

# A Study on the Socio - Cultural Background of the Kōlam Theatre

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The aim of this study is to inquire into the significance of the socio-cultural background of the Kōlam theatre. Kōlam is a form of folk drama tradition created by the Sinhalese folk artists. The Kōlam theatre has been created for the entertainment of the village folk. Themes for Kōlam have also been collected from the society. Sri Lanka was under colonial rule for nearly three and a half centuries beginning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the rural folk in Sri Lanka suffered many injustices on account of the wanton behavior of those in high positions in the administration. Since they were unable to openly protest or rise against the unjust rule, they had to look for other means to express their anger and disapproval of the same. It is under such circumstances that the Kōlam theatre has come into being. Moreover, they have also made good use of the experiences they gather from the society. In this way, the Kōlam theatre which serves as a mirror reflecting interesting aspects of the social life of the society at large has assumed the form of a folk art. Organizing a Kōlam performance is a community affair to which all villagers have to contribute their share. Kōlam theatre in some areas of Sri Lanka has connection with the Gammadu ritual and the Pattini cult. Accordingly, it is clear that the Kōlam theatre has been in existence as a socio-cultural festival in connection with the religious aspects. The reason for selecting Kōlam theatre for this study among the other form of Sri Lankan folk play such as Sokari and Nadagam is that it is much closer to the rural community than the other theatre, as an art form performed for entertaining the populace as well as propitiating certain divinities. In this study, practical observations and interviews are used as the main tools of data collection. In addition literary sources are also used.

**Key words:** *Culture, Entertainment, Folk, Society, Theatre.*