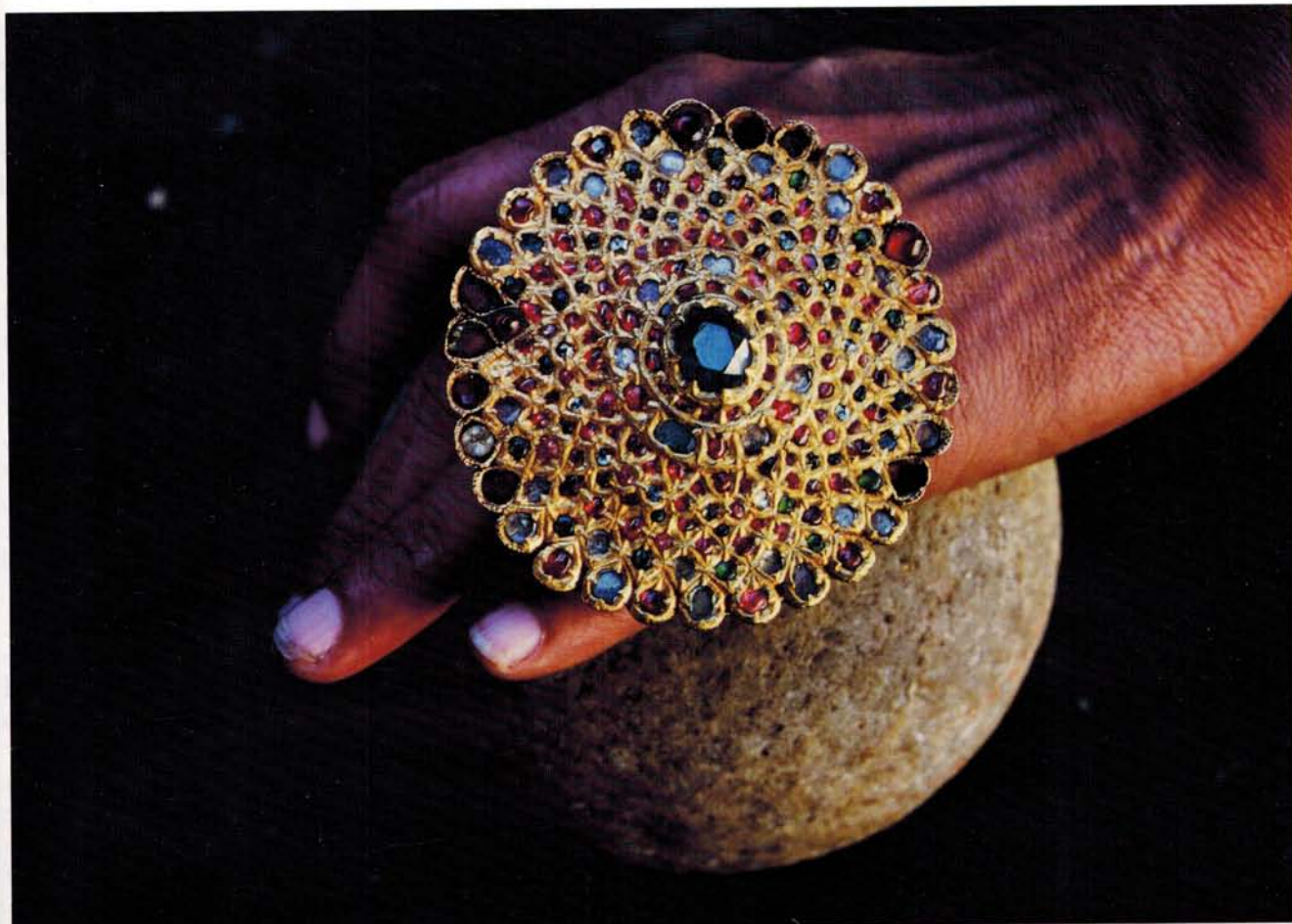
The second general type of Kandyan necklace, strung beads (*pavalam pota*, Tam. string of pearls), makes use of a fairly large number of different characteristic types of beads (*gedi*), two kinds of which will usually be strung in

alternation on heavy thread, often with smaller bead or beads separating the larger ones. There are several common types. Large versions of the *aralu* or *nelli* are extremely common, as are other spheroid beads of gold, silver or brass which do not bear individual names. Unlike the chains, these are all to be seen in South Indian jewelry but are so characteristic of Kandyan work as to be typical of it. What appears to be a specific Kandyan development, however, is the use of beads made of translucent glass which is of two characteristic colors, very dark blue and chartreuse, or *agasthi* ("agate"), carnelian, a dull red and opaque variety of chalcedony (agate). These typically alternate with metal *nelli* or other rather plain spherical beads of approximately the same size (Fig. 9). Occasionally mineral beads of one variety may be attached successively to each other by filigree holders at either end, perhaps separated by a much smaller metal *nelli* or filigree bead.

Another characteristic Kandyan bead used in shorter strung bead necklaces is a distinctive kind of pink or reddish coral. It is typically pitted and irregularly shaped, and rather than being considered a defect, this is a sign of its genuineness and hence value. "Kandyan" coral is no longer available, and whenever found it should be considered as genuinely antique. (Modern replicas of Kandyan necklaces use pink or red plastic).

Even though they may be rather ornate, and suggest solidity and richness, the metal beads used for *pavalam pota* are traditionally hollow and light in weight. They





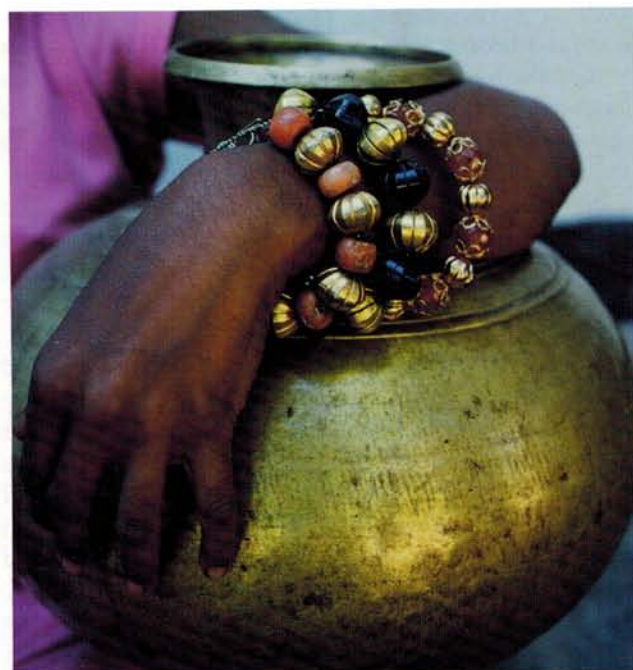
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**FIG. 6** Silver *havadi*, waistchains. Some waistchains were very long and heavy, and decorated with large, elaborate *gedi* (forms suggestive of fruit, nuts, seeds) which would be attached, like amulets. Photograph: Dominic Sansoni.

**FIG. 7** Exceptionally large and ornate Kandyan *peras mudda* (chief's ring) of gold, containing 200 cabuchon-set stones (central blue sapphire, others garnets, rubies, and "emeralds"), some lost, some replaced with faceted stones.



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Gifted by King to Marapana family, now in Kandy Museum. Photograph: Dominic Sansoni.

**FIG. 8** Reverse of Fig. 7, engraved with Kandyan leaf and vine motif. Photograph: Dominic Sansoni.

**FIG. 9** Three *gedi valalu* (bracelets). Gold-dipped silver *nelli* beads alternating with either filigree-capped carnelian, ridged blue glass or coral. Photograph: Dominic Sansoni.



were made in molds (perhaps with wires and grains later applied to the surface) or beaten over a solid molded core to achieve repoussé designs, or they may be of intricate openwork or filigree.

Kandyan neckbelts (*karapatiya* or *gelapatiya*) are in most respects similar to Dravidian ones, including those depicted in ancient sculpture. Usually the component gold or silver links are simply strung at top and bottom onto a cord or tape, but there are also other, often very intricate, jewelers' ways of joining them. In most instances the pieces are very close together so that the effect is essentially that of a continuous collar, which may be an inch or more in width and (as the name implies) fits closely around the neck. The metal pieces may be decorated with small stones, or may alternate with small vertical strings of tiny pearls or coral beads. Filigree work or incised markings are other common forms of decoration to the metal pieces which may be straight but are more often curved into a crescent shape (*niya potu*, lit. fingernail paring) or a double crescent which flank a round or oval central piece.

Pendants of various types generally hang from neckbelts, and often from strung beads and even plain chains. Although derived from Dravidian antecedents, they are characteristic of Kandyan pieces. *Botu petthi* (lit. throat flat-piece) are round or oval, symmetrical in design, and have a number of small dangling round beads, or sometimes pearls, at their lower edge (Fig. 5). The large *bherunda pakshiya* (lit. fearful bird, or double-headed eagle) (Fig. 5) and variants of it, is probably ultimately derived from the Near Eastern heraldic device or motif of symmetrical two-headed or opposed birds or beasts. In its Kandyan form it was on the flag of the Three Korales (one of the Kandyan provinces). It is frequently used as a large pendant, worn for ceremonial rather than merely social occasions, and is probably the form referred to in the 1815 inventory of the Temple treasures.

Neckbelts and pendants (and indeed rings and some bracelets and ear ornaments) are usually adorned with rubies or garnets and other gems in a manner which, though also found in South India, is highly characteristic of Kandyan jewelry and should be described (Figs. 5, 7).

Unlike the European practice of facetting precious and semi-precious stones, the Indian preference is for the type of gem cutting called *cabuchon* in which the surface of the stone is gently rounded and polished. The effect is of a rich deep glow from within (occasionally augmented by setting the stone over colored paste or foil) rather than brilliant flashiness as reflected from the surface of faceted stones (Figs. 5, 7).

The traditional South Indian method of setting *cabuchon* stones (called in Sri Lanka, *tahadu kola bamma*, lit; thin sheets of metal fasten together) was also different from the European practice of using claws or prongs. Rather the gems were pressed into soft gold over wax so that only a small rounded area protruded above the surface. The effect is very rich and decorative, but pieces so made cannot easily be repaired. Thus old Kandyan *tahadu kola bamma* work may show gaps where gems have fallen out (Fig. 5).

## BRACELETS

The narrow shiny golden "sovereign" bangles so characteristic of women's jewelry in modern Sri Lanka are not Kandyan, where bracelets were all substantial in size. Kandyan bracelets (or *valalu*) could be relatively flat, as if a bundle or cluster of bangles had been joined and "clasped" by bands (*sāri valalu*, lit. Tam. brought together) (Fig. 2) or less wide but raised (bowed) *kankanada valalu*, lit. Tam. heavy, chunky) (Figs. 1, 3) There were many variations on these two basic themes, and they lent themselves to elaborate craftsmanship, such as filigree dot and wire, repoussé, or cabuchon-set stones. They were always stiff and firm — that is, they were not of links or braid that could be unhooked and stretched out to a length, but were made on a curved and fixed band. Usually they were in two sections with a hinge and pin-fastened clasp, and fit rather tightly, although some might be true bangles, i.e., unbroken circlets to be slipped over the hand onto the arm.

The *gedi valalu*, made with alternating *nelli* and coral, carnelian (*agasthi*) or glass (*bim viduru*) beads was also very popular, being worn by brides at their marriage and thereafter. These were strung close together on a wire so that the circlet would be stiff (Fig. 9).

Most Kandyan bracelets are of silver or gold, though a few were of copper or even brass. Strips of ivory or glass might be set into the metal. They were traditionally worn in pairs, one on each arm, and usually a variety of paired bracelets would be worn at one time.

The bracelets with affixed amulet cases that are sometimes to be found in Sri Lankan jewelry shops are of Indian origin and cannot be said to be Kandyan, as they were not part of Kandyan dress or tradition.

## RINGS

Although gold, silver and brass rings (*muduwa* or *mudda pl. mudu*), some with gems, were worn by Kandyan of both sexes, it is really only the "chief's ring" (*perās muduwa*, signet ring) that can be said to be distinctively Kandyan. Usually of gold and bearing a slightly rounded disc that was set with *cabuchon* stones in the Dravidian pressed-down fashion, these sometimes could be as much as two inches in diameter. The reverse was generally incised in a characteristic lotus design, and one might propose that the obverse is also derived from a lotus prototype. The usual stones were red, but other colors of gemstones might also be used in combination (Figs. 7, 8).

## EAR ORNAMENTS

Ear ornaments (*thodu*) are among the most distinctively Kandyan of jewelry forms, though all are derived from Indian prototypes. They are worn only by girls and women, although Knox writes that before his time noble men "bored holes in their ears, and hung weights in them to make them grow long like the Malabars [South Indians], but the King not boring his, that fashion is almost left off."

Today it is customary to pierce the ears of an infant girl sometime during the second trimester of her life. In the



village this is usually done by an elderly woman, with a needle, and a stem from the curry-leaf plant that is inserted in the hole to prevent it from festering or closing. When the wound has healed, gold wire will be inserted, and later small earrings. At menarche girls also receive new earrings (and often a new necklace and bracelets as well).

The modern preference for small ear-studs (*karambunetti*, lit. clove spike) seems not to have been shared in the past, except for the *pulli-mal* (lit. Tam. flower made of dots). Museum collections display a preponderance of large, dangling ear ornaments. Knox's account tells us that when young girls' ears were pierced and in the holes were placed rolled-up coconut leaves to stretch them, "by which means they grow so wide that they stand like round Circles on each side of their faces, which they account a great ornament, but in my Judgment a great deformity, they being well featured women."

Present-day Kandyans remember grandmothers with earlobes perforated and distended with the aid of rolled *ola* (taliapot rather than coconut) leaves, replaced eventually by gold or silver cylinders (*kola*, lit. leaf, implying a rolled leaf or scroll). These then held a circular thin wire from which might be suspended another piece (*dimbitiya sahita thodu*, lit. earlobe ornament with pendant), usually pagoda-shaped (Fig. 5). Some of these are among the most beautiful Kandyan jewelry, with red stones set in gold.

The other traditionally old Kandyan type of ear ornament, called *kura* (lit. pointed object, spike) consists of two equal-sized smallish beads or pieces, one of which is inserted through the earlobe by means of a stick or spike attached to the back, and from which the second, usually identical bead hangs, most often with a small intervening bar or bead.

Kandyan ear ornaments were generally of gold and sometimes silver, as these metals are less likely than brass to irritate human skin.

## WAISTCHAINS OR GIRDLES

Although waistchains (*havadiya*, *havadi*) were worn by all men (to secure their cloth) they could be ornamented far past any utilitarian necessity. Some were very long and heavy, and decorated with large, elaborate *gedi* which would be attached, like amulets. Waistchains were always of silver, and are both splendid pieces of jewelry and fine examples of traditional Kandyan forms. Typical versions included *kamba-räl* (lit. rope-twists, waves); *tel* (lit. "oil", referring to the slippery, shiny appearance); *taraka* (lit. star); and *katakaliya* (lit. horse's bit and reins, apparently a post-European introduction) (Fig. 6).

Knox writes that Kandyan women would wear "one or two Silver girdles made with Wire and Silver Plate handsomely engraven, hanging down on each side, one crossing the other behind..." but today only one chain is worn. The female waistchains with hanging bunches of fake keys (called *chatelaines*) are derived from European sources and were not traditionally Kandyan, unlike the dangling silver toothpicks (*dat katuwa*, *dat kura*), ear spoons (*kanhände*) and lime spatulas (*hunu hände*) or lime boxes (*killota*). These are indigenous implements often with characteristic Sinhalese designs (such as the *serependiya*

face or bird motif). Usually of silver, these useful instruments (not illustrated here) frequently hung from the *havadiya*.

## HAIR ORNAMENTS

Of the two types of hair ornaments worn by Kandyan women the hair pin (*kondakuru*), though fashionable in recent memory, seems to have been a Low Country "import", while the *konda mala* (or hair flower) is regarded as truly Kandyan (Fig. 4). This circular shaped ornament was placed at the center of the low bun at the nape of the neck (*kode*), which is today the traditional Kandyan female hairstyle. However, Robert Knox writes,

Their hair grows not longer than their wastes but because it is a great ornament to have a great bunch of hair, they have a lock of other hair fastened in a Plate of engraved silver and gilded, to tie up with their own, in a knot hanging down half their Backs.

Perhaps the *konda mala* (also South Indian) is a later version of the "engraved plate" described by Knox. Its resemblance to some ear ornaments and rings (all beholden to ancient lotus designs) is striking. ■

\*New York, New York

## FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup>The influence of Arabic culture was of course widespread throughout the Indian Ocean area. Because the Indian tradition had in many cases absorbed Arab features, making them its own, it is difficult to know in particular cases of Kandyan jewelry forms, designs, or motifs whether Arab influence was direct or came indirectly through Indian intermediaries.

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## LENDERS

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