



# Restudy of Kotahalu Yaagaya at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** Since Sinhalese people consider puberty as a special event in a young girl's life, they perform many customs and rituals from ancient past. Secondary socialization process has been beginning at this event and thereby internalize the future responsibilities as a woman, wife, and a mother in girl's mind. This celebration referred to as Kotahalu Mangalya and it contained many meaningful customs and practices. When girl attained puberty in inauspicious time Kotahalu Yaagaya is performed by Sinhalese shamans after the seclusion period of her. Principal researcher had conducted a deep study on this ritual in 1990 at Pandulagama in Anuradhapura. She was one of the eyewitnesses who had watched this ritual when performed over one whole night by shamans of Nochchiyagama, Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. Twenty-three years after that study, the group of present researchers have revisited twice to the same area in 2013 and 2016 and conducted a restudy. The research problem of this study was why this historically valued culture event had disappeared from the society and reasons for failing to resurrect it. Then, objectives of this research were to restudy and understand the contemporary status of the same ritual and tried to reform it, after more than two decades of the first study in 1990. Further, it is interesting to study the reasons and factors for this kind of cultural events becoming disappear over time. It is also important to study the reasons for this type of cultural events becoming obscure with time. Purposive sampling method was carried out for the present data collection. Qualitative data gathered by employing the interview method, including in-depth interviews. Narrative analysis was occupied as the major analytical method of the study. Among them, fifteen key informants were eyewitnesses as well as the women who were subjected to this ritual. Finally, researchers compared data which were gathered more than two decades back, and data gathered two decades after the first study. Sedaraman (1968), explained the many reasons for fading this ritual in the present society. Among them, one is that since the shamans are looking down and their successors reluctant to continue the shaman tradition as like as their ancestors. Sedaraman's this explanation was proved by the experiences of researchers' regarding the attempt to resurrect Kotahalu Yaagaya. Young descendants of shamans at Nochchiyagama lineage, attempted to learn and perform it. But they completely failed and gave up the task due to difficulties to recite verses of this unique ritual as they were not practised it from their childhood. It is extremely difficult to reconstruct this diminished cultural event, namely the Kotahalu Yaagaya which consists of many tuneful and meaningful verses. Accordingly, like many other cultural events, Kotahalu Yaagaya also has become history.

**Index Terms - Kotahalu Yaagaya, Puberty Ritual, Sinhala Culture, Socialization, Shamans**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rites of passage are considered as utmost important in Sinhala culture, and they perform many customs and rituals during these life events. Among them reaching puberty is a very important event in a girl's life and it has been celebrated since ancient past. Secondary socialization process has been beginning at this event and therefore, the main objective of this grand event is to internalize the future responsibilities as a woman, wife, and a mother in a girl's mind. This outstanding celebration referred to as Kotahalu Mangalya and it contained many meaningful customs and practices. When girl attained puberty in inauspicious time Kotahalu Yaagaya is performed by Sinhalese shamans after the seclusion period of her. This special ritual performs by the shamans those who belong to a special caste called 'Rajaka' or 'Ridee'. The word of Kotahalu was a distinguished word which had offered by the Sinhala king to these special shamans to honour for their magnificent performance of this ritual.

In Sinhala culture, reaching puberty is a very important event in a girl's life and it has been celebrated since time immemorial. These grand celebrations leading to the girl being taken out of doors are referred to as Kotahalu Mangalya. Kotahalu Yaagaya is performed during the puberty of a girl. If she has attained puberty at a non-auspicious time this ritual was performed by shamans belonging to a special caste called 'Rajaka' or 'Ridee'. The objective of this ritual, which was performed throughout the night, was to educate the girl on the important episodes of a woman's life. Principal researcher had conducted a deep study on this ritual in 1990 at Pandulagama in Anuradhapura area. She was one of the eyewitnesses who had watched this extinct ritual when performed over one whole night by shamans of Nochchiyagama, in Anuradhapura. Twenty-three years after that study, the present researchers have revisited, the same area in 2013 and 2016 to conduct research again. Accordingly, objectives of this research were to restudy and understand the contemporary status of the same ritual and attempted to resurrect it, after more than two decades of the first study.

### ➤ The Research Problem

The research problem of this study was why this historically valued culture event had disappeared from the society and reasons for failing to resurrect it.

### ➤ Objectives

- To restudy and understand the contemporary status of the same ritual and tried to reform it, after more than two decades of the first study in 1990.
- To study the reasons and factors for this kind of cultural events becoming disappear over time.
- To study the reasons for this type of cultural events becoming obscure with time.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling method was carried out for the data collection. Qualitative data gathered by employing the interview method, including in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. Among them, fifteen key informants were eyewitnesses as well as the women who were subjected to this ritual. These informants were selected based on judgment and purposive sampling technique. Finally, researchers compared data which were gathered more than two decades back, and data gathered two decades after the first study. Thus, researchers could be able to accumulate information on the contemporary status of Kotahalu Yaagaya. Additionally, researchers met with descendants of Nochchiyagama lineage and attempted to resurrect this extinct ritual too. Collected data were analyzed by narrative analysis and it focused on using the stories and experiences shared by people to answer the research question.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ➤ Performing of Kotahalu Yagaya

According to the respondents who provide the data, *Kotahalu Yaagaya* was popular in the Anuradhapura until the decade of the 1960s. But this ritual does no longer exist, since all shamans who had equipped with traditional knowledge of performing *Kotahalu Yaagaya* no more alive.

A girl who has reached puberty is eligible for a marriage and therefore she should have a proper understanding of sexual matters. The verses titled '*Gabha Uppaththiya*' (getting pregnant) in the *Kotahalu Yaagaya* provide the sex education needed for an attained girl. Unlike the present day, the ancient young women did not have the opportunities of learning from books and mass-media. Therefore, the attempt made through the verses of '*Gabha Uppaththiya*' in the *Kotahalu Yaagaya* is extremely useful in imparting sex education to the young women (Jayatileke, 2010).

The special hut constructed for *kotahalu yaagaya*



The shamans performing the blessing, wearing the wendama and the hand bangles.



The girl stays overnight keeping her feet on the ceremonial dock



#### Verses perform at the ritual

<i>“Sathosa wadana mithurani</i>	<i>ahapan</i>
<i>Mama dan melesa kiyanu pada sathutu</i>	<i>sithin</i>
<i>Nidoso bilindu wadumata</i>	<i>anganun</i>
<i>Nisi koi wayaseda mata kiyan</i>	<i>diyan” (1990)</i>

**Meaning:** Friend, who brings joy, please listen to my verses that I am singing merrily. Let me know the suitable age for a young woman to give birth to a child.

<i>“Suwa satha hata upathak ethi</i>	<i>wilasata</i>
<i>Kawuruth danagena ethi dan</i>	<i>bohokota</i>
<i>Awurudhu dahasaya pirunoth</i>	<i>elanduta</i>
<i>Kiudaru upadithi ethanin</i>	<i>pasuwata”</i>

**Meaning:** Now it is evident that once a woman reaches the age of sixteen (16), she is in a position to give birth to children thereafter.

<i>“Thun dina athulatha rudiraya dutu</i>	<i>thana</i>
<i>Kamrasa vidhimen sathahata leda</i>	<i>ena</i>
<i>In dahasaya dina thula daru pala</i>	<i>dena</i>
<i>Min mathuwata dharuwan noma</i>	<i>upadina”</i>

**Meaning:** It is explained clearly in the above verse how to indulge in sexual activities in a healthy and fruitful married life.

Having sexual intercourse during the first three days of the menstrual period would lead to diseases and from then onwards to the next sixteen days (16) are ideal for having sex to get conceived. After this period conception is impossible.

Next verse explains further the knowledge they had about the sexual intercourse.

*“Kama sapehi nirathuruwa kamathi wana  
Prema ithiri dedenek ek weemena  
Booma raga paha kara gaththoth dena  
Keema kusehi ata naththek upadina”*

**Meaning:** This verse indicates that lesbian activities are not encouraged.

*Loba kota kavi boo se – dan nuba  
Hema than paraka se  
Gaba upadina ma se  
Kiyapan nova roo se*

**Meaning:** Be generous to recite more verses, without boasting and without getting antagonized, please tell us how a child is conceived.

*“Kuhul Wenda mokatada dhagalanne  
Awul sandu bas motada kiyanne  
Wipul palamuweni gabhaya landunne  
Sewel wathura piri dalabuwa wanne”*

**Meaning:** Why do you have doubts? Why do you speak in a provocative tone? Human embryo in a womb is like a caterpillar in a pool of greasy water.

*“Dasa masa pirila bihiwena kala kumarunne  
Is mas dan bihi wennata siritha bolanne  
Dosa wadi unu thana wenas wela bihiwanne  
Kohomada koi sityata dei thawa pawasanne”*

**Meaning:** On completion of ten months, normally the head of the baby comes out first. But due to some fault the baby may come out in a different orientation, please tell us more details on the childbirth.

*“Dasa masa pirila bihiwena kala kumarunne  
Is mas dan bihi wannata siritha bolanne  
Dosa wadi unu thana wenas wela bihiwanne  
Kohomada koi sityata dei thawa pawasanne”*

**Meaning:** On completion of ten months, normally the head of the baby comes out first. But due to some fault the baby may come out in a different orientation, please tell us more details on the childbirth.

#### a. Diminishing of Kotahalu Yaagaya

It is also important to investigate the reasons for this type of cultural events becoming obscure over time. Sedaraman's (1968) explanation in this regard is that, with the decline of the prosperity of a society, people tend to retain only the rituals which they can afford and let the rest disappear. According to astrology, there are some cases where the time of attainment of a girl is inauspicious. Sederaman (1968) further states that at present the expenditure incurred in performing the *Kotahalu Yaagaya* is unaffordable to many people. Therefore, even though this *Yaagaya* helps to eliminate the evil effects of the inauspicious time of attainment of a girl, most villagers are unable to afford this.

The economic hardships experienced by the villagers largely contribute to the disappearance of such important rituals like this *Yaagaya*. Sedaraman (1968) provides another reason for the disappearance of *Kotahalu Yaagaya*, according to which less expensive white magic has replaced it. He also mentions that the shamans are looked down on in the present society, and their children and

grandchildren do not continue the shaman tradition. Therefore, with the demise of the remaining shamans, the *Kotahalu Yaagaya* has disappeared from the villages.

### b. Re- studying and Resurrecting Kotahalu Yaagaya

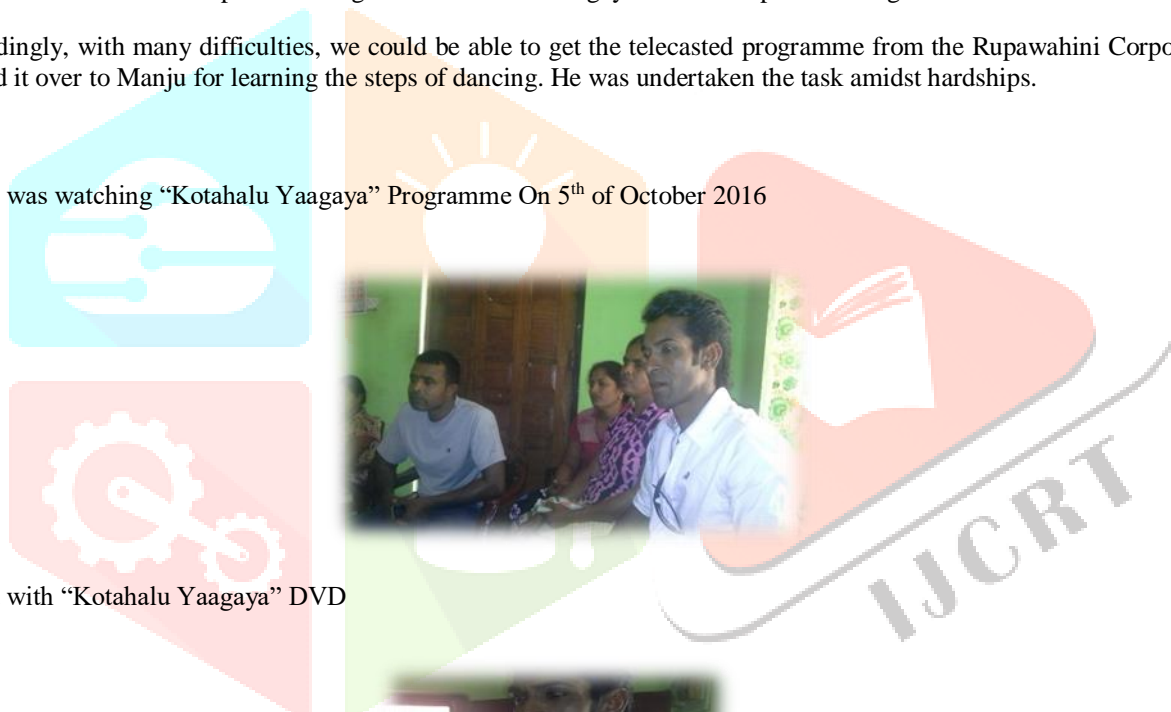
The principal researcher saw the last ‘Kotahalu Yoagaya’ which had performed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1990 at Pandulagama of North Central Province in Sri Lanka. It should be described how the principal researcher observe this ritual and her contribution in this regard. Under the patronage of Sri Lanka Rupavahini corporation of Sri Lanka, this Yaagaya had performed by the shamans of Nochchiyagama, Hiriyalegama in Anuradhapura District. Rupavahini Corporation was televised this ritual throughout the whole night, and it was telecasted on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1990 under the programme 'Our Heritage' Being a young researcher while she has been conducting a study on this ritual, she was invited to be the presenter of this TV programme by the producer of 'Our Heritage' late Mr Sisira Suraweera. Accordingly, she had become an eyewitness of this great ritual which performed by the shamans of Hiriyalegama lineage.

Twenty-three years after the first performance she decided to conduct a re-study with rest of the researchers on ‘Kotahalu Yaagaya’ and all went to Hiriyalegama in the years 2013 and 2016. Then we came to know that all the shamans those who participated in this ritual were died by now. But researchers met one young person called Manju who performs *Jahuta Nadagama* and he is a son of late Appuwa Kotahalu. Appuwa Kotahalu was one of the shamans who participated for the Kotahalu Yaagaya which performed in the Pandulagama on 19th March 1990.

Further, we came to know that all the children of those shamans engaged in various form of economic activities instead of their traditional activities. But Manju was a deferent young person who would like to learn about their traditions and rituals. He said that if he was able to see the steps of dancing of the Kotahalu Yaagaya he likes to perform it again.

Accordingly, with many difficulties, we could be able to get the telecasted programme from the Rupawahini Corporation and we handed it over to Manju for learning the steps of dancing. He was undertaken the task amidst hardships.

Manju was watching “Kotahalu Yaagaya” Programme On 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2016



Manju with “Kotahalu Yaagaya” DVD



Manju's Mother was watching "Kotahalu Yaagaya"



#### IV. CONCLUSION

Sedaraman (1968) explained the many reasons for fading this ritual in the present society. Among them one is that since the shamans are looking down and their successors reluctant to continue the tradition as like as their ancestors. In fact, his explanation was proved by the experiences of researchers' regarding the attempt of resurrecting this ritual. Young descendants of shamans at Nochchiyagama lineage tried to learn and perform it. But they completely failed and gave up the task due to difficulties to recite verses of this unique ritual as they were not practiced it from their childhood. It is extremely difficult to resurrect this diminished cultural event, namely the *Kotahalu Yaagaya* which consists of many tuneful and meaningful verses. Accordingly, like many other cultural events *Kotahalu Yaagaya* also has become history. It is highly unlikely to resurrect this long-lost cultural event, namely the *Kotahalu Yaagaya* which contained so many melodies and meaningful Sinhala verses. Therefore, like many other cultural events *Kotahalu Yaagaya* has also faded into the history.

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