

## V. Provisional List to be nominated on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

### Provisional inscribed items (to be examined)

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Sri Lanka being a signatory to the Convention ICH and a country with enormous wealth of ICH of universal significance would be pleased to submit a representative number of items from among the innumerable number of such items for the consideration and the kind attention of the ICHCAP. Selection of the items had been done carefully to give priority to national events, ethnically important events and events of religious importance in order to give a true and wider picture of the diversity of the culture that had been evolved through united efforts of the members of a harmonious and tolerant society that exists in Sri Lanka.

#### 1. Item: Sinhala/ National New Year Festival.

**Official name:** Sinhala and Hindu New Year. (see below for the explanation to get the correct name)

**Local name:** Sinhala / Jathika Aluth Awrudu Ulela (Sinhala/National New Year Festival). Alternatively it is referred to as Bak Maha Ulela-Great Festival of the Month of Bak or April. New Year falls on the month of April ( Bak in Sinhala denotes prosperity)

**History & Background:** The celebration of the dawn of New Year had come from time immemorial and no period of its origin is traceable. However it is believed that the custom of celebrating the New Year with several appended customs had been in vogue from the time of the known history. Evidences are traced among the poetry in the Sigiriya mirror wall dating back to about the 7th century where reference is made to the custom of sighting the new moon which indeed is an essential custom during the New Year celebrations. . References can be found in the writings of some of the foreign visitors in the past as well. The importance attached to this festival as one that was celebrated as a national event by

everybody in the Island at the time can be understood by the action taken by the British colonial rulers to declare it a public holiday in 1885 in response to the demands made by the people. In doing so they made a blunder of naming it as Sinhala and Hindu New Year day in order to appease a section of the society. The blunder occurred when the festival was named after an ethnic group (Sinhala) and another religious group (Hindu) when in actual fact it was a national festival celebrated by everyone living in the country irrespective of ethnicity or religion. This was another instance of proving their adherence to the policy of divide and rule.

New Year is dawn on 14th April and the 13th is considered very important as the preparatory day to receive the expected New Year Prince on the following day. The personification of the New Year is very symbolic of the importance attached to this event by the indigenous people. All the preparations are aimed at this arrival of the most welcome visitor. However the actual preparation for the New Year begins much earlier specially with the environment starting to show signs of the prosperous season to come. Trees start blooming and rich harvest of fruits and berries is assured. Birds and beasts, bees and insects start roaming in the village environment more frequently converting the whole surrounding to a garden of festivals. The singing melodies of the New Year bird (*Kovla* in Sinhala) perform the role of a crier to inform the village folk about the impending arrival of the New Year and then the whole village gets activated like a hive of bees.

Preparation for the New Year is an essential feature and it is a long process. Starting with the cleaning of the surrounding, and the footpaths and the path leading to the well that provides drinking water they finish up with the cleaning and repairing of the houses. This displays their concern for the clean environment. The process would see an end only after new pots and pans are bought and new dresses, clothes and other new requirements are brought home. Need to be new in every sense is emphasised here. Finally, everyone at home will be busy collecting the items required to prepare the sweetmeats etc, bunch or two of plantain (banana), *cadju* nuts, and many other items necessary to prepare the New Year meals and sweets. However children never forget to ensure that required nuts and seeds be used at the folk games on the New Year day are collected. While the children attend to the collection of games materials, the elders will help them to prepare the swings of different types, playing areas for other types of folk games etc.

The special foods and sweetmeats etc will be prepared by the competent ladies in the village only a few days before the due date and will be kept safely without leaving any room for anybody to partake them before the due date since the first share has to be offered to the Lord Buddha for whom left overs will never be served. Hence it will be seen that from the time of the preparation for the event there is much observances to be followed and maximum community participation with all, men, women, children and elders jointly contributing their share to make the festivities most successful. Hence it is really a national event in its widest meaning.

When considering the great festivities believed to have been associated with the New Year celebrations invariable question that arises is as to how the people who had been engaged in such a heavy and strenuous job could have found the time and leisure to spend on games and amusements. The answer is very simple. Mother Nature herself had found them the way out by making this particular period the off-season in the cultivation cycle. The people are also free soon after completing the hazardous workload of the previous cultivation period and for them this happens to be the time for relaxation before the beginning of the next cultivation season. Therefore they had not only the required leisure to spend on them but also had all the resources to spend since attics and grain stores are full of the fruits of their labour and hence could enjoy the New Year in great joy and happiness with the family and neighbours..

From the very beginning of the preparation process till the end of the New Year customs proper everything pertaining to the New Year is performed according to auspicious times given by the astrologers. Not only the times were given but specific colours to wear and suitable directions to face are also prescribed and they have to be carefully followed. Hence one can see that there is a strong connection between the New Year, Religion and Astrology. Sighting of the old moon (moon of the past year) and the bathing for the last time for the year have to be performed according to the prescribed way and time. These symbolically indicate the severing of connections with the previous year.

There is a host of customs and rituals to be performed before the actual New Year dawns. Visiting the relatives in distant villages will be undertaken on a convenient day. The share to the temple will

have to be taken as dry rations before the penultimate day since nothing will be exchanged with anyone during the transition period that is from the time Sun is considered to have left one planet to the time it arrives at the other or in other words from day previous to the dawn of the New Year till the actual dawn of the New Year. Very importantly all the different people who provide their services towards the successful achievement of day to day activities in the normal life have to be rewarded for the New Year when they pay a visit. This is an absolutely essential duty to be performed by everybody since this is the opportunity to show gratitude to each other.

The dawn of the transition period called Sankranthi kalaya or the time the Sun is on the move and hence neither here nor there is the link between the old and the new year. By now everyone has finished the last bit of activity, cleaning the hearth and removing the ashes, emptying the water pitches and turning them upside down, and ensuring that nothing from the old year is left over. Then they eagerly wait for the arrival of the New Year Prince. This is also called the Punya kalaya (time for meritorious activities and hence the auspicious time). Since the transition period is considered to be good for nothing other than meritorious or religious activities, temples become the centres of activity during this period. The reverence in which the traditional people had observed these customs can be measured by the fact that everyone in the village including those who would have never been to the temple for the year do go to the temple with the family members on this occasion. Hence it can conveniently be argued that this is a mechanism adopted from the good old days to motivate people to engage in religious activities on this very auspicious day. Hence, one will be able to understand how and why the religiosity of the people in this country had originated and also the close connection between the temple and the New Year celebrations. The other most important feature during this period is the custom of refraining from taking any food (fasting) during this entire period until the arrival of the auspicious time for consuming food after the dawn of the New Year.

After several hours lasting for 8 to 10 hours of the transitional period comes the time when the Sun is believed to return to the planet from where the journey started completing a 365 day journey to start another journey once again. It is the auspicious hour of the dawn of New Year and the beginning of the festivities. Therefore the entire Nation in much jubilation starts the activities

for the New Year with a new vigour after getting the religious blessings for a happy and prosperous New Year. This is the beginning of the real significant part of the activities for the New Year. Most striking feature in these celebrations is the engaging of that entire Nation as one single individual in all these customs in the specified manner. This is unique since nowhere else can one find such commitment of an entire nation to adhere to the specified times, colours and directions to face in performing the New Year rituals.

The first task as the auspicious hour comes on is to revamp the hearth in order to kindle the new fire in the new hearth. Most significantly this great and honourable duty had from time immemorial been entrusted to the chief lady in the family or the mother. Significance of the honour associated with these inaugural activities can be properly understood only if the deep meaning hidden under these activities is well comprehended. Kindling the hearth for the first time is symbolic of introducing energy of the sun into the life of the residents. Without sun's energy none and nothing can survive hence mother is represented here as the giver of that power to the family members. Soon after the kindling of fire she starts cooking the new rice for the preparation of the first ceremonial meal namely Kiribath or Milk Rice a special ceremonial food of the Sinhalese. Having prepared the milk rice in the prescribed manner and giving necessary instructions to the other members of the family to prepare the table for auspicious meal, she takes the empty water pot with a pre-prepared bundle of herbal items and accompanied by a little girl in the family goes to the well that provides drinking water.

Here she first keeps the pot on the floor and worships the well saying "I thank you for the benevolence shown to us by providing drinking water through the year" and deposits the bundle of herbal medicinal materials inside the well and takes away a pot of new water. She tells the inquiring little girl that we have to be grateful to everyone whether a man or matter if any service had been rendered to us. This is what our Lord Buddha had taught us when He spent the second week after attaining Buddhahood by staring at the Bo-tree which provided Him only the shelter. This custom of taking a pot of water after depositing the bundle is called Ganu-denu kirima or first exchange for the New Year. One would be sad to know that such a valuable custom worth exemplifying by all has been corrupted after the commercialisation of the society and

replaced with an exchange of monetary gifts. This is a classic example of the ignorance of the true meaning of some of the ICH items depriving the society a very meaningful traditional custom and also bringing in the detrimental of modernization. Hence the need to make the society knowledgeable about them has become urgent.

As the lady returns from the ganu-denu with the well, the time is almost close to the next auspicious activity of consuming the first meal. Children and others at home had by now prepared the table with all the different sweetmeats and other items like the national ceremonial food, Kiribath (Milkrice) plantains (Banana), Hat-maluwa, a special dish of minimum of seven varieties prepared for the New Year meal only. Depending on the time fixed for the meals (if the time is in the morning hours) the first share will be offered to the Triple Gem by all the members in the family, another instance proving the strong link between the people, religion and the New Year. Then all the members will rally round the table dressed in the prescribed colour and facing the prescribed direction for the head of the family to feed everyone with the first handful. The father lights the lamp on the table wishing brightness to everybody's life in the coming year and reciting a blessing will start from the youngest in the family to feed everyone. This includes wife and any other elder in the family present on the occasion. Once the ceremonial part is over everyone would enjoy a hearty meal to each one's satisfaction in expectation of the next move. Father's role displayed here is a crystallization of the traditional responsibility of the head of a family namely feeding and looking after them. Father by feeding the first mouthful assures that in the same way he fed and looked after them during the previous year would not fail in his duty this year as well.

Then we come to the most important part of the ceremony, namely the exchange of blessings. The children and the young ones would come in with whatever gifts one could have afforded with a sheaf of betels and bend in knees and worship both father and mother after giving them the gifts. Parents then would kiss and hug them to bless them and give in return a suitable gift to be remembered for a long time. This ritual will go on until last one had paid the due respects to all the elders to him or her. This is considered most important since this is the exact time the younger ones are transmitted the correct ethics, values and virtues. The sheaf of betels is very symbolic here and the primary objective is to

inculcate the virtue of paying gratitude and gifts have no special significance at all.

It will be followed by an equally important custom. Once all have finished their meals everyone will be enthusiastically engaged in preparing shares to the neighbours and the loved ones in the vicinity. Each member in the family accompanied by another will visit a home with a plate full of New Year sweets with good wishes covered by a white cloth, symbolic of purity of the goodwill taken along with and hand over the plate with all the blessings to a member of that family. It is very important that you enter the neighbour's house before handing over and spend a short while to express the goodwill one would carry with the plate. If you are not ready to do so your plate will have no true acceptance and the hosts cannot be blamed. One who cannot spend a while on an auspicious occasion like that will not be accepted as a true friend and a well wisher. This custom is known as the *Beda hada gena kema* or enjoying by sharing with others. This again is an exemplary virtue that had been transmitted from generation to generation fostering the unity and cooperation among the people encouraging them to be interdependent.

However, most people prefer to be engaged in another customary practice even before going to visit neighbouring houses. That is to attend to some regular activity for the first time of the New Year. Elders in the village situations always prefer to start something connected to agriculture while the women folk engage themselves in knitting and weaving or mat weaving or some similar customary activity. But they encourage their young ones to engage in some sort of learning from books showing winds of change that is taking place in the society. This custom is known as the *weda aramba kirima* or the official starting of the usual activity for the New Year. This is intended to remind the nation that their main duty is to engage in productivity whether in goods or in service.

Once all these major customs are meticulously adhered to all the members of the society are free to engage in whatever way they prefer in the numerous activities associated with the New Year. This is the time they visit freely their own friends and known ones with whatever gift they can afford. Then most or almost all do engage in New Year games and past times or the folk games day and night. This is the time they are compelled to eat beyond their capacity since it is very rude to refuse anything offered from a house visited. Since folk games take place everywhere this is the

time for the folk games to breathe fresh life to sustain until the next New Year time. Most conspicuous feature of the New Year folk games is the emphasis laid on the participation rather than on the victory or the defeat. Also outstanding is the participation without any distinction of male and female, young and old, parents and children, and teacher and pupil. This is in quite contrast to the present day heavy attraction for victory and rewards.

All these festivities and enjoyment with uncontrolled eating and non-stopped participation in games and competitions have to come to an end in keeping with the vision of the indigenous people. Traditionally nothing is allowed to be carried on to endless levels. Everything has a limit beyond which none can go. System itself stipulates the limits. In the case of the New Year festivities the limit will be determined by the auspicious hour for anointing oil and bathing for the New Year which falls 2 to 3 days after the dawn of New Year. On this day according to astrological instructions specially prepared herbal oil will be anointed by a healthy and virtuous elderly person, mostly a native medical practitioner or a Buddhist priest followed by the new year bath. Often they are invited for a meal by the medical practitioner who is always regarded as a highly respected community leader. The idea behind this custom is the inculcation of the need to pay attention to the health and healthy life to the people indicating that the traditional practices had always been modelled to lead the community on the correct path.

Soon after this, may be in a day or two, the auspicious time to set out for the first time in the New Year for work arrives. Having enjoyed fully the New Year, and taking all the precautions to maintain good health and beaming with blessings from the temple, people set out in a new vigour for work with enthusiasm and in high spirit with the most laudable determination of doing a better service in the coming year. They never forget to take whatever gift they can get for their fellow-men. This in fact is the end of the customary traditions and practices related to the New Year. However now a days it can be seen that the celebrations meant for the month of April are been dragged on until about August through the efforts of the business community whose only motive is to promote their businesses rather than the traditional culture.

A close examination of the different customs adhered to on different occasions during this period it can be seen that the entire



festival has one basic objective to achieve, namely, the annual rejuvenation of the culture and its many aspects useful for the continuation of the peaceful and harmonious self-sufficient society in a healthy and strong position for the future. Therefore it is the occasion to transmit to the younger generation through practical lessons the knowledge about the manner in which they are adhered to. Festivities are mechanisms invented to keep them attached to the customs which teach them all the valuable virtuous qualities essential in leading a happy social life. In this context it is the occasion when all the different national identities like folk games, foods and beverages, full community participation, etc come into prominence. The high value given to sheaf of betels and the invariable get together of the members of a family at the ancestral home are also outstanding features of this occasion. Finally the importance attached to the custom of exchanging betels by members of the families as well as the village as a token of begging and granting of pardon for an enmity or misunderstandings if any, during the past year can be considered key factor of the strength of their society to survive amidst all the hindrances and encumbrances.

## **2. Item: Wesak Poya Celebrations**

**Local name:** Wesak Maha Mangalya (Great Wesak Celebrations)  
Temagul Wesak Mangalya (Three Great Wesak Celebrations)

**History, background:** The full moon poya (religious day in the calendar) day that falls on the month of May is considered to be the day on which Guathama Siddhartha of ancient Dambadiva (India) was borne 2635 years Before Present (BP), attained supreme knowledge to be the Lord Buddha 2600 year BP and passed away 2555 years BP. Hence the adherents of His eternal teachings consider this triply auspicious day as the most significant religious day in their calendar and engage in highest level of celebrations in His honour. Ever since Buddhism had been made the official religion of the country this day had been declared a holiday to facilitate the people to engage in meritorious activities in His honour. Sri Lanka was denied this privilege by the European colonial masters from about 1771 but restored after strong demands in 1885.

Its international acceptance as a worthy day to respect a worthy religious teacher was given legal validity in 2002 when the UNO

declared it as an international holiday from then onwards. In Sri Lanka the celebrations to mark this day assume gigantic proportions with every household been extravagantly decorated and lit, every major road and town been gaily decorated and illuminated to give a bright and colourful glitter that astound even the locals, leave along the many foreigners who come here with the sole ambition of seeing this rare event. Locally all the Buddhists through the temples, some to engage in religious activities and others to observe the precepts for the day. This too is a national event with many a added events like decorated and illuminated pandals, free eating halls on the way sides, different performances to enhance the religious feelings etc. Country 's history shows that this is one of the oldest celebrations conducted under the patronage of the Kings.

However it must be said that Wesak celebrations are been held in almost all countries where Buddhism enjoys great recognition though the intensity, decorative aspects and other details may differ from country to country. Yet the fact remains that all of them remember and mark the three main events in the life of Lord Buddha on this day. This has been further encouraged by the United Nation's recognition of this day as an international holiday.

### **3. Item: Poson Poya Celebration**

**Local name:** Poson Mangalya (Poson celebrations)

**History, background:** This can be called one of the most unique local ceremonies confined to Sri Lanka since it is connected with the arrival of Arahanth Mahinda Thero in Sri Lanka some 2300 years ago to propagate Buddhism though certainly did not carry with him any weapon or other lethal object in hand intended for using force in spreading the Dhamma that is based on non-violence. Poson is the month of June and on the full moon day of June, history records that Venerable Arahanth Mahinda Thero, the son of King Dharmasoka of India came with a group of 6 to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism in Sri Lanka appeared on the summit of the Mihintale rock.

This event is a turning point in the history of the country and ever since then this day has been celebrated as a national day. Entire country join in the celebrations with the main attraction and hence the emphasis been Mihintale, a suburb of Anuradhapura and its

surroundings. Anuradhapura, the oldest capital city of Sri Lanka was the royal city when Arahant Mahinda Thero landed and started his campaign from the summit of the rock at Mihintale, few miles away to the north of the capital city. During this festival season the entire area is thronged with and filled to the capacity and only the intervention of the Government and the local bodies along with hundreds of Voluntary organizations in providing the numerous needs from transportation to food, medicine, rest places, water supply, sanitation, security etc to the millions who gather there to help to get over the situation.

However this is not a strange phenomenon since there are records by the colonial rulers describing the alarming situation that they had fallen into owing to this unusually large gathering of devotees in Anuradhapura during this period. The Assistant Government Agent of Anuradhapura in 1870 during the British colonial period reported in his administrative Report how this large crowd thronged the sacred city of Anuradhapura and the terrible scare he has had in controlling this unusually large crowd and the surprise he had when he achieved it with ease. Since as he says "these people were not only unaccustomed to criminality but also they do not seem to know even the meaning of criminality."

Therefore it would be seen that the centre of attraction for celebrations for Poson is Mihintale and Anuradhapura to which area the people from all over the country clad in white as the symbol of purity and religiosity throng in large numbers for pilgrimage. The main reason why many of them come to this place is to observe the eight precepts (Atasil) that the lay Buddhists consider as the highest meritorious act that they can and are expected to fulfil. Hence one can see that all temples in the island crowded with devotees on this day. They consider it most meritorious to be physically present in the very land where Arahant Mahinda Thero preached the Dhamma. Hence the largest majority of the devotees who throng there do engage in this religious act among many other things.

Consequent to this heavy flow of devotees solely for pious and religious purposes another astonishing custom of feeding these large crowds on the way and in the sacred area has arisen in the country that all the foreign visitors too are surprised to find and amazed at the devotedness of the locals in providing free meals to the millions of devotees. This custom has become a part and parcel

of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture that by now these feeding centres called Dansela, meaning free alms-centres are been conducted by the non-Buddhists as well. Furthermore there are many other features been added every year to these celebrations Mihindu Perahera, the very colourful pageant or procession in grand style in honour of Arahanth Mahinda Thero is one of the new additions that has gained much popularity and admiration. Hence it appears that new organizations come up with new modes of commemorating the great Savant of Buddhism every year. The erection of pandals that has become a popular feature for Wesak celebrations has become a popular item in the outskirts as a part of Poson celebrations. However, to the dismay of the religious minded people it appears that sometimes new features that appear to be irreligious to say the least are been added every year owing to the attempts by unscrupulous people who through ignorance try to make the Mihindu commemorations another fun fare completely forgetting its deep religious significance.

#### 4. Item: Esala Festivals

**Local Name:** Esala Mangalya (Esala celebrations)

**History, background:** Month of Esala is the month of July/August and this month is synonymous with religious pageants and processions pertaining to both Buddhism and Hinduism. These are not confined to urban centres either. They are found all over the island where the abodes of the gods ([Devala] whether Buddhist or Hindu) are located. They are very colourful annual events in honour of the gods and take an identical form the only difference been the intensity and glamour added to each depending on the capacity of the patrons of each Devala. Therefore it will be seen that the two major religions have common ground here to be attractive to the devotees of each others' faith and hence to be united in conducting the procedures which can be considered the hallmark of their success.

Considering the significance of the Esala festivals as a whole one would be immediately reminded of the chief among all these Esala festivals, namely the Kandy Esala festival which has gained international fame. Although Kandy Esala pageant is synonymous with the Kandy Dalada (Tooth relic) Pageant, it has 2 main parts. The Dalada procession is the most important and significant of them. The 4 Devala processions form the other part of this great

pageant. The Gods that come for veneration are the gods of Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama and goddess Paththini. Hence the combination of these two processions is considered the main pageant of international fame. Therefore it is seen that the Esala festival is basically the homage paid in honour of the benevolent gods to whom the gratitude of the people is paid for what they have done for the success of the people's undertakings. That is why Esala festivals form such a valuable part the cultural heritage of the people.

Equally important is the Kataragama Esala festivals that takes place in far corner of South Sri Lanka. This festival too has gained international fame for several reasons. On the one hand it is a holy place for adherents of all four major religions in the world namely Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Buddhists believe that it was the abode of the God who was the provider of all the prerequisites of Lord Buddha when He visited and made Kataragama a sacred place in His third visit to visit Sri Lanka. Therefore divine person called God of Kataragama was a Buddhist and the abode was built subsequently for him by the king Dutugemunu who before embarking on the mission of war against king Elara in Anuradhapura to save the country from the invaders got the blessings of this god. After gaining the success of his mission the king fulfilled his promised of building an abode for the God. It is the reason why the affairs of the Kataragama god are been made the responsibility of the Sinhala-Buddhist. On the other hand Hindus believe the God Skanda who had come from India is residing here after marrying a second wife Vallimatha, a native of the place. But owing to the opposition shown to him in his marriage with the native woman by the Dravidians he punished them by not entrusting any personal duty on his behalf to the Hindus and entrusting every responsibility to the Sinhala Buddhists who supported him. Most believe that some of the forms of offerings of enormously painful and unbearable nature resorted to by the Hindus who go there on pilgrimage are also forms of punishments or acts of repentance for the betrayal they have done to their god.

The international fame of the Kataragama Esala festival does not depend on its popularity among the foreign crowds who visit here to watch it but on the patronage of the foreign devotees who gather here annually to perform their offerings on behalf of this god. Hindus from all over the world come during the festival season to Kataragama and make their offerings as done by the Hindus in Sri

Lanka who make pada yathra (trekking on foot) annually through the thick jungles in the eastern province as a ritual to pay homage to the god. Since some section of Muslims believe that there is a well of water with miraculous powers to heal discovered by some of their saints and hence they also have much faith on this god. Therefore groups of Muslim devotees make annual pilgrimage here. Christians likewise do make annual pilgrimage here and hence Kataragama Esala festivals have been getting the patronage of the people of all different faiths. The annual festival lasting several days and ending with the water cutting ceremony followed by walking on fire (embers) is rich with all the cultural features from the Sinhala-Buddhist as well as the Hindu culture. The rituals associated with it, the customs connected with and the belief system underlining, are all pregnant with ICH value and therefore deserve the attention of all interested in ICH.

The pageants in honour of God Sumana Saman in the Sapparagamuwa Saman Maha Devale in Ratnapura, Mahiyangane, Deraniyagala and Bolthumbe, God Basnahira at Getabaruwa Devale in the Matara District, God Upulwan in Devundara (Dondra), God Dediminda in Hingula Devale off Mawanella, Hindu Gods at Munneswaram in Halawatha (Chilaw) are prominent among the large number of pageants throughout the country that take place during the Esala season.

##### **5. Item: Religious ceremony concluding the confinement of the Buddhist monks during three-month rainy season**

**Local Name:** Katina Cheewara Pinkama (offering of rainy season robes)

**History, background:** According to the teachings of Lord Buddha the monks are expected to be confined to their abodes during the rainy seasons for reasons of safety and health. It is a rule of discipline enacted during the life time of Lord Buddha after listening to the representations made by the patrons about the dangers and the difficulties the monks will have to face if they are to be on the move as in other times for their meals during rainy times as well. This indeed had been the democratic way Lord Buddha had managed the order of the Bikkhus. The rainy season in the orient continues for about 3 months beginning from August during which period the monks come into agreement with the lay devotees to stay in the temple and attend to the religious needs of

the laymen while laymen vow to provide all the requirements of the Bikkhus during that period.

The ceremonial period begins on the full moon day of month of Nikini (August) with special religious rituals and sermons at the end of which the laymen symbolically invite a number of Bikkhus mostly the resident monks to be kind enough to stay in their temple and enjoy the hospitality of the laymen until the end of the rainy season. From then onwards until the last day of this 3 month period there will be special offerings and sermons and other convenient rituals to transmit the religious knowledge to the devotees. Every household considers it a great honour and duty to take over unto themselves the task of patronizing the proceedings of a particular day thereby easing the burden of the others and enjoying the happiness of been a party to the celebrations. For several days before the final date arrives, there will be special celebrations and various events followed by a sermon by a reputed preacher in the area each day.

On the final night there will be an all night Pirith (Parittha) chanting in the temple while the village ladies will be busy stitching the robes to be offered to all the Bikkhus who participate in the Vas (rainy season) ritual in the temple on the following morning at the end of the reciting of Pirith. This will be followed by the morning alms offerings (breakfast to the Bikkhus). There will be mid-day almsgiving to even a larger number of Bikkhus invited from other places as well. Finally the same evening there will be a religious ritual where normal religious activities will be performed and at the end of all the rituals transfer of merits to all those who had contributed in whatever little way towards the successful completion of the proceedings during the 3 months period will be conducted by a leading priest. This is one of the great occasions in the series of Buddhist rituals that the Buddhists are engaged in, in their efforts to sustain the Sasana (Dispensation) well and unhindered and uninterrupted.

## **6. Item: Paddy Broadcasting Festival**

**Local Name:** Vap Mangula

**History, background:** Agriculture been the main means of livelihood and the guiding light of the people of Sri Lanka from the time of known history there are many a rituals and ceremonies

associated with the vocation of agriculture. They had been continued unbroken and unhindered over the years and many of them had the full participation of the Kings and members of the royal families which indicates great patronage given by the royalty to agriculture in the country.

Vap Mangula is the festival of broadcasting of seeds performed as the final act after the completion of the preparation of the field. Since the royal participation was considered indispensable it always took a ceremonial appearance. The ploughs used by the royals on this occasion were considered to be of gold while lesser officials had silver ploughs and the ordinary cultivators used the normal wooden ploughs. The animals harnessed, either the cattle or the buffalos were gaily decorated. The work started at the auspicious time prescribed by the royal astrologers. The fields were muddied and levelled with the wooden levellers and at the end the germinated seeds were broadcasted.

At the end of this long process there were many other rituals adhered to as means of crop protection against birds and beasts and evil eye or evil mouth. With the broadcasting of seeds openings for water will be closed for several days since otherwise the seeds will be washed away. But then the birds and beast who feed on seeds will harm the field. Hence as a precaution several measures would be adopted. One is to plant scarecrows to drive away them. There will be a variety of herbs planted here and there along the weirs to scare away the beasts. Small children will be used during day time to make various sounds to scare away the seeds pickers. Sound producing indigenous implements will be used in the field to scare them away. (see the next chapter for details)

The antiquity of this custom could be measured by the fact that history records the incident that Prince Pandukabhaya who later became king in 2500 years BP found his future queen Swarna Pali when she was taking meals to her father who was in the field participating in the Vap Mangula. Lord Buddha in one of His previous births had been participating in a Vap ceremony according to the birth stories. Prince Siddhartha is said to have performed his miracles while watching the father participating in a Vap ceremony. Hence the ritual of Vap ceremony has to be considered as one of the most important of the agricultural rituals having a long history.



## 7. Item: Alms to the Seven Grandmothers

**Local Name:** Kiriamma Danaya

**History, background:** The Sinhala-Buddhist community holds in very high respect the ritual associated with the alms to the Kiriammas since they symbolically represent the seven Goddesses of Paththini (seven incarnations). Though the belief system of Paththini is said to have come from India Paththini is the only female deity held in high esteem and worshipped. She is a model of purity, trustworthiness, motherhood and virtuousness of womanhood and hence the worship of Paththini is considered synonymous with the worship of motherhood. Therefore in all matters of distress where the help of some outside power is required it will be the Goddess Paththini that will be looked up to. Especially in cases of children and females the rituals in the name of the Paththini will be resorted to. The elderly ladies invited as Kiriammas to represent the Goddess Paththini are essentially mothers of several children and hence no unmarried or childless women will be qualified to be invited.

Seven Kiriammas representing the seven incarnations of the Goddess Paththini would be invited and all of them would come very early in the morning before the sun rises. Once they are offered alms they would conduct the ritual and confer the blessings on all the residents of the house. This is done specially in cases of vows taken to offer or donate certain specific things in the name of the children or women in distress. The Kiriammas appear in white dress, white been the symbol of purity, at home under the leadership of one talented and experienced elderly lady and perform the ritual and taking whatever is offered will go away rise after blessing the householders before the sun rises. Since this a deeply rooted custom among the Sinhala-Buddhist community it again assumes greater importance in the social system in the country and hence attaches much significance.

## 8. Item: Offering of the Medical Practitioners

**Local Name:** Bath Malawa (Beheth Malawa)

**History & Background:** This is a unique blessing ceremony

conducted by the village shamans on invitation extended by the village medical practitioners. The series of ceremonies in the village starting with the main one by the senior most medical practitioner in the village in the month of Bak (April) goes on until the end of the last ceremony as a mark of respect and paying of gratitude to the deity who is considered to be the guardian of the medical practice namely, Kadawara. The belief is that the deity Maha Kadawara is considered to be the chief guardian deity of the medical practice and he is followed by several minor Kadawaras. Hence the ritual is perpetuated as a ceremony of the medical practitioners intended to show their gratitude to the deity for the services rendered to preserve and sustain the practice.

The ceremony starts in the hours of the evening with the village shamans gathering at the house of the patron and preparing the arena for the performance. There is not much of a decoration other than the erection and decorating of the pahan pela or structures to accommodate the lamps and other offerings like flowers. Lots of flowers will be collected along with different varieties of grains and certain number of betel leaves which will be spread on the floor to deposit the offerings. Initial rituals of obtaining the blessings of the triple gem etc will be done after which the protection of the premises will be ensured before the partaking of evening meals in preparation for the actual ritual activities. One of the main functions of the occasion is the feeding of everyone who attends to watch and participate in the proceedings. This indeed is the hallmark of this ceremony since the medical practitioners consider it obligatory to display their philanthropy and hospitality towards the people who happen to be their clients. Hence the lavish feeding of the visitors could be witnessed from early hours of the evening till the end of the ceremony in the early hours of the following morning.

The ritual will see the end in the early hours of the morning with blessings showered on the patrons, family members, the visitors and the premises with the hope that better future will dawn for the practitioner and his family. The final activity will be the feeding of the shamans and the participants who oft to remain until the end. Looking back into the actual significance of the ritual it would be seen that the belief system of the indigenous people tend to consolidate the convictions of the people deeply in whatever field they opt to dwell in by attaining perfection through virtuous means with heavy emphasis on religious and righteous life style. In this

process from king to the farmer there is an accepted code of conduct which none can deviate from. This can be considered the primary reason for the stable and strong nature of the social system of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation that Sri Lanka very proudly nurtures. Therefore the rituals that still occupy an important place in the social life of Sri Lanka can be considered as most important exemplary sources of valuable ICH the entire world community can benefit from.

## 9. Item: New Rice Ceremony

**Local Name:** Aluth Sahal Mangalya

**History, background:** This is one of the most important agricultural ceremonies Sri Lanka is well known for. The entire ritual is pregnant with a series of deeply meaningful activities and concepts. Hence, the reason for its survival for such a long time since its origin is unknown past.

The ritual occurs at the end of the harvesting season of the main cultivation period. Often it falls on end of March or beginning of April. It invariably occurs in a temple or a devale, an abode of a deity. Each region may have its own central place where the main ceremony is held. Ancient Rajarata or the modern North Central Province has Sri Maha Bodhi as its centre while Central province has the Temple of the Sacred Tooth or Dalada Maligawa as its centre. Likewise Kirivehera in far South, Maha Saman Devale in Ratnapura, Muthiyangane Rajamaha Vihara in the Uva or South-East Sri Lanka, Kelaniya Rajamaha Vihara near Colombo in the Western province are among the many religious centres well known in Sri Lanka for the New Rice Ceremonies. In addition to all these all village level temples and devales play the same role since it is such a popular and commonly celebrated ritual by the agricultural society that we have and live in, in Sri Lanka.

The main activity associated with the ritual is the offering to the triple Gem (Lord Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) or the deity, the first or the initial share of the newly harvested paddy by the farmers. The grain is taken in procession to the sacred place and after the religious proceedings the grain is offered while a separate cooked meal will also be offered in the traditional way such an alms would be offered. In the case of the New Rice Ceremony of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic there is a separate paddy field set apart from the ancient times for this purpose thus showing how

important this ritual had been. The entire ritual clearly demonstrates the virtuous qualities the indigenous people had been known for from the very early days. This act is almost entirely set apart to show their gratitude to the various forces, both seen and unseen who had been responsible for the successful harvest they are been blessed with. Religiosity, unity and cooperation, and the commitment of the people in their day to day activities are well reflected through this ceremony. That again can be interpreted as the secret behind their great success and achievements. Hence their value as a part of ICH is amply demonstrated.