

SS.ARTS.14

A STUDY OF THE *KIRIAMMA DANAYA* (ALMS GIVING FOR SEVEN MOTHERS) RITUAL IN THE KANDY DISTRICT**K. P. G. C. Kumari Guruge***Department of Sinhala, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

This ritual has a long history and has been practiced widely among Sinhala communities all over the island. The Goddess Pattini is considered a protector of the Sinhalese and people expect her blessings for fertility, prosperity, healing children from illnesses apart from protecting them from epidemic diseases, such as small pox and chicken-pox (commonly known as *Ammawarunge leda*). Moreover, when a woman is pregnant, the blessing of this Goddess is secured for the protection of the mother and the embryo and also for a safe delivery. At all these occasions people make vows to the Goddess Pattini and promises the deity that they would give alms to seven mothers in her name. This is called a *kiriamma danaya*. Once their wishes have been granted people believe that it is necessary to fulfil the promised to the deity with all purity.

Unlike other similar rituals, this ritual is performed and alms are prepared by lactating mothers or elderly women, who have given birth and nursed their children. The ritual includes women dressed in white arriving at the house bearing flowers to accept alms, evocations to the Goddess Patthini, boiling a pot of milk and the blessing of the household. All previous studies focused on the formation of this ritual. In this study the main focus is the attempt to distinguish between the past and the present practice of this ritual. This study examines how the *kiriamma danaya* is practiced at present.

Research was conducted in the Thumpane Divisional Secretariat Division. Data was collected through interviews, individual studies and group discussions.

While this was a common occurrence in the past, it is becoming rare due to many socio and economic reasons, such as financial difficulties, inability to find women knowledgeable in conducting the ritual, due to busy lifestyles of people, due to too much pollution (*Kili*) around one's abode and due to the lack of commitment in people. These circumstances have give rise to a new tendency, which is to perform the ritual at the temple of the Goddess Pattini located near the Temple of the Tooth, in Kandy. Accordingly, one only needs to reserve the day by bearing the expenses of the ritual which will take place in the temple premises of the deity and to participate in the ritual. With this new tendency some of the latent functions of the ritual have been lost.