

Closing of Grant Award No. 359/24

India - Sri Lanka Foundation



Awarded to

Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama

Dept. Integrated Design, Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa

Ref. No. COL/ISLF/AP/BOD39/427

1st March 2025

To: Secretary
India-Sri Lanka Foundation
% High Commission of India
No. 36-38, Galle Road, Colombo 3.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Closing of Award No. 359/24 by the India-Sri Lanka Foundation

I am writing to formally close Award No. 359/24, granted on April 24, 2024, and commenced on June 1, 2024. I am pleased to confirm that I have successfully completed the work outlined in the award's scope.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the India-Sri Lanka Foundation for your patience and trust throughout this period. For your kind reference, I have attached the following documents:

● Copy of the Awarding letter and Acceptance letter	03
● Copy of the Proposal	04
● Research Overview and the Development of the Manual	06
● Workshops and Publicity	16
● Acknowledgment & Future Prospects	18
● Calligraphy Manual	30
● Budget Revision and Payments	33

The funding provided was instrumental in conducting this research, developing the manual, and organizing workshops. We kindly request the release of the remaining 50% of the award to further support our efforts in expanding this initiative. Additionally, we look forward to future collaborations, exhibitions, and publications that will showcase the reconstructed Sinhala calligraphic forms and promote their application in contemporary design.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any clarifications or questions.

Thanking you for your support,
Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama

PhD, M. Design Arts (SG) , B.Des (Hons), CTHE (Colombo), SEDA (UK)

Senior Lecturer and Research Coordinator, Department of Integrated Design, Faculty of Architecture,
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Content Attached

1. Copy of the Awarding letter and Acceptance letter	03
2. Copy of the Proposal	04
3. Research Overview and the Development of the Manual	06
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7. Budget Revision and Payments	33

1- Copy of the Awarding letter and Acceptance letter

This has also been included as an attachment in the email for better visibility

<p>India-Sri Lanka Foundation Application Form for Financial Assistance</p> <p>1. (a) Name of the Applicant <u>DR. SUMANTHRI SAMARAWICKRAMA</u> (Please use capital letters)</p> <p>(b) Address <u>DEPT. INTEGRATED DESIGN, FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF MORATUWA, KATUBEDDA, MORATUWA, SRI LANKA</u></p> <p>Telephone No. <u>011 2 650352</u> Fax No _____</p> <p>For Individuals For Institutions</p> <p>(a) Date of Birth (a) Registration Number & date <u>20.07.1981</u> _____</p> <p>(b) Relevant Act under which registered</p> <p>(c) Nationality (c) Type of Organisation <u>SRI LANKAN</u> NGO/Educational/Commercial/other (Please specify)</p> <p>2. Title of Project Preserving Calligraphic Heritage in Sri Lanka</p> <p>3. Duration of Project <u>1st June 2024- 31 December 2024</u>. (Please specify commencement and completion dates)</p> <p>4. Total amount of financial assistance required <u>LKR 700,000/-</u></p> <p>5. Mark the area under which your proposal falls</p> <table><tr><td>Education</td><td>Agriculture</td></tr><tr><td><u>HISTORY & CULTURE</u></td><td>Science & Technology</td></tr><tr><td>Health</td><td>Training</td></tr><tr><td>Development Studies</td><td>Women's studies</td></tr><tr><td>Area Studies</td><td>Other</td></tr></table> <p>6.</p>	Education	Agriculture	<u>HISTORY & CULTURE</u>	Science & Technology	Health	Training	Development Studies	Women's studies	Area Studies	Other	<p>Please enclose your project proposal covering the following points: <u>ATTACHED</u></p> <p>(i) Rationale/Justification of the study/work (ii) Objective & Methodology (iii) Anticipated outcome (iv) Beneficiaries of the Project (v) Time schedule and detailed budget</p> <p>7. Name and address of Recommending Institution, if any <u>INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CENTER, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, BOMBAY.</u></p> <p>8. Have you applied to the Foundation for financial assistance in the previous 3 years? If so, give brief details of same, including both rejected and accepted proposals. <u>Not in the last three years, but in 2018.</u></p> <p>It is hereby confirmed that, if the above proposal is accepted, I/we shall abide by the Foundation's by-laws and regulations and would submit a report on the project to the Foundation.</p> <p>Date <u>12.02.2024</u>  <u>Dr. S.S.M.R. Samarawickrama</u></p> <p>N.B. The Board reserves the right to entertain, accept or reject any proposal.</p> <p>Proposal may be sent to: Secretary/Program Officer India-Sri Lanka Foundation C/O High Commission of India,</p>
Education	Agriculture										
<u>HISTORY & CULTURE</u>	Science & Technology										
Health	Training										
Development Studies	Women's studies										
Area Studies	Other										

2- Copy of the Proposal

This has also been included as an attachment in the email for better visibility

Proposal for a

Preserving Calligraphic Heritage in Sri Lanka: Investigating and Reconstructing Calligraphy Styles in Southern Kandian Mural Paintings via a Calligraphic Manual

through the India-Sri Lanka Foundation

(i) Rationale/ Justification of the study/ work

Calligraphy is the art of beautiful handwriting, often characterized by skilled and artistic penmanship. It involves the careful and deliberate formation of letters and words, often using specialized tools such as pens, brushes, or other writing instruments. Calligraphy holds significance in India, both historically and culturally. India has a rich tradition of calligraphy, with various scripts and styles developed over centuries. Some of the notable calligraphic scripts in India include Devanagari (used for Sanskrit, Hindi, and Marathi), Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Urdu scripts, among others.

Calligraphy has been used in India for religious texts, manuscripts, royal decrees, inscriptions on monuments, and decorative purposes in art and architecture. It is also an integral part of traditional Indian arts such as painting, embroidery, and sculpture. In comparison Sri Lanka too has a rich ola leaf writing tradition and a mural painting culture with an extensive collection are found in temples of the 18th and 19th centuries. Yet, within the ola leaf writing tradition and the mural painting tradition the significance of the calligraphic forms are rarely discussed due to the overwhelming importance given to other elements such as the illustration techniques, preparation of surfaces, the tool, the visual flow etc.

therefore, with the support of this grant, we hope to investigate and record a selected temples of the 18th central mural paintings- related to the Southern Kandian Painting School of art. Among these recordings we hope to select a

single calligraphy style and reconstruct it as a preservation of historic knowledge, and calligraphy as a art style to wards current day practices. Cultural Heritage: Calligraphy is often deeply intertwined with a culture's history, traditions, and identity. Preserving old calligraphic styles ensures that cultural heritage is not lost and allows future generations to connect with their cultural roots.

Artistic Appreciation: Old calligraphic styles represent the artistic achievements of past generations. They showcase the skill, creativity, and craftsmanship of calligraphers who mastered these styles. By preserving these styles, we can continue to appreciate and learn from the artistic accomplishments of the past.

Historical Documentation: Calligraphy has been used for centuries to document important texts, manuscripts, inscriptions, and records. Old calligraphic styles provide valuable insights into historical events, religious teachings, literature, and languages. Preserving these styles ensures that historical documents remain accessible and legible for scholarly research and cultural understanding.

Diversity and Innovation: Calligraphy encompasses a wide range of styles, scripts, and techniques developed across different cultures and time periods. By preserving old calligraphic styles, we maintain a diverse artistic heritage and provide inspiration for future innovation and creativity in calligraphy.

Continuity and Tradition: Preserving old calligraphic styles helps maintain continuity with the past and honors the traditions of calligraphy. It allows contemporary calligraphers to study and draw inspiration from traditional styles while also evolving and adapting them to suit modern contexts.

Overall, preserving old calligraphic styles is essential for safeguarding cultural heritage, fostering artistic appreciation, documenting history, promoting diversity and innovation, and honoring tradition.

In addition to its historical importance, calligraphy continues to be practiced and valued in modern India.

Methodology includes visits to selected temples in the southern coast of Sri Lanka, documenting calligraphy within the mural paintings, re-illustrating the calligraphy styles with calligraphers, composing them into correct proportions, formulation of a calligraphic manual for future use. All this will be done with the expert knowledge from the collaborator -expert. Prof. Girish Dalvi. Outcome will be a Calligraphy manual for Sinhala, and exhibition on new findings, documentation of the research process.

To expand on this new knowledge the author proposes through this grant – to convert part of the study to a book as it will not limit it to experts but to non-experts interested in history and this area of study. The layout of the book and the research required to make it a comprehensive document, will be accomplished through a co-authorship between the two supervisor (India and Sri Lanka) and the proposer.

The book will discuss the chronological development of the Sinhala letter from its inception (Brabham influence) to the 20th century. It will discuss the letter forms, the surfaces and tools used to scribe the letter and mostly the graphical evolution. The visual evidences of the letters will be re-examined from the primary sources or secondary by visiting the locations, archives, museums- photographed or scanned to provide an in-depth and interesting feel to the book. The book is proposed to be laid out as a visual encyclopedia and cited data -literature.

Due to the limited budget allocation by the (ISLF of LKR 700,000/-) for this grant, The project will only be limited to the completion of the layout/ designing of data into a book. The publishing is not included. Yet, based on the successful completion of this project – the book can be published through the India-Sri Lanka Foundation or any other grant grant. Nevertheless, the ISLF grant will be acknowledged as the primary financial source.

Justification:

- Comprehensive document with the co-authorship between three research experts from India and Sri Lanka – CV's Attached.
- The book will cater to experts and non-experts interested in history
- At the publishing stage of the book - The ISLF will be acknowledged as the primary financial source.

(ii) Objective & Methodology

- To present a comprehensive research on the graphical evolution of the Sinhala script and its influences – cultural and technological.
- Extend scholarly knowledge to a wider audience, to open up more opportunities towards the area of research.
- Disseminate knowledge on the locations and sources where these data can be accessed.

Methodology

- The data from the PhD thesis will be structured to comprehend to a book.
- The identified literature sources will be re-examined by observing primary or secondary data. This may lead to re-visiting locations where the Sinhala letters were scribed. These visual data will be restructured to address the objective of the book- comprehensive research on the evolution of the Sinhala script.
- All collected data will be compiled and presented to a book designer to do the layout of the overall book, followed by the data and sources to be correct and precise by research consultants.
- On the approval, it will be given to a proof reader and

(iii) Anticipated outcome

Comprehensive and ready to print book layout on the graphical evolution of the Sinhala script and its influences – cultural and technological.

(iv) Beneficiaries of the Project

- Experts : Academics, Historians, scholars, students

- Non –experts : People interested in Sri Lankan/Indian history, Sinhala letters, the cultural influences,
- Typographers, calligraphers, language specialist etc.

(v) Time schedule and detailed budget

6 months – starting from the 15th January 2018- 15th July 2018.

Proposed budget

Ready to Print book on
THE GRAPHICAL EVELOUTION OF THE SINHALA SCRIPT
(AND ITS INDIAN INFLUENCE)

Position/ title/ name	No	per month	perio d	Amount
Research Assistant	2	30000	6	360,000.0
Transportation/ accommodation to locations				20,000.00
Data collectors 3	3	10000	2	60,000.00
Photographer	1	30000	1	30,000.00
Source material (Archival material)				20,000.00
Stationary				20,000.00
Copies/ printouts				20,000.00
				100,000.0
Consultants	2	50000	0	
Proof reader	1			20,000.00
Art director - Book layout coordinator	1	50000		50,000.00
Total				700,000.0
				0

Thank you,

Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama

3- Research Overview and the Development of the Manual

"Preserving Calligraphic Heritage"

The Preserving Calligraphic Heritage project successfully explored and documented the calligraphy style found in 18th-century mural paintings from the Southern Kandyan Painting School in Sri Lanka, with a special focus on Karapitiya Raja Maha Viharaya, Galle. This temple was chosen for its well-preserved and visually rich murals, which provided valuable insights into the calligraphic traditions of the time. The project aimed to identify, analyze, and reconstruct a distinctive calligraphic style embedded in these murals, ensuring its preservation and continuity in contemporary artistic practices.

Beyond documenting a historical script, this research also served as a pilot study for developing a structured methodology for the preservation of calligraphy in temple mural paintings. A key focus was the detailed examination of the tools and techniques used by ancient mural artists, particularly:

- The brush as a tool – its stroke dynamics and handling techniques.
- The limestone/plastered wall as a calligraphic surface – influencing the texture and characteristics of the script.

By analyzing these elements, the study provided deeper insights into the historical techniques that shaped Sri Lankan mural calligraphy.

Calligraphy, a vital part of both Indian and Sri Lankan artistic traditions, has often been overshadowed by other artistic elements within Sri Lankan heritage. While India has a well-documented history of diverse calligraphic styles, Sri Lanka's calligraphic heritage—particularly in ola leaf manuscripts and mural paintings—remains largely underexplored. This project aimed to bridge that gap by systematically:

- Documenting, studying, and reviving an authentic calligraphic style from Karapitiya Raja Maha Viharaya.
- Developing a documented methodology that can be applied to similar research contexts in the future.

- Creating a Step-by-Step Manual on how to reconstruct this calligraphic style, ensuring its preservation and accessibility.

As part of this initiative, the project also explored the application of this calligraphic style in contemporary design. The findings were disseminated through workshops, where participants learned how to adapt this historical calligraphy for modern creative uses. This knowledge continues to evolve, with ongoing efforts to develop a range of typographic designs that can be utilized for contemporary applications or other artistic and scholarly purposes.

The overall research process and completion of the project can be summarized as follows:

1. Field Research and Documentation

As the first phase of the project, an extensive field study was conducted at Karapitiya Raja Maha Viharaya, Galle, with a focus on identifying, analyzing, and documenting the calligraphic elements found in the temple shrine room's 18th-century mural paintings. This phase was essential in laying the groundwork for the systematic study and reconstruction of the calligraphic style.

The key steps in this phase included:

- Capturing high-resolution photographs of the calligraphy in murals to enable detailed analysis.
- Identifying and cataloging a comprehensive set of letterforms, classifying them into common, rare, and unique groups based on their frequency and stylistic variations.
- Collecting root letter samples to establish a structural foundation for reconstructing the script.

This phase provided crucial visual references, forming the basis for further study, analysis, and reconstruction of the calligraphic style.

2. Analysis and Visualizing the Style

Following the documentation phase, the research team conducted an in-depth visual analysis and reconstruction process, which included:

- Observing and documenting stroke variations, including differences in thickness, thinness, and nib width.
- Identifying proportional guidelines and structural consistencies within the script.
- Testing the analysis through workshops with undergraduate students from the Bachelor of Design degree program at the University of Moratuwa. These workshops played a crucial role in:
 - Evaluating the reconstructed stroke movements and construction techniques.
 - Comparing student experiments with historical references to assess accuracy.
 - Refining and finalizing a systematic, step-by-step calligraphy reconstruction process based on workshop findings.

Systematic Process of Documenting, Studying, and Reviving the Calligraphic Style

The process of analyzing and reconstructing an authentic calligraphic style involved the following steps:

1. Observation and Analysis
 - Study the calligraphy in the 18th-century murals of the Shrine Room at Karapitiya Temple, Galle.
 - Narrow the research focus to a specific calligraphic style found in the murals.
2. Documentation and Classification
 - Record existing letterforms and classify them into common, rare, and unique groups based on their frequency and stylistic variations.
3. Letterform Reconstruction
 - Gain familiarity with surfaces, tools, forms, structures, and stylistic features.

- Refine an understanding of letter proportions by studying stroke thickness and angles.

4. Establishing Reference Lines
 - Define key baseline and outermost parameters to maintain structural consistency in reconstruction.
5. Creating a Cohesive Character Set
 - Use reference lines to reconstruct letterforms, ensuring accuracy and consistency.
6. Finalizing the Calligraphic Style
 - Standardize proportions, base characters, ascenders, and descenders to define the foundational script.
7. Deconstructing Letterforms for Structural Analysis
 - Break down letterforms into anatomically distinct visual features of the Sinhala script.
 - Identify and classify common strokes used in this calligraphic style.
8. Tool Experimentation and Material Testing
 - Test various tools to replicate the mural letterforms.
 - Determine that a paintbrush and ink provided the most accurate representation of the original style.
9. Process Documentation
 - Record each step of the reconstruction, including:
 - Hand movements
 - Pressure variations
 - Stroke direction
 - Techniques such as dips and lifts
10. Finalizing the Calligraphic Construction Process
 - Establish a step-by-step guide for reconstructing the Karapitiya Temple calligraphy style, preserving it as a historical reference and practical resource for contemporary use.

Ensuring Long-Term Accessibility and Application

This structured methodology ensures that the calligraphic style from Karapitiya Raja Maha Viharaya is not only preserved but also made accessible for future studies, artistic applications, and contemporary design interpretations.

The findings from this research contribute to the revival and reintegration of historical Sri Lankan calligraphy, ensuring its continued relevance in both traditional and modern creative practices.

3. Reconstruction, Digitization, and Step-by-Step Manual Development

The reconstruction phase involved a rigorous process of reinterpreting and refining the script, ensuring its accuracy and usability for contemporary practice. This phase included:

- Freehand recreation of calligraphy letters through 200 trials per letter to analyze and confirm the stroke movements. This process helped finalize:
 - The distinct characteristics and refinement to the calligraphic style.
 - The number of strokes required to construct each letter.
 - The lifts, presser point and hand movements necessary for reconstructing the calligraphic forms accurately.

Once the letterforms were reconstructed, the root letters were digitized using Glyphs software, under the guidance of font designer and engineer Mr. Pathum Egodawatta. This digitization process ensured precision and consistency, allowing for a structured reproduction of the script.

After completing the digitized letterforms, the team developed detailed instructional illustrations outlining:

- The number of lifts required per letter.
- The movement and direction of hand strokes.

These illustrated instructions were then compiled into a comprehensive manual in preparation for a workshop.

Workshops and Public Engagement

The project concluded with a two-stage workshop series aimed at testing and disseminating the reconstructed calligraphic style:

1. University Workshop – Conducted with undergraduate students from the Bachelor of Design degree program at the University of Moratuwa. This session provided an opportunity to:
 - Test the manual's effectiveness in guiding learners.
 - Observe how design students interpreted and adapted the reconstructed calligraphy style.
 - Refine the instructional content based on student feedback and performance.
2. Public Workshop and Presentation – The findings and reconstructed calligraphic style were publicly presented at the Sri Lanka Design Festival on 9th November 2024. This event:
 - Introduced a wider audience to the historical and artistic significance of the Karapitiya calligraphy style.
 - Provided hands-on experience for participants to engage with the script.
 - Encouraged contemporary artists, designers, and calligraphers to explore and integrate the style into modern creative practices.

By reconstructing, digitizing, and formalizing the calligraphic style into a structured learning manual, this project has successfully revived an important aspect of Sri Lanka's calligraphic heritage, making it accessible, teachable, and adaptable for both scholarly and artistic communities.

For this, we are extremely grateful for the India Sri Lanka foundation for your support.

A few captures are found below:

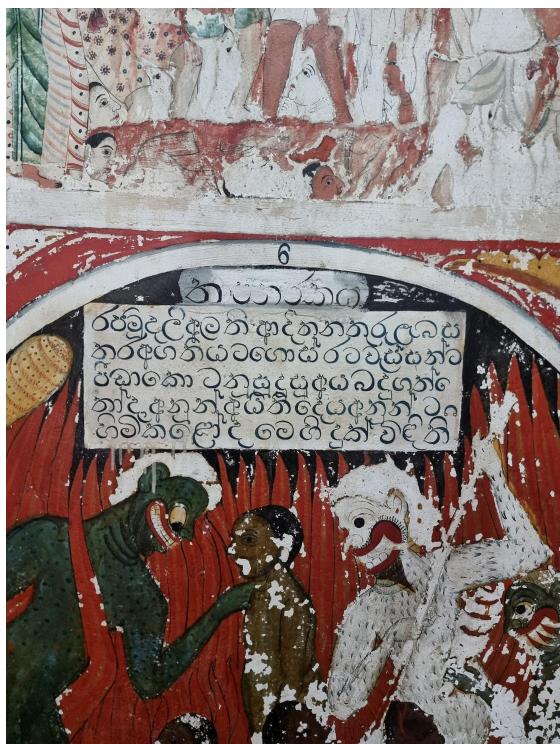
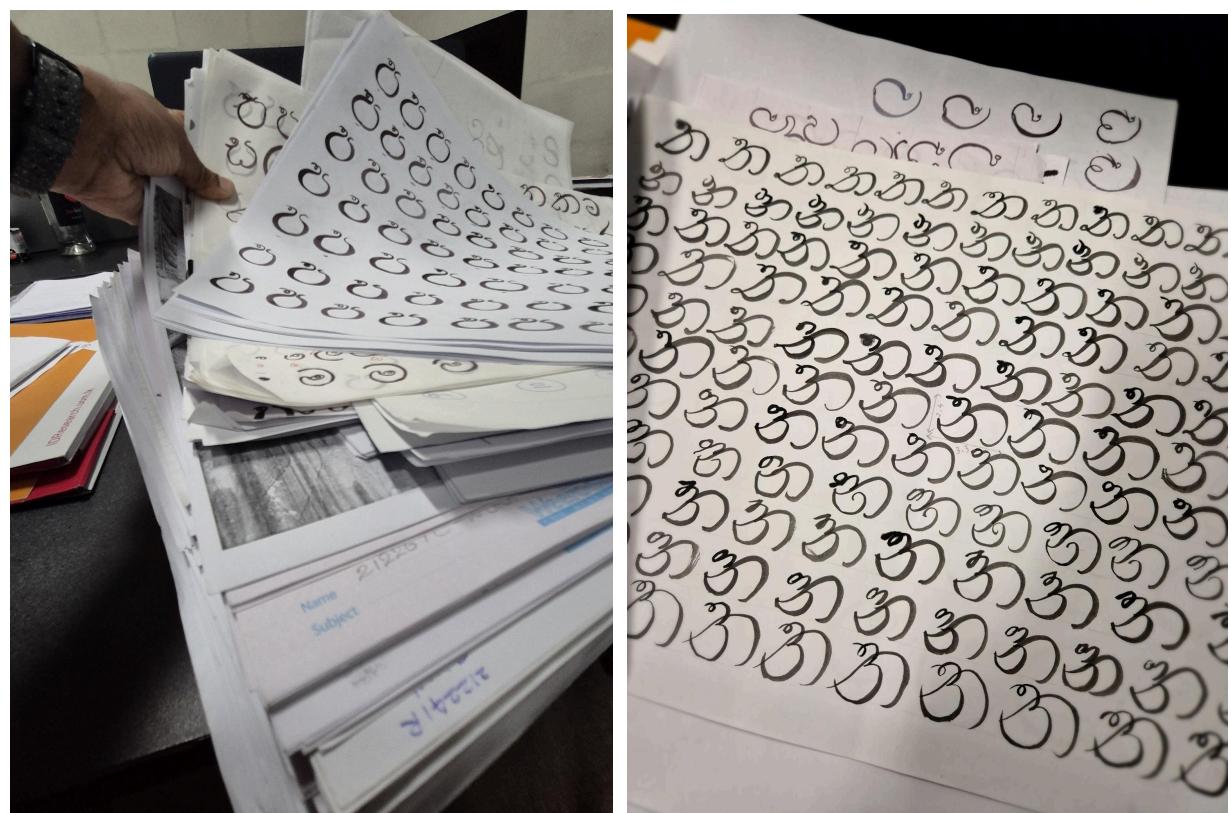
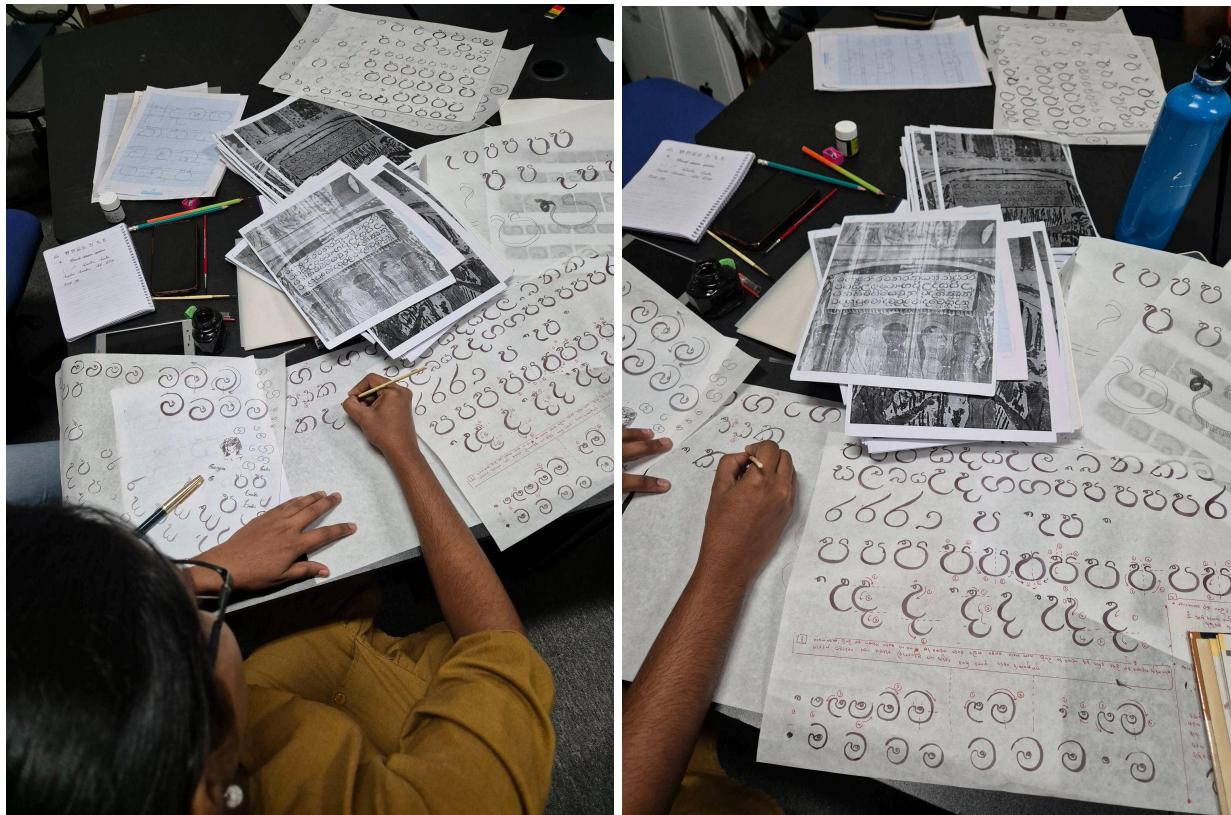


Fig. 01: The murals of the Karapitiya Raja Maha Vihara, Galle and its 18th century Sinhala Calligraphic style



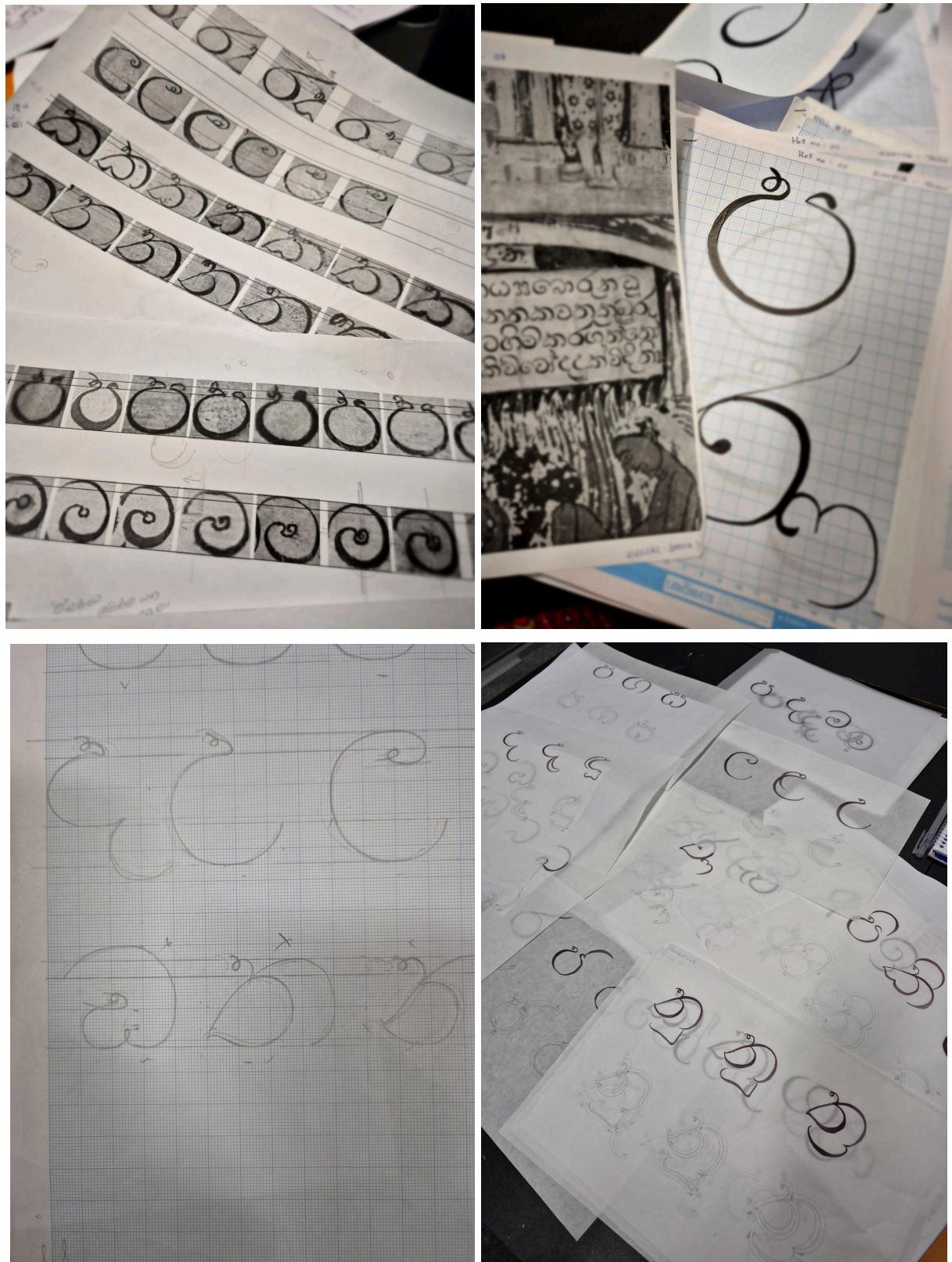


Fig. 02: Research process - Initial Lettering with Brush

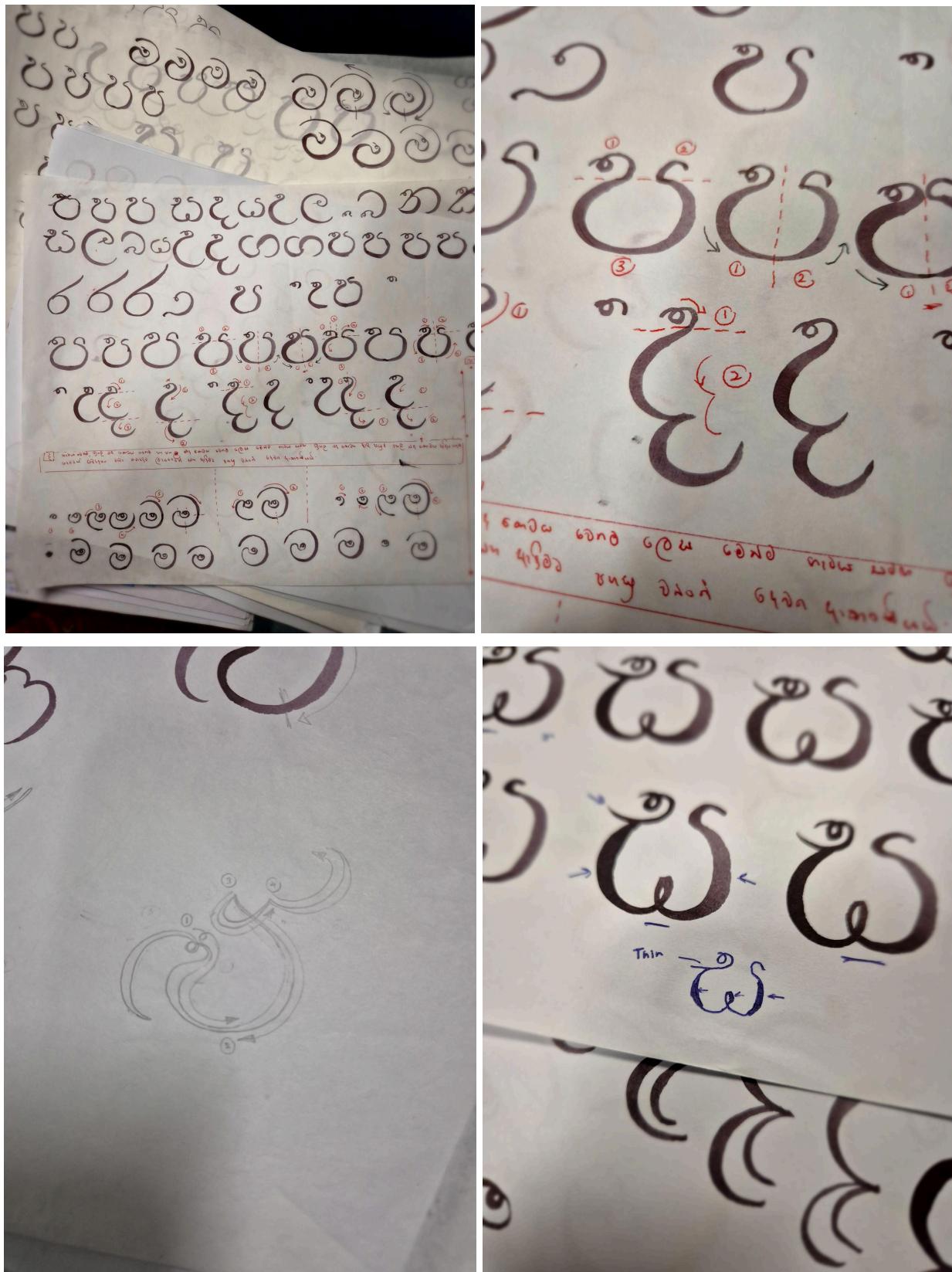


Fig. 03: Research process - Letterform Analysis

4- Workshops and Publicity

On behalf of the entire research team, we extend our gratitude to the Sri Lanka-India Foundation for their generous financial support, as well as to SLDF and AOD Colombo for providing necessary support for the workshops. We also acknowledge the contributions of the three research assistants who played a crucial role in facilitating the workshop series and documentation process. Thank you to:

- P.B.S.Deshani Ariyathilake
- A.I Sewwandi
- K.A Udari Gunawardhana

Workshop Engagement

The workshop series included two primary sessions conducted with undergraduate students from the Department of Integrated Design, University of Moratuwa:

- Level 3 Workshop (conducted on [insert date])
Focused on basic stroke techniques and constructing traditional letterforms. Participants engaged in hands-on activities to understand the core principles of Sinhala calligraphy.
- Level 2 Workshop (conducted on [insert date])
Built upon the foundational knowledge from the Level 3 workshop while exploring modern adaptations of traditional letterforms in contemporary design applications.

For the Level 2 workshop, approximately 28 students participated, while for Level 3, around 30 students took part, making these sessions highly interactive and engaging.

- Main Workshop: "Reviving Sinhala Calligraphy: A Hands-On Journey in Reconstructing Traditional Letterforms"

This primary workshop was conducted as part of the research project "Preserving Calligraphic Heritage", a collaboration between Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama from the University of Moratuwa and Prof. Girish Dalvi from the Indian Design Center, IIT Bombay, with funding from the Sri Lanka-India Foundation.

Participants were guided through a step-by-step process as outlined in the research-based manual, allowing them to reconstruct traditional Sinhala calligraphy for contemporary applications. The hands-on nature of the workshop provided attendees with practical exposure to historical stroke techniques, brush manipulation, and letterform construction.

Held at Cinnamon Life, Colombo, as part of the Sri Lanka Design Festival (SLDF), the workshop was attended by several participants, including individuals with or without prior experience in calligraphy and brush manipulation. Design students and educators with a keen interest in Sinhala calligraphy also took part. The event was a dynamic and interactive session, with participants exploring the historical context, structure, and aesthetics of Sinhala calligraphy under expert guidance.

Audience Feedback & Impact

Participants expressed deep appreciation for the workshop's unique approach to Sinhala calligraphy. Many found the step-by-step reconstruction process particularly insightful, enabling them to connect with Sri Lanka's calligraphic heritage in a hands-on manner. The opportunity to explore both traditional techniques and modern adaptations sparked enthusiasm among design students and educators alike.

The collaborative nature of the workshop, bringing together students, researchers, and calligraphy enthusiasts, reinforced the importance of reviving endangered art forms. The research assistants played a vital role in facilitating discussions and hands-on sessions, further enriching the learning experience.

Publicity and a few Captures

Letters of Legacy: Hands-on Calligraphy Reconstructing Traditional Sinhala Letterforms

Venue:

Boardroom 2, Level 8
Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams

In collaboration with



Entrance: Free
Limited seats available, **Register now!**

Workshop by:
Dr. Sumanthri
Samarawickrama

Nov 9th
10 am - 12 Noon



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Letters of Legacy: Hands-on Calligraphy Reconstructing Traditional Sinhala Letterforms

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28 October 2024



Project funded by India-Sri Lanka Foundation



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Script and Structure: Conference on Typography and its Cultural Relevance

Conference by:
Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama, Pathum Egodawatte, Anant Ahuja, Pooja Saxena, Sarang Kulkarni

Nov 9th
3 pm - 6 pm

Venue: Studio, Level 8, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams

Entrance: Free
Limited seats available. [Register now!](#)

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Register now for talks and workshops at [www.srilankadesignfestival.com](#) and stay tuned to find out more about our speakers and their work.

#srilankadesignfestival #sldf #aod #innovationisland

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October 28, 2024

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Letters of Legacy: Hands-on Calligraphy Reconstructing Traditional Sinhala Letterforms

Workshop by:
Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama

Nov 9th
10 am - 12 Noon

Venue: Boardroom 2, Level 8, Cinnamon Life at City of Dreams

In collaboration with 

Entrance: Free
Limited seats available. [Register now!](#)

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sldesignfest Letters of Legacy: Reconstructing Traditional Sinhala Letterforms through Visual Design

Sri Lanka Design Festival 2024 presented by AOD

Hosted by Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama (@sumanthri), this workshop took participants on an immersive journey into the intricacies of Sinhala calligraphy, a script celebrated for its historical richness yet rarely practiced in modern design. Drawing inspiration from her research on 18th-century murals at Karapitiya Temple, Dr. Samarawickrama guided attendees through the nuanced process of reconstructing traditional letterforms using curated tracing sheets and manuals.

41 likes December 11, 2024

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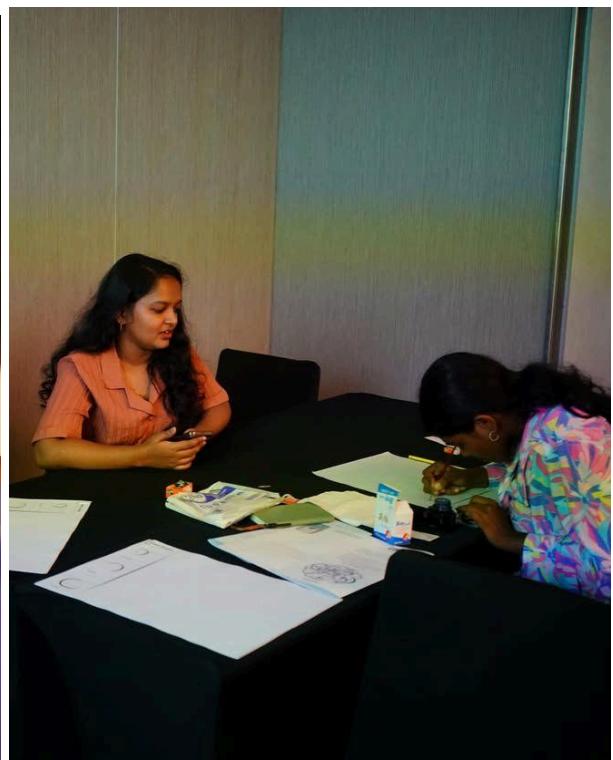
Supported by the Sri Lanka-India Foundation, this session emphasized the role of visual communication in cultural preservation and innovation, empowering attendees to take an active role in safeguarding and reimagining Sri Lanka's artistic narrative. It exemplifies how AOD encourages design students to merge traditional techniques with modern design sensibilities, fostering a new generation of culturally aware visual communicators.

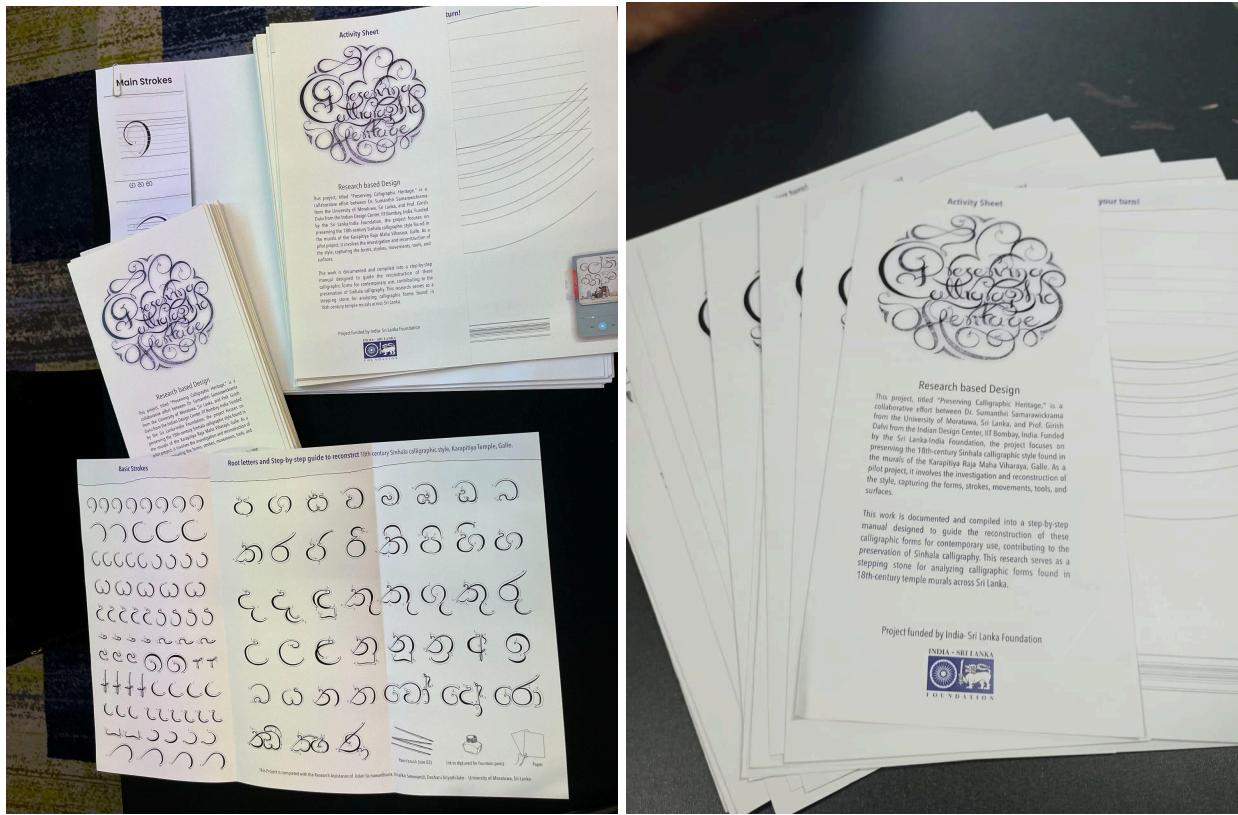
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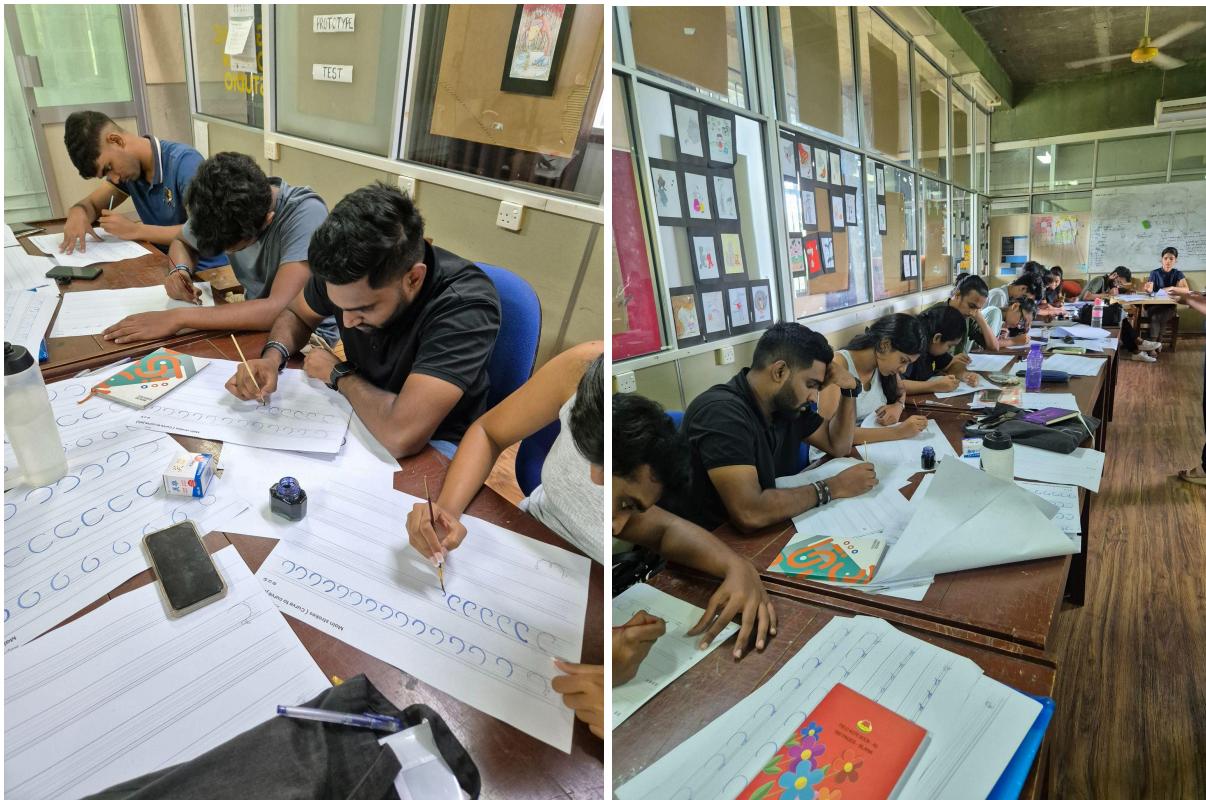
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Workshops with Undergraduates the Bachelor of Design(Hons) Degree programme, Media and Communication Design Level III students of the University of Moratuwa







PERSPECTIVE/FOOD | **3** | **Sunday, February 23, 2025**

Reviving Sinhala calligraphy

BY NAVEED ROZIAS

For centuries, calligraphy has been an integral part of many cultures, from Arabic and Chinese traditions to Japanese brush scripts. However, in Sri Lanka, Sinhala calligraphy has remained an underexplored art form, lacking the structured study and practice seen in other traditions.

Researcher and typographer Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama – a senior lecturer at the University of Moratuwa Department of Integrated Design – is working to change this narrative through a groundbreaking study.

Her research, supported by a grant from the India-Sri Lanka Foundation and in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay Industrial Design Centre (IDC) School of Design Professor Girish Dalvi has focused on the historic Karapitiya Temple near Galle, extracting and analysing Sinhala letterforms to create a structured manual for calligraphic practice and digitisation.

REDISCOVERING THE ART OF SINHALA CALLIGRAPHY

One of the most significant aspects of Dr. Samarawickrama's research has been identifying and reconstructing Sinhala letterforms from temple inscriptions and murals. "As this is a calligraphic form, we cannot simply extract a letter from a single inscription and expect it to be complete," she explained.

"We have to study similar letters, analyse their strokes and understand how the hand would have moved to write them," she added. This deep analysis of traditional formations helps in bridging the gap between historical and contemporary Sinhala script usage.

A key finding in her research challenges a long-standing myth: the belief that Sinhala letters are rounded because they were written on oil leaves.

"That's not completely accurate," Dr. Samarawickrama stated. "This idea was first proposed by Professor Seneviratne Paranavitana, but scholars like P.E.E. Fernando have pointed

out that other scripts written on oil leaves – such as Tamil and Sinhalese – contain vertical angular forms. The rounded nature of Sinhala script likely emerged due to the influence of Pallava script from South India, which had a preference for circular forms."

Unlike cultures that have emphasised calligraphy as an art form – such as Japan, China, and the Middle East – Sinhala calligraphy has not been widely acknowledged.

"In Sinhala, we don't have an established tradition of calligraphy," Dr. Samarawickrama said. "This is largely because Sinhalese culture did not emphasise it as a formal artistic discipline."

However, her research has uncovered evidence that variations in letter formation did exist. "In murals, we have identified different styles, suggesting that someone taught these techniques. Even though letters may look the same today, they were likely written in distinct ways in the past," she noted.

The process of reconstructing these historical calligraphic forms involved meticulous observation and reproduction. "We observed, extracted, and rewrote," she explained. "After figuring out how a letter might have been written, we standardised its structure, constructed a set of lines to determine its framework, and then analysed the variations in stroke thickness based on how pressure was applied by the hand."

This analysis was supplemented by studies conducted with

undergraduate students, which examined the comfort zones and pressure points involved in writing Sinhala script.

DEVELOPING A SINHALA CALLIGRAPHY MANUAL

One of the major outcomes of Dr. Samarawickrama's research is the creation of a structured manual for Sinhala calligraphy.

"We weren't completely sure what direction our research would take at the start," she shared. "But as we progressed, we realised the importance of identifying baselines, stroke sequences, and structural elements to turn calligraphy into a teachable skill."

The manual follows a logical learning progression, starting with basic strokes before moving into more advanced formations.

A crucial aspect of this process was understanding the 'skeleton' of each letter. "After placing letters on a grid, we examined where to apply pressure to create variations in thick and thin strokes," she explained. "Each letter had its own characteristics. For example, when studying the letter 'pa', we looked

at all possible variations, identified where strokes were thicker, and determined whether multiple strokes were used."

She was supported in her research by graduates also studying typography – P.B.S. Deshani Ariyathilake, K.A. Udari Gunawardhana, and A.I. Sewwandi – each of whom played pivotal roles in guiding the research and mapping out letterforms.

Currently, research is progressing toward digitising these reconstructed letterforms to create calligraphic fonts. "Digitisation will allow us to test the script's adaptability as a font," Dr. Samarawickrama said. "This will be a major step in preserving Sinhala calligraphy and making it more accessible for modern applications."

Dr. Samarawickrama's work also includes hands-on public engagement through workshops, such as those conducted at the Sri Lanka Design Festival (SLDF). "At SLDF, we worked with participants to introduce them to the basics of Sinhala calligraphy," she said. "We gave them the foundational strokes, showed them how to use ink, and guided them in understanding wrist movements. Many found it challenging despite the seeming simplicity, proving that

calligraphy is a skill that needs structured practice."

Public interest in these workshops has been quite positive. "The response was fantastic, but we could only accommodate 10 participants," she noted. "Many more people wanted to join, which shows that there is real enthusiasm for Sinhala calligraphy."

A key question that comes to mind when thinking of modern Sinhala calligraphy is whether it requires a standardised method or whether it should remain a freeform artistic expression.

"It definitely needs a clear methodology. People can do creative things if they have a good sense of wrist movements and letter formations, but without a structured reference, we lack a foundation for developing the skill further," Dr. Samarawickrama asserted.

The manual she is developing aims to provide this foundation. "In Sri Lanka, people often need structured guidance to feel confident in their creative pursuits. It's not a bad thing; it just means we need a solid point of reference from which new ideas can emerge," she said.

A TYPOGRAPHIC BASE FOR THE FUTURE

Dr. Samarawickrama's research has been made possible through a collaborative effort between the University of Moratuwa and the IIT Bombay, led by Professor Girish Dalvi. "Girish and I put this grant together to ensure that the research could be done systematically," she shared. "This collaboration is just the beginning. Others will take this work forward, expanding on what we have discovered."

Reflecting on the project's biggest findings, she emphasised how much the research had evolved over time. "We initially thought creating the manual would be straightforward," she admitted. "But as we progressed, we discovered how crucial technical aspects – like line spacing, ascenders, and descenders – were to create a truly usable guide."

The study also provided insight into the calligraphers of the past. "By studying these scripts, we pay homage to the artisans who created them and ensure their work lives on."

Looking ahead, Dr. Samarawickrama hopes to complete and publish the Sinhala calligraphy manual within the year. "This research is about preservation, but also about bringing Sinhala calligraphy into modern design. We are making sure this art form has a future, not just a past," she said.

Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama (second from left) with her research assistants P.B.S. Deshani Ariyathilake, A.I. Sewwandi, and K.A. Udari Gunawardhana

27th February, 2025

Reviving Sinhala calligraphy

27 Feb 2025 | By Nimesh Ratnayake

Developing a Sinhala calligraphy manual

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The manual follows a logical learning progression, starting with basic strokes before moving into more advanced formations.

A key element of this process was understanding the 'language' of each letter. "After placing markers on a 'G', we examined where to apply pressure to create a thick and thin effect on the stroke," she explained. "Each letter had its own characteristics. For example, when studying the letter 'pa', we looked at all possible variations, identified where strokes were thicker, and determined whether multiple strokes were used."

She was supported in her research by graduates also studying typography – P.L.S. Devasuri Arayathilake, K.A. Udara Gunawardhana, and A.I. Seneviratne – each of whom played pivotal roles in guiding the research and mapping out letterforms.

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One of the critical findings in Dr. Samanwickrama's research is how Sinhala calligraphy can be applied beyond special documents or decorative purposes. "Calligraphy simply means 'beautiful handwriting', but it has the potential to be so much more," she highlighted.

To explore its potential, she conducted an experiment with a junior batch of students at the University of Moratuwa, asking them to innovate with Sinhala letterforms. "They incorporated traditional motifs into their designs, proving that Sinhala calligraphy can have contemporary design applications."

Dr. Samanwickrama's work also includes hands-on public engagement through workshops, such as those conducted at the Sri Lanka Design Festival (SLDF).

"At SLDF, we worked with participants to introduce them to the basics of Sinhala calligraphy," she said. "We gave them the foundational strokes, showed them how to use ink, and guided them in understanding various motifs. Many found it challenging during the writing samples, proving that calligraphy is a skill that needs structured practice."

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The manual she is developing aims to provide this foundation. "In Sri Lanka, people often need structured guidelines to feel confident in their creative pursuits. It's a bit like dancing; it just means we need a solid point of reference from which new ideas can emerge," she said.

A typical day for the researcher

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THIS WEEK »»

- PERERA'S BAILA NIGHT
- 5 July at Water's Edge
- REV MOTOR SHOW 2024
- Ends today at BMICH
- CHILDREN FOR INCLUSIVE FUTURES ART EXHIBITION
- 6 and 7 July at Barefoot Gallery Colombo
- SEEKERS' INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FAIR
- 6 July at Taj Samudra Colombo

Sunday, June 30, 2024

the sunday morning brunch

INTERNATIONAL MAKEUP AND THE LANKAN MARKETPLACE

SEE PAGE 3

Understanding the Sinhala script

● Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama's revolutionary work on Sinhala typography

NAVEED ROZIAS

One of the key visuals of the Sri Lankan identity is our Sinhala script in all its forms – from the flowing Sinhala script of the ola leaves of old to the modern Sinhala typefaces pioneered for the digital age.

After the printing press was introduced, the evolution of letter forms went through various phases – from cold metal to hot metal, followed by light, and now completely virtual.

Originating from the ancient Brahmi script, Sinhala is characterised by its flowing, curvilinear letters that create a sense of harmony and beauty on the written page. The script features intricate diacritical marks and elaborate ligatures that enhance its visual appeal.

Over the centuries, the script has adapted to incorporate loanwords from languages like Tamil, Portuguese, Dutch and English while maintaining its distinct identity. Today, the Sinhala script remains an integral part of Sri Lankan culture and heritage, used in official documents, signage, and artistic expressions.

But how is the heritage of the Sinhala script being preserved? Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama, Design Senior Lecturer Dr. Sumanthri Samarawickrama, guided *The Sunday Morning Brunch* as we sat down with University of Moratuwa, Department of Integrated

Her work bridges the gap between art, science, and design. With a PhD in typography, Dr. Samarawickrama's research has had a profound impact on the field, especially in helping to understand the anatomy and evolution of Sinhala letter forms. Currently, her groundbreaking project at the Karapitiya Temple aims to preserve and revive ancient calligraphy forms, adding another significant chapter to her illustrious career.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH TYPE

Dr. Samarawickrama's academic journey is as impressive as her research. She earned her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Moratuwa, followed by a Master's in Visual Communication from LASALLE, Singapore and a PhD from the University of Moratuwa in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay.

Continued on page 2



PHOTO: USHA KARUNAWAYA

▲ CONT'D. FROM PAGE 1

Understanding...

Reflecting on her path, she noted: "I got into typography somewhat randomly, but my unique way of thinking and working guided me here. It's been a great ride."

Dr. Samarawickrama's role as a research educator at a technical university like the University of Moratuwa presents its own set of challenges, given the university's strong focus on engineering and technology. Yet, her efforts have significantly enriched the university's curriculum and research output, particularly in the areas of graphic design and communication.

The Sinhala script, like many writing systems, has a rich history influenced by various cultural and technological changes. Dr. Samarawickrama's research provides a comprehensive timeline tracing the evolution of Sinhala typefaces from early inscriptions to modern digital forms. The script's distinct circular anatomy, influenced by the traditional practice of writing on oil leaves, sets it apart from other scripts, including Western scripts.

"The idea of the ola leaf is not lifting the pen and going on; you do until you finish the line," Dr. Samarawickrama explained. This continuous, flowing style was disrupted with the advent of the printing press in the 18th century. The introduction of movable type by Dutch and British colonists brought about significant changes.

"After the printing press was introduced, the evolution of letter forms went through various phases – from cold metal to hot metal, followed by light, and now completely virtual," she explained.

PRESERVING SINHALA CALLIGRAPHY FROM DAY'S GONE BY

One of Dr. Samarawickrama's research interests is the preservation of calligraphy forms found in the murals of the Karapitiya Temple. This project aims to create a manual that documents these ancient forms, providing resources for future generations to learn from and use to revive Sinhala calligraphy.

The process is meticulous and collaborative. "We photograph the murals, study the forms, and then convert and recreate those letters," she said. The goal is to ensure that these scripts, often lost to time and modernity, are preserved and passed on in contemporary contexts. Working with a team, including Prof. Girish Dabir from IIT Bombay, the project promises to be a significant contribution to the preservation of Indic scripts.

Understanding the historical context of the Sinhala script is crucial for appreciating its unique characteristics and development. Dr. Samarawickrama's research has delved into various historical periods, highlighting how the script evolved over centuries. The eighth or ninth century marks a significant point where Sinhala letterforms began

"No one has bothered to define our local visual identity, which is important if we want to expand on a subject"

to take on their distinctive shapes, moving away from the Brahmic scripts that influenced them.

However, much of the modern understanding of Sinhala typography stems around the 16th century. Dr. Samarawickrama's work seeks to fill this gap by tracing the script's development through the present day.

She pointed out that there was a common misconception that the script did not evolve after this period. "People often think it hadn't evolved after the 16th century, which was also when the printing press was introduced," she explained, noting that the script was quite different.

Dr. Samarawickrama noted that understanding these different stages in the evolution of Sinhala typefaces could have an important impact on both how to record the history of Sinhala type, as well as shedding light on how to better standardise the use of fonts across various industries.

For instance, the introduction of the printing press in 173 brought about significant changes in Sinhala typography. Early printed documents, such as the 1737 prayer book and tax notices, showcase the adaptation of Sinhala letters to printed forms. These early works were often produced by the royal court or colonial rulers, both for administrative purposes and evangelisation.

Despite these advancements, Dr. Samarawickrama pointed out that the modern use of Sinhala typefaces was still evolving. "Sinhala type has been evolving until the present day – its usage is clearly changing," she said. However, the integration of technology with traditional letterforms is often lacking due to a gap in foundational knowledge.

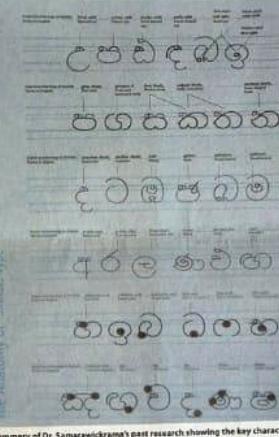
LOCAL VS. WESTERN TYPOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Samarawickrama is a strong advocate for local visual identity, which she believes is crucial for the growth and recognition of Sri Lankan design.

"No one has bothered to define our local visual identity, which is important if we want to expand on a subject," she insisted.

Understanding the evolution of Western letterforms and type is often something that is easy to do because the wealth of documentation that surrounds it. One of the critical points Dr. Samarawickrama raises is the importance of developing a local perspective on typography.

She also explained that Western theories and practices could not be directly applied to Sinhala typography due to its unique



The Anatomy of Sinhala Type

A summary of Dr. Samarawickrama's past research showing the key characteristics of Sinhala script.

The power...

■ **Curiosity:** Asking questions and seeking to understand the reasons behind success and behaviour is crucial. Nicklin pointed out that leaders ask questions like, "How do we understand why this happened?" or "Why do you feel this way?" By fostering a culture of curiosity, leaders can better understand their employees and address issues more effectively.

Nicklin also stressed the importance of measuring empathy and incorporating it into the organization culture. "If you want to change culture, you have to formalise how you change it," she asserted. This means embedding empathy training into regular activities and ensuring that it is a part of the performance metrics and evaluations.

EMPATHY AND SOCIETY

Empathy extends beyond the workplace. It is a critical skill for societal well-being and human survival. Nicklin pointed out that when empathy is low within a society, we can see higher levels of distress, isolation, and even suicide.

This highlights the essential role of empathy in fostering positive interactions and addressing social issues.

In personal relationships, empathy enables individuals to connect more deeply and understand each other better.

Nicklin shared that understanding another person's reality did not mean agreeing with them but that it provided a foundation for meaningful and compassionate interactions.

This understanding can prevent conflicts and strengthens bonds, whether in families, friendships, or romantic relationships.

Nicklin's personal journey into empathy advocacy began with a revelation about the empathy deficit in the workplace. She recounts an experience where a coach asked her about her leadership style, questioning whether it was intuitive or empathetic. This moment led her to discover the 'empathy deficit' and its profound negative impact on societal well-being, including the alarming rates of youth suicide.

"Learning about the empathy deficit changed my life," Nicklin shared, adding that it was this which propelled her into a mission to promote empathy through her work, including her best-selling book and popular podcast.

THE QUANTIFIABLE COSTS OF THE EMPATHY DEFICIT

With empathy often seen as a 'soft' skill, Nicklin's quantitative approach to empathy helps drive home just how much our lack of empathy costs us. A few sobering statistics Nicklin shared are:

■ 52% of us are lonely, globally.

Loneliness is considered more dangerous to our health than smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Surgeon General, US)

■ Only 24% of the global workforce

is engaged. 70% of people are disengaged and disconnected at work. This has led to an \$ 8.8 million problem, which is the calculated loss based on our collective disengagement in the workplace (*Business Insider*).

■ 55% of the workforce today claims they are currently considering resigning.

■ 79% of people will work longer hours of choice, for an empathetic boss (Gallup).

■ Employees of empathetic leaders are 63% more engaged and 48% more innovative (Gallup).

■ Gallup's data shows that highly engaged teams are 21% more productive compared to their less engaged counterparts.

■ Higher employee engagement often translates to better customer service. Engaged employees are more attentive and motivated, leading to a 10% increase in customer satisfaction scores, according to Lattice.

FOSTERING EMPATHY

Empathy, as Nicklin explained, is not an inherent trait but a skill that can be taught and developed. Here are some practical steps *Branch* has put together based on her insights:

■ **Listen actively:** Practise listening to understand, not just to respond. This involves giving full attention to the speaker and seeking to comprehend their perspective fully.

■ **Ask questions:** By asking questions, we can dig deeper into the reasons behind actions and feelings. This can provide valuable insights and foster a better understanding.

■ **Measure empathy:** Incorporate empathy into performance metrics and organisational evaluations. This helps to reinforce the value of empathy and ensures that it is a valuable part of the culture.

■ **Train and practise:** Provide training on empathy and create opportunities for employees to practise it regularly. Repetition and reinforcement are key to developing this skill.

■ **Acknowledge and validate:** Acknowledging the acknowledgement and validation of someone's feelings and perspectives can be more impactful than any action.

Letting people know they are heard and understood can foster trust and connection.

Empathy is a powerful skill, which, while frequently thought of in the context of the workplace, far transcends the boundaries of work, shaping how we as individuals and as a society approach personal relationships and collective well-being.

Nicklin's advocacy and insights centre around the fact that empathy is not just about being kind or compassionate; it is about understanding and connecting with others on a deeper level as well.

By recognising empathy as a vital skill and actively fostering it, we can create more engaged, productive, and harmonious environments, both professionally and personally.

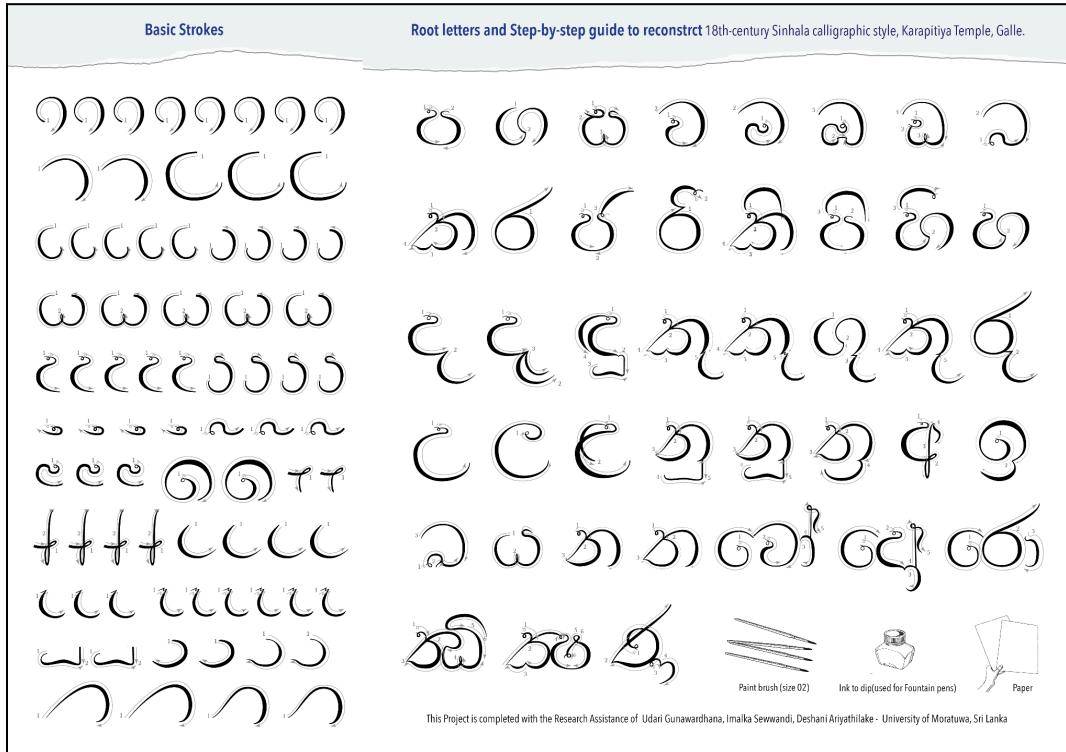
5- Acknowledgment & Future Prospects

We sincerely thank the Sri Lanka-India Foundation for their continued support in preserving Sri Lanka's rich calligraphic tradition. Their funding was instrumental in conducting this research and organizing the workshop. We kindly request the release of the remaining 50% of the award to further our efforts in expanding this initiative.

Additionally, we look forward to future collaborations, exhibitions, and publications that will showcase the reconstructed Sinhala calligraphic forms and encourage their application in contemporary design.

6- Calligraphy Manual

Manual One: Introduction to the "Preserving Calligraphic Heritage" Project



Manual Two: Activity Based on the "Preserving Calligraphic Heritage" Project

Root letters and Step-by-step guide to reconstruct 18th-century Sinhala calligraphic style, Karapitiya Temple, Galle.

Activity Sheet

Research based Design

This project, titled "Preserving Calligraphic Heritage," is a collaborative effort between Dr. Sumanthri Samarakrama from the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, and Prof. Girish Dalvi from the Indian Design Center, IIT Bombay, India. Funded by the Sri Lanka-India Foundation, the project focuses on preserving the 18th-century Sinhala calligraphic style found in the murals of the Karapitiya Raja Maha Vihara, Galle. As a pilot project, it involves the investigation and reconstruction of the style, capturing the forms, strokes, movements, tools, and surfaces.

This work is documented and compiled into a step-by-step manual designed to guide the reconstruction of these calligraphic forms for contemporary use, contributing to the preservation of Sinhala calligraphy. This research serves as a stepping stone for analyzing calligraphic forms found in 18th-century temple murals across Sri Lanka.

Project funded by India-Sri Lanka Foundation

This Project is completed with the Research Assistance of Udai Gunawardhana, Imalka Sewwandi, Deshani Ariyathilake - University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Activity

Now it's your turn!

Step 01
Draw a rectangular guideline around the entire area and add reference lines to guide your sketch. You will see straight, parallel lines and an arc shape for the main title, as well as straight, parallel lines at the bottom for the tagline.

Step 02
Sketch the basic structure of the letters along the guidelines. Focus on creating clean, balanced shapes that align with the reference lines. Pay close attention to spacing and proportions to maintain a harmonious layout.

Step 03
Begin inking the letters using a brush and ink. Maintain the calligraphic style by creating distinct areas of thick and thin lines. Apply slightly more pressure for thicker sections to achieve bold strokes, and use lighter pressure for thinner sections to create fine, delicate lines. Ensure all thick areas are consistently bold and all thin areas are evenly light.

Step 04
Add additional details, such as icons or decorative elements, using the provided tools. Position these details to complement the overall composition and balance with the proportions of the letters. Refer to the example image for guidance, or feel free to incorporate your own creative ideas to enhance the design.

Step 01

Step 02

Step 03

Step 04

Now it's your turn!

INDIA - SRI LANKA FOUNDATION

Manual Three: Calligraphic Form Reconstruction Sheets – A3 printed sheets to assist in reconstructing calligraphic forms.

