

The importance of the "Eagasa" in Sri Lankan rituals.

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The objective of this study is to examine the reasons for using the "Eagasa" as one of the main props in Tovil, Sri Lankan demon ceremonies. Apparently, the "Eagasa" is the principal prop used by ritual priest to heal patients and to tame demons. According to popular belief, "Eagasa" is the "Nayanayudha" of the King Vesamuni, the Lord of the demons. The *Mahawamsa* states that the King Vesamuni was worshipped by the tribal group called *Yakka*. Thus, the ritual priest or the *Yakdessa* uses the Eagasa with the hope that it protects both the priest and the patient with the power of the Eagasa which is the divine weapon of the King Vesamuni. The very reason for commemorating Vesamuni in demon ceremonies is the application of the powers of Eagasa to heal the suffered since it symbolizes the Gods power to control the demons and to heal the victim. However, in Sri Lanka ritual tradition, the Eagasa is differently used, depending on the regional and authentic cult practices related to each ritual tradition. Whereas, in *Sabaragama* tradition the Eagasa is used in the performance of *HendeSamayama* (Evening Ceremony), and *DahaAtaSanniya* (ceremony of eighteen demons), the Kandyan tradition uses it in *AwasheshaPoojakarma* (small scale ritual ceremonies) such as *DehiKepeema*. Particularly in Low Country rituals it is given a special place which is evident in major ritual ceremonies such as *RiddiYagaya*, *SuniyamYagaya*, *KalukumaraSamayama*, *MahasohonSamayama*, and *SanniYakuma*. The "Eagasa" is believed to hold an immense religious value, attested also in the literature, which states that the prop strengthens the healing power of such rituals. According to the evidence and the literature, it is the ornament of the god that encompasses the divine and limitless power of the King or the God Vesamuni that was granted to the priest to control the malicious behavior of demons who the society, and to grant physical and mental consolation to the suffering. Therefore, the present study aims at examining the importance of "Eagasa" in Sri Lankan traditional demon ceremonies.

Key words: Eagasa, Wesamuni, Nayanayuda, Yak Thovils, yathu karma.