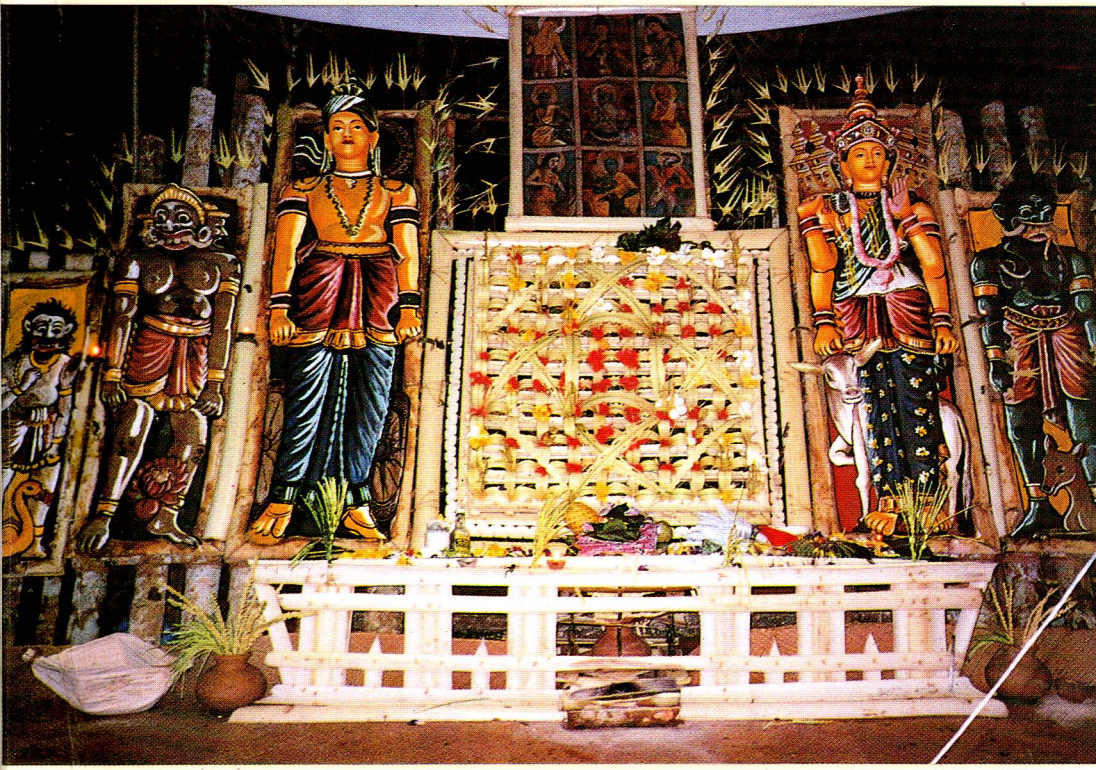
Globalization

and the

Transformation of Planetary Rituals

in

Southern Sri Lanka



D. A. Premakumara de Silva

Globalization and the Transformation of Planetary Rituals in Southern Sri Lanka

Globalization and the Transformation of Planetary Rituals in Southern Sri Lanka

D. A. Premakumara de Silva

International Centre for Ethnic Studies
Colombo

International Centre for Ethnic Studies
2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka

ISBN 955-580-053-7

Printed by
Unie Arts (Pvt) Ltd
No. 48 B, Bloemendhal Road
Colombo 13

Dedication

To my father, Neelan de Silva
(1930-1984)

Contents

List figures

List of tables

Map

List of Plates

after page

Acknowledgements

The present publication is a revised version of a dissertation approved for a M. A. degree in Sociology at the University of Colombo in 2000. I am indebted to many individuals and the institution, their generosity, kindness and help extended me throughout this work. First of all I am indebted to my university (University of Colombo), for the research grant which made it possible to carry out my post-graduate research.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the following individuals who have all, in various ways, made important contributions to the present work.

I am particularly thankful to Dr. Sasanka Perera who acted as my supervisor and patiently guided me throughout this work. Prof. S. T. Hettige read the final draft carefully and offered many insightful comments and suggestions, I sincerely thank him for all this.

My special thanks should go to Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, Dr. Rohan Bastian, Mr. Markus Mayer, Prof. Jonathan Spencer, Dr. Bob Simpson and Dr. Desmond Mallikarachichi in discussions with whom I have learned much.

I must acknowledge the help rendered by my colleagues Dr. Gameela Samarasinghe, Dr. Neluka Silva and Mr. Ananda Abeysekere who proof read this document.

I thank Prof. Tissa Jayawardane who carefully translated Sinhala verses into English.

I would also thank my collegues and friends at the department, who helped me in numerous ways, particularly Mr. I. V. Edirisinghe, Prof. Ramani Jayathilaka and Prof. Joe Weeramunda for their constant encouragement. Moreover, I wish to thank Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Director of the International Center for Ethnic Studies for supporting this

publication. In addition, I must also thank Mr. Thambiraja and the ICES staff.

My deepest thanks go to all my *aduro* (performers) friends particularly Edin *guru*, who gave me generous access to their lives and work and with whom I shared their sorrows and their happiness.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Chaithrika, who not only encouraged me but also remained patiently supportive throughout the present work.

Premakumara De Silva
Department of Sociology
University of Colombo
Sri Lanka
October, 2000.

Foreword

It is a pleasure for me to introduce to the Sri Lankan reading public Premakumara de Silva's book, *Globalization and the Transformation of Planetary Rituals in Southern Sri Lanka.* Planetary rituals *Bali* are performed for persons who have had "bad times" (astrologically speaking). Though there are published *bali* texts, they have scarcely been studied with any analytical depth and in context except for an early 1928 dissertation by A. P. de Zoysa and a yet unpublished study by Beatrice Fryba focusing on rituals in villages in the Kandy area. The richest traditions of *bali* are found in the Sinhala low country and Premakumara's book deals with expert *bali* priests or *aduras* in the Bentota area. This work is well-written and carefully thought out and is, in my view, a serious contribution to Sri Lankan studies. Premakumara's basic argument is that there has been a strong current of opinion, and that includes my own work, which states that with the breakdown of the solidary bases of kinship and village social organization in general there will be a concomitant decline in local rituals. Premakumara boldly argues against this position. He shows quite convincingly that the so-called traditional rituals have not declined but they have changed their goals and orientations and that they indeed show a remarkable resilience. He illustrates his argument with the specific case of the *bali* rituals among those practitioners with whom he has collaborated in sustained fieldwork.

I think Premakumara has shown through detailed empirical evidence that *bali* rituals have certainly changed for good reasons, that is, the extraordinary expenditure of time, energy, collective resources and above all the money required for the performance of an eighteen hour ritual. He gives an ideal typical description of a "traditional" *bali* ritual which entails a communal mobilization of resources and a lot of drumming and dancing and music, including bawdy humour,

and above all, the construction of stunningly beautiful images of planetary deities. But *aduras* nowadays rarely perform these; instead they perform individualized or personalized rituals, a short version of *bali* which takes only a few hours and generally known as *at-baliya* ("hand *bali*"). In these emended rituals only the afflicted person and his immediate family are present; and no drumming is permitted because that will intrude on the family's privacy by proclaiming to the public that a healing ritual is going on. Premakumara relates this contraction of *bali* to the processes of globalization after the advent of a free-trade economy in 1977. He is right. However, globalization is also associated with the longterm enbourgeoisment of Sinhala society and the dissemination of middle class values which are given new Buddhist meanings. Hence, there has been over some time the development and diffusion of middle-class mores and concepts of public/private spaces that are also relevant for understanding the movement from a communal to a more personalized orientation in *bali*. Further, in urban society people no longer need perform collective village rituals for gods and goddesses. They can visit the central shrines for the deities such as Kataragama, Pattini and Vishnu; failing which, to the multitude of local shrines for deities, new and old, that have mushroomed all over the nation. What is quite remarkable is the absence of a parallel development in *bali*; there are no new public *bali* shrines even though the preoccupation with astrology has escalated in the nation. As someone who has thoroughly enjoyed the music, dancing and bawdy humour of traditional village rituals I can only nostalgically lament their erosion in contemporary society.

I found Premakumara's discussion of the impact of global forces on the *bali* rituals quite fascinating. He shows that alongside the impact of global forces on our economy and society, including mass movements of labour back and forth from the Middle East and other places, there is a concomitant

development of forms of "cultural nationalism." Thus, traditional rituals such as *bali* and *gammaduva* (for Pattini) and low-country exorcistic rituals are held up by local and provincial governments as part of one's cultural heritage and therefore a "spectacle" to be performed in such venues as school-halls before large audiences. Some of these newly refurbished cultural performances are even more elaborate than their village variants but for the fact that they have become "politically correct;" they are performed before national and local politicoes; and vulgar humour is no longer permitted. Premakumara also mentions that the same dance troupe will perform any kind of *bali*; "traditional" *bali* (increasingly scarce), shortened versions of *bali* for individuals, public heritage exhibitions which can easily and comfortably move into hotel performances for tourists, local and foreign, eager to imbibe the exotic local culture while sipping wine and having dinner!

Premakumara's theoretical discussion of "globalization" shows that he is conversant with the recent literature on this subject and that he can critically assess the various theories of globalization and relate them to his argument. One popular theory is that, with the stranglehold of the global, there is decline in the local which, in turn, forces individual societies to embrace a globalized culture. This Premakumara rightly shows is unwarranted; and he demonstrates this with the *bali* and *gammaduva* rituals. It is true, he says, that global economic forces have underminded the communal based healing rituals but cultural nationalism preserves "tradition" and, perhaps, even acts as a counter to global force -- at least for now. For example, a *gammaduva* ritual for the goddess Pattini which Premakumara witnessd was heavily publicized as a ceremony to bring blessings on the police and armed forces in their combat with the Tamil separatist movement. Hence, says Premakumara some what ironically, the *gammaduva* has moved from a village healing ritual to one

which tries to heal a nation. Whether such performances can actually heal the nation is doubtful but there is no doubt that they serve the political ambitions of well-heeled politicians.

A final note: there is an appealing modesty in Premakumara de Silva's study, especially striking in the contemporary cultural situation where coffee table books are disguised as serious scholarship and book reviews are uncritically adulatory. He admits that his is not a complete or exhaustive study of low country *bali* but one that focuses on a specific aspect of it, namely, its changing visage. This leaves open the possibility of further studies of *bali* from different vantage points and I can only hope that Premakumara and others like him will continue the good work.

Gananath Obeyesekere
Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus
Princeton University.

1
Introduction

This is a study of a major Sinhala ritual, namely, the planetary or *bali* ritual, performed in and around Bentota in Southern Sri Lanka. The study examines the nature of a practical form of deity propitiation among Sinhala Buddhists. The word *bali* or *bali Santiya*[1] (ritual of blessing) is used as a generic term for Sinhala rituals incorporating appeals and offerings made mainly to planetary deities. The ritual is performed to alleviate the misfortunes believed to arise as a result of passing through an unfavourable astrological period or *apala kalaya*, which literally means a "fruitless period". The purpose of the ritual is to bless and protect an individual when the protection emanating from the planets is weak, and the individual is vulnerable to malign influences. This is achieved by making numerous offerings to the Buddha, the deities and "demons" *(yakku)* during the course of the night long *baliya*[2]. The

---

1 Also known as "bali santhi karmaya" and "bali yagaya" (see: Vitharana, V.1992).

2 In his glossary, Gombrich defines *bali* as 'a ceremony for exorcising evil planetary influences; an image of a planet used in such a ceremony' (1971: 340).

specialist who performs the *bali santiya* is generally referred to as *bali adura*[3] .

I decided to study this particular ritual *(bali)*, instead of the rituals concerning demons *(yakku)*, gods and other supernatural beings such as minor deities and ghosts *(preta)*, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the anthropologists who have studied Sinhala Buddhist rituals such as deity propitiation (Obeyesekere:1977, 1978, 1984, 1988), religious festivals (Seneveratne: 1978, Nissan: 1985), "exorcism" or *yaktovil* (Wirz:1954, Kapferer:1983, 1997, Scott:1994) have paid scanty attention to the *bali* ritual (see: Simpson 1985). In other words, in the context of ethnographic studies of Sri Lanka, there is a visible lack of empirical material dealing with the *bali* ritual. The only article devoted specifically to *bali* is by De Silva (1911) who describes some of the ritual's main features. Paul Wirz (1954:105-128) also provides a brief account of the ritual, but does not examine it systematically or in detail. Secondly, in the formal ethnography of Sri Lanka, astrology, despite its importance in Sinhala society, is often mentioned but hardly discussed either from the perspective of its practical application or its social consequences. Steven Kemper (1979,1980) is a notable exception in this regard. He provides useful ethnographic information on the social aspects of Sinhala astrology[4]. Examination of the *bali* ritual enables me to locate astrology and the question of personal misfortune within the wider framework of Theravada Buddhist cosmology.

[3] People who perform *yak tovil* are known as *'yakaduras'*. These performers *(aduro)* are usually of low caste mainly from *berava* (drummer) caste.

Notably, Perinbanayagam's study of the use of astrology in Jaffna is the only monograph on this theme by a Sri Lankan anthropologist (1982). He sees astrology as a language that seeks to create an order and a pattern for human lives (1982: 88).

Another important reason for studying *bali* is due to the fact that some scholars identify *bali* as a part of "Sinhala cultural heritage" or *"urumaya"* that is dying out (Witharana: 1994, Seneviratne:1991). Even Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 395) who co-authored a massive text on recent religious change in Sri Lanka state that the *bali*, performed for alleviating unfavourable planetary influence, seems to be dying out in many parts of the country. Whatever little empirical information I had access to did not appear to warrant such an assertion, and this encouraged me to undertake the present study.

1.1 Research Issue and Methodology

The main issue I want to address is whether the *bali* ritual is dying out or not. If so, why? If not, what sort of changes has the ritual undergone over the years and under what circumstances? What is the impact of globalization in this context? The ethnographic material for the present study was collected during the period from October 1994 to December 1995 in and around Bentota, which is situated approximately 63 km. south of Colombo in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka **(Map1)**. During my fieldwork I mingled with a troupe of ritual specialists *(bali aduro)*, who belong to a lower stratum of the Sinhala caste system, namely the *berava* (drummer) caste also known as *Nakathi*. Most of the ethnographic material I have collected for this study relates to the work and performances of these ritual specialists. Firstly, I collected information concerning their kinship, marriage, family profiles and the way in which ritual knowledge and skills were passed onto the younger generation. Secondly, I attended a series of major and minor rituals, particularly *bali* rituals performed

by them. I witnessed eighteen major rituals, (including five major *yak tovil)* as well as a number of smaller ones. The collection of detailed information, especially relating to ritual performance, was based on my engagment as a participant-observer in a variety of ritual performances.

I observed the ritual proceedings, tape-recorded ritual verses *(kavi)*, incantations and drumming, photographed varying phases of the ritual, and had informal discussions with other participants and ritual organizers. My study is concerned with the expressive qualities of ethnography rather than numerical considerations.

During my fieldwork I often faced one difficulty, that was attendance at ritual events. It was necessary to stay awake till the end of the ritual. Sometimes, if it was a night-long ritual, I often had to stay awake for twenty-four hours at a stretch. I should also note here that, on certain occasions, my *berava* friends would forget to invite me to smaller ritual performances, preventing me from participating in some of the rituals perfomed in and around Bentota.

1.2 The Theoretical Background

The globalization discourse is one of the most recent "meta-narratives" that social scientists have become concerned with. Globalization is a process that has been facilitated by the recent advances in communication and information technology and their practical applications. Many globalizing forces are impersonal and are beyond the control and intentions of any individual or group of individuals. These forces are supposed to lead to the formation of a global society and culture. The discussion about globalization takes place in different spheres, such as the economy (talking about the integration of national

economies into the global economy through liberalization policies, global market forces, transformation of production systems and labour markets etc.), politics (the spread of liberal values, discourse on human rights etc.), the environment (global climatic change, global pressures on natural resources, etc.), society and culture (new consumption patterns, the spread of new values etc.).

According to Giddens (1990: 64), globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. Local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extention of social connections across time and space. Robertson (1992:135) refers to globalization as the process whereby the world becomes a single place. He argues that globalization does involve the development of a global culture.

Apart from this, there are differing views among social scientists on the emerging global condition. Some scholars have emphasized certain negative aspects of the global system, for instance, marginalization of regions, and exploitation of certain groups (Amin: 1994, 1997, Hurst and Thompson: 1996, Petras: 1997, Breman: 1998). Others seem to assume that globalization is bringing about a radical transformation of the global order (Smith: 1990, Featherstone: 1990, McGrew 1992, Waters: 1995, Appadurai: 1996). The latter group of scholars focus attention on the globalizing tendencies, particularly in the cultural and social spheres. There are also different views of how global processes shape culture, mainly, cultures of peripheral societies that are exposed to various external forces. Some writers argue that globalization leads to cultural "homogenization" but others argue that it leads to outcomes such as fragmentation, revitalization and hybridization. Although global culture can be perceived to be destroying local culture, scholars like Featherstone (1990) argue that it

can also be used for reconstituting a sense of locality. My argument is mainly located in the latter, where I emphasize that traditional (local) cultural practices, particularly healing and other ritual practices, are not disappearing under the influence of globalization processes. Rather they appear to be adapting to global forces.

Sri Lanka has been exposed to forces of globalization over the last couple of decades, particularly after the liberalization of its economy in 1977. But one can also argue that Sri Lanka had been exposed already to the world market under Western colonial hegemony, especially under the British. Over a period of more than 150 years, the political, economic and socio-cultural structures of the country were transformed by the influence of British hegemony and the market economy that the colonial rulers introduced. But the post-1977 liberal economic policies have progressively exposed the country to diverse forces of extensive globalization. The dismantling of the state-centered, protectionist development policy, which was operating in the 60's and 70's, the rapid expansion of export-oriented industries, the electronic media and telecommunication services, growth of private enterprises, Middle East migration, the inflow of foreign investment, the growth of a new urban middle class, tourism and the diffusion of a consumerist culture are indicative of the country's exposure to global processes. With these economic reforms, Sri Lanka became more and more integrated into the global capitalist system. It has been further strengthened by the removal of many of the hitherto existing barriers for the movement of capital, labour and cultural goods across national boundaries. As a result, today we see the impact of globalizing tendencies on the local scene in economic, political, social and cultural terms. The integration of the local economy into the global economy has received much attention from economists who have looked at its various economic implications (Lakshman:1986,

Vidanapathirana:1988, Kelegama & Wignaraja:1991, Ruhunage: 1995, Corea: 1996). But political, social and cultural implications of global integration have not yet been adequately investigated. A few sociologists have paid attention to some of the social implications of economic integration, such as its impact on ethnic relations (Gunasinghe: 1984, Ali: 1996), on social development (Silva: 1994), on social inequality, youth and ideological structures (Hettige: 1995,1998), and its impact on gender relations (Jayathilake: 1998, Hewamanne: 1997). Cultural implications of the process of global integration appear to be as equally important as the economic, political and social implications. Globalization impinges upon culture in complex ways, but precisely how it shapes and modulates cultural change is yet to be fully understood. But as I have already noted, this aspect has not been given adequate attention so far. In a notable attempt, A. J. Gunawardana (1997) has examined how production and appreciation of the arts are influenced by globalization. How have the post-1977 economic reforms affected local culture? Clearly, it is a very wide ranging question to answer, but given the nature of my analysis, at least a partial answer to that question is needed. Thus, I would attempt to give a broad overview of local *(deshiya)* cultural change as a consequence of globalization. It is also important to note here that, when Sri Lanka was under the hegemony of three European colonial powers for nearly four centuries, and particularly under British hegemony, the country's politico-economic and socio-cultural structures were radically transformed. One of the most significant shifts relating to this transformation was in the field of culture. This is understandable, in view of the fact that independence struggles often mobilized national cultural resources to support anti-colonial campaigns. The invention of cultural symbols that define only Sinhala national identity were

supposed to represent the unity of the Sinhala nation. But that exercise only brought about a short-term, uneasy alliance among different ethnic groups. No attempt is made here to discuss these changes as there already exists a large body of writing on the subject (Obeyesekere: 1975, Kapferer: 1988, Spencer: 1990, Roberts: 1998 etc.). What is attempted here is to point to certain significant aspects of the current processes of cultural change in the country.

The post 1977 liberal economic policies have facilitated cultural flows across national boundaries. They facilitated the unprecedented movement of capital, labour, commodities and symbolic goods across national boundaries. The removal of state controls has taken away restrictions that hitherto limited the inflow of certain commodities and cultural goods. The introduction of television in the early 1980's and the subsequent penetration of the national space by transnational media networks have allowed the diffusion of information, ideas, cultural symbols and even consumer goods throughout the country. The result is that there are vast disparities between upper and lower social strata in terms of life-style, particularly in terms of consumption patterns (Hettige: 1998: 90-98). However, these disparities have not prevented the spread of consumption as an ideology across social strata. Today, workers migrating to the Middle East *(dubai yama)* constitute an important agent of cultural change in the country (see Jayathilake: 1998, Hettige: 1988). The increased migration of women represent a clear departure from earlier practices. It was not in keeping with the long established cultural norms which restricted the physical and professional mobility of women.

The tourist industry also constitutes another significant factor, contributing to cultural change. Yet, the cultural changes brought about by the post-1977 economic policies

were met with resistance from certain influential social groups. The most articulate among these groups is the *Jathika Chinthanaya* group[5] which began to resist these new changes at an ideological level. These cultural critics focus on several issues, such as the alleged devaluation of local lifestyles under the influence of western consumerism or so-called "Coca-Cola culture"; the alleged deterioration of sexual morals under the influence of tourism and overseas travel, particularly of female workers; the perceived decline of local cultural performances such as art, music, and dance, under the influence of western mass media; and so on. These critics have expressed the view that these external forces *(bahira balavega)* are destroying the long established cultural heritage of the country and, eventually, the nation as well. The first significant controversial intervention against these changes was made by Ediriweera Sarachchandra in his book *Dharmista Samajaya* (Righteous Society), published in 1982. His book provided an analysis of the outcome of liberal, open economic policies in terms of traditional Sinhala cultural and nationalist ideas (Serasundara 1998: 65). Such cultural criticisms have reinforced nationalist ideology that seeks to protect and preserve the national cultural heritage *(urumaya)* from the influence of external forces. These critics believe that the incorporation of local culture into the process of globalization tends to undermine traditional values and other aspects of national culture such as Buddhism *(agama)*, language, local arts *(deshiya kalava)* etc.

Initially, globalization was seen by some as a homogenizing process, which undermines existing local

[5] According to Chandraprema *Jathika Chintanaya* is mainly an expression of the elite conflict between rural-based Sinhala educated and the urban-based English educated (1990:110). Currently, Nalin de Silva and Gunadasa Amarasekere are playing a decisive role in the movement.

cultural traditions and replaces them with a global culture. But this idea appears to be unfounded and does not reflect the specific ways in which the globalization process influenced and shaped social and cultural life in a particular locality. The most important of these kinds of generalisations is that, while globalization accelerates cultural change, it also generates forms of resistance to such change. Concepts regarding identity, selfhood and the individuality of cultures become key mortivating factors in the opposition that builds up against globalization's inroads into national and regional cultures. Thinking on these lines, I am going to focus my attention on Sinhala traditional ritual practices, particularly the *bali* ritual and explain how these traditional ritual practices, while going through a process of transformation, nevertheless, persist in a new form.

This line of argument is not evident in the context of ethnographic studies of Buddhism and Sinhala rituals. These studies can be broadly divided into two schools of thought. The first school deals with the role of Buddhism as a tool of political legitimization in historical contexts. Most studies belonging to this category began in response to the conflict between the Sinhalas and the Tamils that began to unfold after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 (Bechert: 1976, Tambiah:1986, 1992, Kapferer:1989, Spencer:1990, Kemper:1991). These studies have examined the relationship between Buddhism and Sinhala national identity.

The second school focuses mainly on how (Sinhala) Buddhism has changed along with the social changes in Sinhala society in general. It has concentrated on a number of interrelated themes: the nature of "orthodoxy" in contemporary Sinhala Buddhism (Gombrich: 1971,1990, Southwood: 1983, Carrithers:1983), the relationship between Buddhism and ritual practices (Leach:1962, Yalman:1962, Ames:1963, Obeyesekere:1963, 1966, 1968, 1978, Kapferer:1983,1998, Seneviratne:1978, Scott:1994), and the transformation of

traditional Sinhala Buddhism over the last century (Obeyesekere and Gombrich:1988, Malalgoda:1976). Most of these studies present an idealised, often perfectly integrated and highly functionalist view of the role of Buddhism in the past (Obeyesekere 1963, 1966, Seneviratne:1978 and Gombrich and Obeyesekere:1988). Both these schools of thought have contributed to the development of a substantial theoretical perspective about Buddhism and rituals of Sri Lanka. In my study I do not follow the functionalist theoretical perspective of Sinhala Buddhism but raise some questions about the ways in which it has interpreted traditional rituals in the present social context.

My observations of *bali* records its forms and practices at a particular historical moment. When comparing *bali* with other Sinhala ritual practices, it is also subject to movement and change over time. My argument here is that *bali* retains some of its "original" elements while it is being recreated or refashioned under the influence of external processes.

Some anthropologists interested in Sinhala Buddhism and rituals have documented changes in their spheres of concern. Some of them have argued, (Obeyesekere: 1970,1975,1978, and Obeyesekere & Gombrich: 1988) that a range of "radical" changes have taken place in the religious practices among Sinhala Buddhists over the last few decades. One of the changes discussed is the rise of what has been called "Protestant Buddhism", a form of Buddhism confined to the urbanized, westernized middle class that arose under the British colonial domination. It has been argued that Protestant Buddhism is distinctly different from what some have called "Village Buddhism". "Protestant Buddhists" supposedly underplays the traditional distinction between the monk and the laity. They have also contributed to the development of Buddhism in its intellectual sense and have left little room for ritual practices such as *bali, yak tovil,* astrology etc.within their worldview.

The second major stage of religious development is labeled "Post Protestant Buddhism"(Obeyesekere and Gombrich: 1988: 09). This new development in Sinhala Buddhist religiosity has been identified in broad psychological terms. Obeyesekere & Gombrich attribute these major changes to the failure of the economy to meet the aspirations of the people, and a political system which encourages unrealistic aspirations, mass universal education, which, in turn, increases social aspirations too. These significant changes have heightened psychological tensions among the masses and as they have pointed, one way of relieving such tensions is to rely on new forms of religious expression (Gombrich & Obeyesekere:1988, Obeyesekere: 1982). The growing propitiation of gods such as *Kataragama, Huniyam*, and goddesses such as *Kali, Lakshmi*[6] , the practice *bodhi puja*, Sai Baba devotion and the "grandiose rituals practices" (Perera, 1995: 71- 79), have been the result of a collapse of "traditional order" and the resultant lack of a coherence and order in social life. Obeyesekere and Gombrich point out that the collapse of this "traditional social order" has given way to a "disordered modern society" (1988:100). They further state that these new forms of religious practice within the "disordered modern society" have necessarily surfaced under the guise of traditional forms of ritual practice. "In Sri Lanka, as in many other parts of the world, there has been a decay in traditional communal, religious ritual" (Obeyesekere: 1982: 156).

Obeyesekere suggests that village-based traditional rituals like, "exorcism" *(yak tovil)*, *gammaduva*, a ceremony devoted to goddess Pattini and *bali santiya* for planetary deities *(grahayo)* are disappearing in the wake of new rites

---

6 Lakshmi is a Hindu goddess of wealth, and this cult is currently very popular among the Sinhala Buddhists in urban and suburban areas of Sri Lanka.

which are more accommodating to contemporary conditions. This line of argument tends to assume a unilinear development, the old forms necessarily giving way to new ones. What it fails to see is that these so-called "traditional rites" are engaging in continually innovative practices as they continue to elaborate on some elements of the traditional rituals. My field data, on the other hand, indicate that traditional rituals are still very important in urban as well as village areas. The data shows how traditional rituals have responded to the changing circumstances by changing their forms.

Bruce Kapferer, who investigated "traditional exorcism" in southern Sri Lanka, in his book, *A Celebration of Demons*, argues that the present day "demonic practices" are predominant among rural peasants and working-class people in Sri Lanka (1983). It is, however, hard to accept this view that "exorcism" or any other traditional rituals are confined to one particular class or structure. In fact, a proper understanding of what is happening to ritual traditions in Southern Sri Lanka requires going beyond a simple class analysis. David Scott, who has recently published a book entitled *Formation of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil* has criticized Gombrich's and Obeyesekere's views. He argues for a radical rethinking of historical change within the context of Sinhala Buddhism. He questions the ways in which anthropological and colonial production of knowledge about *yak tovil* in Southern Sri Lanka has taken place (1994). The bulk of Scott's work in this regard takes the form of an extended critique of Kapferer's analysis of Sinhala ritual (1983). Scott's analysis focuses on the textual traditions rather than the social context of the ritual. By contrast, I would argue that one must be more concerned with the social context where the ritual takes place in order to investigate the dynamic nature of the Sinhala ritual tradition. My study will be firmly grounded on the social context rather than on the textual tradition. As I mentioned before, my

ethnographic material clearly shows that traditional rituals are not necessarily declining, but continually developing into new forms, at two different levels. On the one hand, collectively organized larger exorcist and healing rituals of the traditional Sinhala communities are shifting away from the public arena to a much narrower focus, namely, the **family** or **individual** level. This process can be identified as **personalization**[7] of the once village-based public rituals. One remarkable feature of this family or private level ritual is the removal of the public display aspects of the ritual, such as dancing, drumming and comic drama. Now it only concentrates on its healing aspect. On the other hand, its performative and displaying aspects (drumming, singing, dancing and comic drama etc.) are reappearing in an entirely new context, encompassing **public** (or **national**) ritual performances. This new dimension of traditional ritual practice is increasingly common in most parts of the country today. These public events take the form of cultural displays or *sandarsana (maha bali santhi sandarsanaya)*. Both levels of ritual forms have different characteristics that I hope to describe in detail in Chapter 5. These changes indicate how traditional ritual practices have responded to external influence by changing their forms.

So far, I have made an attempt to explain my approach to the study of traditional rituals, and more specifically *bali*. Furthermore, I have discussed some limitations of ethnographic studies already undertaken by others which point to the need for a new approach. I have also explained my desire to locate my study in the context of recent theoretical debates on globalization. However, in order to prepare the groundwork for an analysis on the above lines, it is necessary to look at the relationships between Buddhism, astrology and the planets. Without understanding these relationships we cannot explain

---

7 Bob Simpson defines this process as a "privatization" of ritual (1997,vol 03:43-59).

the mechanisms and beliefs that underlie the *bali* ritual, and in particular, its relationship to astrology. Therefore, it is very important to first write a chapter on these relationships to understand the *bali* ritual in its proper context. Later in Chapter Two, I will explain how the *bali* ritual evolved in the particular historical contexts.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the role of ritual specialists *(bali aduro)*, particularly their ritual knowledge and skills, which are required for the performance of both public and private forms of the ritual.

Chapter Four provides a description of various types of *bali*, which I observed in and around Bentota. In the same chapter, I provide an analysis of the *bali* ritual in terms of its structure and organization.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the changing forms of traditional rituals in relation to globalization, in the present context of Sri Lanka. I also elaborate on some aspects of the public and private nature of contemporary rituals.

In the concluding chapter, I will be summarizing what I have presented so far and will try to point out the significance of the traditional ritual practices in the contemporary social context under the influence of globalization, which are already labeled as "disappearing rituals". I will conclude by emphasising the importance of the dynamic nature of Sinhala ritual traditions, which is an area that ethnographers have not studied in detail.

2
Buddhism, Astrology and Planetary Rituals

> "Buddhism in its early phase kept aloof from magic and supernaturalism but it transformed itself in the post-Asokan era to accommodate popular religious needs for magic, divine intervention in worldly distress, and the promise of heaven in the hereafter (Weber 1958: 237)"

The main purpose of this chapter is to look at the relationship between Buddhism and the so-called non-Buddhist system, particularly astrology and planetary rituals. In addition, I also look at the relationship between astrology and planetary rituals, in particular, the *bali* ritual. The ultimate purpose of this chapter is to explain the underlying mechanisms and beliefs that sustain *bali* rituals in Sinhala Buddhist society. Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka has always coexisted with various forms of other religious practices oriented to deities, planets, astrology and demons, and some of these often figure in the Hindu tradition as well. However, the Buddhist doctrine in its canonical form stands apart from the culturally-specific forms of popular religious practices. Beliefs in astrology and other supernatural powers and rituals are, in theory,

inappropriate to be considered as part of Buddhism. Buddhism teaches the accumulation of merit through one's own good deeds as the way to ensure good fortune, and *Nirvana* as the elimination of the suffering inherent in existence outside the endless round of death and rebirth. Similarly, Gombrich points out that "Buddha himself condemned astrology, palmistry, and similar practices, but did not deny their possible validity. Anyway the Buddha declared them a distraction from the road to salvation" (1971:148-149). But many anthropologists and sociologists[8] who have spent extended periods of time in Theravada Buddhist societies have shown that Buddhists do believe in various types of (non-Buddhist) supernatural powers and the magical efficacy of rituals which are outside the Buddhist doctrine. This non-Buddhist part of the religion of Sinhala Buddhists has no unifying label within the Sinhala culture. Obeyesekere and Gombrich suggest that it should be called "Spirit religion"[9]. Like Theravada Buddhism, this religion also has its own traditional roles and institutions (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988: 03).

2.1 Astrology and Buddhism

Gananath Obeyesekere (1963,1966) stresses the point that the Sinhalas' popular everyday religion, or spirit religion, has a genuine place in Buddhism, and describes the total religious field as "Sinhala Buddhism". At the heart of Obeyesekere's

[8] Notably, the work of Spiro in Burma (1967, 1970), Tambiah in Thailand (1970, 1984) and Obeyesekere in Sri Lanka (1963, 1966).

[9] This non-Buddhist part of the religion of Sinhala Buddhists has no lable within Sinhala culture. Obeyesekere and Gombrich give it a lable of convenience "spirit religion" (1988:03).

analysis is the important observation that astrology, deity and demon belief in Sinhala Buddhism are guided by basic Buddhist principles such as karma (Pali: *kamma*), rebirth, suffering (Pali: *dukka*) etc. It is very important to see how Obeyesekere describes belief in planets and astrology as underlined by the concepts of karma and rebirth. According to him, belief in astrology must be understood as a product of "psychological indeterminacy" of the Buddhist doctrine of karma (1968:21-22). Karma is a fundamental and inviolable law, which represents the condition of all living beings. In terms of cause and effect, karma represents the outermost ring of causality, the ultimate reference point with respect to an individual's present condition. Good deeds produce good karma which has a positive impact on rebirths; conversely, bad actions give rise to bad karma and have a negative impact on rebirths. However, not every action is of a karmic nature; only an 'intentional action whether mental, verbal, or physical is regarded as kamma ... involuntary, unintentional or unconscious actions do not constitute kamma' (Narada: 1988:195).

Obeyesekere states that karma as a theory of causation itself produces psychological indeterminancy. The individual knows that the good things he does in his present life-time will be rewarded in a future lifetime, but he has no idea how his future will be related to his present existence (1968:21). Thus, it is possible to explain everything that happens to us, whether good or bad, in terms of some deed, which was performed previously whether in this life or in a previous one. As Obeyesekere states it "I may be a pauper today, tomorrow a prince. Today I am in perfect health, but tomorrow I may be suddenly struck by a fatal disease"(ibid: 21). In this psychological indeterminacy or uncertainty, a Buddhist likes to know when the results of past actions will begin to take

fruit. There is no mechanism to solve this uncertainty in the Buddhist religious doctrine[10]. Therefore, Buddhists need to consult another system. As Obeyesekere has pointed out, astrology can solve this psychological indeterminacy. It can tell us when fortune or misfortune is likely to occur. As Obeyesekere comments "the astrologer tells you that you will become a prince although you are a pauper, or that a fatal illness will shortly strike you down even though you are at present enjoying perfect health"(ibid. 21). One astrologer told me that karma can be described as intangible, unseen or invisible *(dakiya nohaki-no penana deyak)*. However, if the planetary movements are correctly calculated through the horoscope, it makes this "unseen" karma visible before it actually manifests itself malevolently or benevolently. If the predictions are malevolent, then steps can be taken to minimize or avert future misfortune, which are based on quite non-Buddhist belief systems. In theory, astrology cannot alter the inescapable certainty of karmic fortune. It can only map it out in advance to be at least prepared for it. Karma can only be altered by fulfilling the prescribed techniques of concentration and meditation which lead the Buddhist on the path to nirvana (ibid: 22). But Obeyesekere argues that astrological belief has been elaborated to an exceptional degree, despite the fact that this belief is strongly deprecated in the formal Buddhist doctrine. Its persistence and proliferation need to be considered in the context of the problems of meaning posed by the theory of karma (ibid: 22). The astrological system and the planets always mediate between karma and the individual. The fundamental importance of the astrological system as a mediator between karma and the individual is the yielding of results before it

[10] C. Keyes has a similar explanation: that karma has an affective or psychological function but it has not provided a 'logical resolution' for the Buddhist (Keyes 1983:3).

happens. The question is how astrology maps out the individual's karmic fortune or misfortune *(karma pala-vipaka)* in advance. According to Buddhism, it is one's karma that determines when, where, and in what state one is born or rather, reborn. The moment of birth recorded and reified in the horoscope *(kendaraya/handahana)* marks the individual for life and transforms impersonal karma into an individual set of possibilities and potentials. Gombrich describes it as, "One's luck, which is really his current stock of karma, is largely reified in his horoscope: if his karma is good he will be born at a moment when the planets are favorable"(1971:146). An astrologer from Bentota also told me that birth time *(upan velava)* and its associated planetary configurations *(grahayo pihitima)* fulfill the karmic process, which links the person's present lifetime to his previous lifetime. A person is born at a particular nexus of time *(upan velava)*, place, family and social position through which planetary configurations and their ongoing permutations intimate and actually effect the unfolding of his/her karma. This unfolding karma can be astrologically reified in the person's horoscope. By consulting an astrologer the person becomes aware of impending malevolent or benevolent forms of karma.

Most Sinhala people have their horoscope cast at birth and they read it anxiously at times of crises so that good fortune or misfortune can be interpreted as a product of malevolent *(graha dosa)* or beneficent planetary influences. It is important to remember that, most of the time, people do not consult their horoscopes. It is when life is in a crisis that such action is prompted. When things go well it can be assumed that the cosmos is favorably oriented towards the individual: karma is good, the planets are well protective, the gods are well disposed, and the malevolence of demonic forces are not harmful.

In this section, I have pointed out that Buddhism, particularly karma and rebirth, are central to the belief in

astrology and planets. In other words, the belief in planetary influence and astrology are extensions of these two concepts of doctrinal Buddhism. In this regard, planets as deities act upon the unique configuration of their "gaze" in each individual life, and act out the karmic career of every person. In the next section I will discuss how planets operate as deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon.

2.2 Buddhist Pantheon and Planetary Deities

In this section I will attempt to understand how planetary deities *(graha deviyo)* operate and are propitiated in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. The pantheon of Sinhala Buddhists is predominantly a hierarchical one. Several scholars, notably Ames (1966), Obeyesekere (1966, 1982), Gombrich (1971), Kapferer (1983), Winslow (1984) and Scott (1993) have presented classifications of the supernatural beings who populate the hierarchy of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon[11]. Their classifications are in broad agreement with my own material. In almost all discussions of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon, emphasis is given to the moral logic of Buddhism and to notions of karma, authority *(varam)* and merit. My explanation of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon also follows this line of argument.

The highest position in the hierarchy is occupied by the Buddha. The Buddha is not a deity, but Sinhala Buddhists treat

[11] But Mallikarachchi has argued that a similar hierarchy and operation of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon is rarely found among Buddhist traders. He further argues that trader's pantheon (commercial pantheon) is not a hierarchical one, its operational logic is mainly linked to factors such as competition, risk, unforeseen dangers and the fear of losing profits (see: Mallikarachchi 1998: 210-283).

him as a living presence, alive in images *(pilimaya)* of him and in his relics *(dhatu)*, and attribute to him supernatural powers. Below the Buddha are the superior gods *(deviyo)*, the beings still subject to the law of karma, known as *hatara varam deviyo* or Four Warrant Gods. In the Bentota area these are Natha[12], Visnu, Kataragama and Pattini. According to Obeyesekere, the concept of Four Warrant Gods derives from the classical Buddhist concept of the guardian gods of the four quarters: namely Dhrtarastra, Virudha, Virupaksa and Vaisravana (1966:8-9). Below the Four Warrant Gods are a variety of other powerful deities *(devas)* and planetary deities *(graha deviyo)*. These deities are followed by a herd of demons, including yakku and raksas, and the bottom of the hierarchy consists of *pretayo* and *kumbhanda* (the malign spirits). Human beings *(manussa)* occupy a position between deities, on the one hand, and demons *(yakku)*, on the other. The above mentioned order in the Sinhala Buddhist hierarchy has its own cult and special mode of propitiation. But Obeyesekere has pointed out that the hierarchy is integrated by the supreme position held by the Buddha in the pantheon and the dogma that all supernatural beings participate in the human world by the Buddha's permission or *varama*. The concept of *varama* organizes the dispersal or distribution of authority of the Buddha[13] (1966,1982,1984).

As mentioned earlier, planetary deities are located somewhere between gods and demons. There are nine planetary deities, which can be identified as operating in the Sinhala Buddhists pantheon, namely ravi (sun), chandra (moon), kuja (mars), budha (mercury), guru (jupiter), sukra

[12] Natha is propitiated only in the ritual performances and he is not so popular among the people of the Bentota area.

[13] David Scott has pointed out that the concept of *varama* is invariably connected with Buddha's *anaguna* (virtuous command) (See, Scott: 1994: 25).

(venus), sani (saturn), rahu (dragon's head), and ketu (dragon's tail)[14]. Their exact status, however, is far from clear, both in the minds of the informants and also in the limited ethnography as it relates to this aspect of the pantheon.

The planets, which are the main recipients of *bali* offerings, are referred to by some informants as deities *(deviyo)*. They consider the planets to be deities who influence earthly life and who may be worshipped and propitiated. In keeping with this categorization each deity has his own particular form[15] (see **plate 1**), color, direction of overloadship *(adhipathi disava)*, vehicles *(vahana)*, weapons *(ayudha)* and preferred foods *(bojana)* etc (see **table 1**). Like the gods, it is believed that planetary deities can be supplicated and in some way influenced. They receive vegetarian offerings *(bhojana)*, which are relatively pure, as distinct from the impure offerings *(dola)* given to demons. They also have their own associated mythologies, which give descent from humans, usually kings or great sages in ancient India[16]. These myths provide some instances relating the planets as gods to other gods in the Sinhalese pantheon. The myths are relatively obscure with

---

14 Rahu and Ketu, the ascending and descending nodes of the moon are often treated as planets in astrology.

15 For example:
Wayaba disawata adhipoti sanda devi aet wahaneni wadinne
Undu bat dola gena me wadawa sita bandaweluwak daraminne
Ata pasa dolasat jammaya naekatat siti taena apala karanne
Wayamba disawata adipoti Sandu devi set siri salasa awadanne

The Moon god, lord of the North West, comes on his elephant,
Taking the offering of boiled vetches, having eaten it, he winds his sash,
When he comes in the 8, 5, or 12 birth constellations, he causes bad luck
May the Moon god, lord of the North West, granting blessing, preserve
(Nevill. Vol.2, 1954:312).

16 Stephen Markel, gives the mythologies of all the nine planetary deities (see, Markel 1995:19-68).

Plate 1: The nine planetary deities *(grahayo)*

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Table 1: Some Characteristics of Planetary Deities

Name of the planet	Directions of overlordship	Colours *(varna)*	Vehicles *(vahana)*	Weapons *(ayudha)*	Stones *(menik)*	Foods *(bojana)*	Tree *(ruksa)*
1. Sun *(ravi)*	East (indure)	Red	Horse	Siriwasa	Ruby	Kokun rice	Imbul
2. Moon *(Chandra)**	North- West	White	Elephant	A girdle	Pearl	White rice	Diwul
3. Mars *(kuja)**	South	Red	Peacock	Golden Hendu	Coral or Pink Sapphire	Red rice	Kolon
4. Mercury *(Budha)**	North	Green	Buffalo	A chank	Emerald	Milkrice	Kohomba
5. Jupiter *(Guru)**	North -East	Yellow	Human (nara)	Water pot	Golden Topaz	Golden rice	Bo
6. Venus *(Sukra)**	South-East	Rose	Ox or Bull	Whisk	Diamond	Gee rice	Karanda
7. Saturn *(Sani)**	West	Blue	Crow	Nadawata	Crow e Sapphire	Blue rice	Nuga
8. Dragon's head *(rahu)*	South-West	Black	Horse	Remasa	Cinnamon	Sesame rice	Waetake or pandanus
9. Dragon's tail (ketu)*	Pathala or the nadir	Ash	Lotus	Beads and Book	Cat's Eye	White rice	Banana

* Also known as Sandu, Angaharu, Budahu, Brahaspathi, Sikuru and Senasuru.

unfamiliar motifs of Hindu rather than Buddhist orientation. The planets as gods, however, do not figure in the morality structure of the Sinhalese pantheon outlined by Obeyesekere (1966,1982,1984). Planetary deities have not received *varam* or authority from the Buddha, the mechanism by which Hindu or local origin deities appear to have been incorporated into the ongoing Sinhala Buddhist pantheon[17]. Therefore, they have remained outside the category of gods in Obeyesekere's pantheon.

Like other gods the planets are believed to have personal characteristics. As such they can be essentially amoral in the effects they produce. Their benevolence or malevolence arises solely out of their combination and configurations with respect to the individuals. On the other hand, the main Buddhist deities are seen as benevolent but do play a punitive role (rational punitiveness: punishing evil and rewarding the good) in the overall morality structure of the pantheon.

Like other gods, planetary deities also can make misfortune, which is known as *graha dosa*. This *dosa* is entirely different from the *dosa* caused by gods and demons *(yakku)*. The typical ritual performed for those suffering from *graha dosa* is *bali*[18]. Unlike many other gods, the planetary

[17] Obeyesekere has pointed out that historically, Sinhala deities are of Hindu or local folk origin, but they have been incorporated into the dominant framework of Theravada Buddhism (Obeyesekere 1982: 16-17).

[18] In this situation, people conduct Bodhi pujas: the ceremony consists of decorating the bo tree with flags and other ornaments, lighting of coconut oil lamps around the Bodhi and its vicinity, offering of flowers to the Bodhi, pouring pots of water; sometimes mingled with purificatory ingredients and at the foot of the Bodhi expressing in chants the wish that the participants receive the benefits they desire ... (Seneviratne & Wickramaratne 1980: 737-738).

deities are not commonly represented in Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka[19]. Occasionally people do display in their home, pictures of planets but this is far from common. Although some informants actually treated the planets as deities, others did not see the planets as having any metaphysical status and they believe in planets as a force entirely natural and "scientific". Moving from the level of ideas to the level of action, the evidence would suggest that the planets are treated as lower order of deities in the Buddhist pantheon. Because of this, they are propitiated by low caste mediators *(bali aduras)* and the language of mediation is ordinary Sinhala with some Sanskrit verses. The rituals *(bali)* are accompanied by elaborate performances using dance, drumming and song and the offerings presented are distinct from the offerings made to the gods *(puja)* and to the demons *(dola)*.

From the above discussion, it would appear that to a considerable extent, the planets as deities lie outside the Sinhala pantheon. This is not to say, however, that they are wholly disconnected. But anthropologists, who have extensively discussed the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon, have not paid much attention to these deities. The pantheon as described by Obeyesekere (1966) deals primarily with the relationship between a linear hierarchy of gods and their areas of jurisdiction by linking with the political hierarchy in the feudal state. However, in recent years, this pantheon has been subject to a number of changes. Probably the most important of these changes is the rise of the god Skanda, often referred to as Kataragama by Sinhalas (Obeyesekere:1977, 1978). Kali and Huniyam have become increasingly important in urban areas (Gombrich and Obeyesekere: 1988). The planets, however,

[19] I have very recently seen established images of the nine planets at two Buddhist temples, one at Nugegoda and other at Pillawa in Boralasgamuwa, and also a separate shrine for planet Saturn (senasura) at Sella Kataragama, South of Sri Lanka.

have little to do with the questions of space and domination, but rather relate to matters of time. The planets are important in understanding the way in which the Sinhala pantheon operates within and through time and they come to have certain effects on individuals at certain times. The absence of interest in planetery deities in the ethnography of Sri Lanka can partly be located in the peripheral status of these deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon.

As I mentioned earlier, planetary forces sustain an unfolding of fate throughout the lifetime of the person. Fate is manifested in the general features of the person's psychic constitution and socio-familial relationships which, together, articulate the whole life experience including experiences associated with health and disease, family crises, and economic circumstances.

When a person's *kala dasava* (astrological time) is bad, or more precisely, a period of bad planetary influences *(apala kalaya)* appears, various forces that operate in the pantheon can easily inflict misfortunes *(dosa)*. For example, gods, demons or even humans can cause *dosa* at this time. On the other hand, in times when the planets are strong *(honda kala dasava)* or favorable, the benevolence of the gods is more likely to flow, manifesting itself in health and good fortune. Similarly, a person's interaction with other people on a day to day basis is more likely to be fruitful and positive when the planets are well disposed. Also the effects of beings in the lower order in the pantheon, such as demons and other malign forces are ameliorated if one is in a period when the planets are favorably oriented. During this period, demons *(yakku)* cannot cast down their malign glance or *distiya* on a person's body[20] because planets provide protection from all malign forces during this period.

[20] See David Scott for more details about "distiya" (1994: 38-68).

At a more mundane level, the planets can ensure protection in the face of misfortune of a more natural kind. One informant told me "if the time of the planets is good, then even if you are dashed against a rock or tree you will not be killed" (ග්‍රහ කල හොඳ නම් ගලේ ගහේ ගහලවත් මරන්න බෑ).

If these factors are taken into consideration, the planets are operating in time and individuals are moving through these times, which gives both positive and negative qualities of the person's life. These qualities are recognizable through a person's horoscope. The horoscope contains various astrological features (see: Kemper 1979: 482-483). These astrological features are calculated very carefully by the astrologer, and then he can predict the nature of the influence that will come from the various forces of the pantheon, mainly the planets *(grahayo)*. The bad influence *(graha dosa)* that comes from planets is the most difficult to eliminate through normal rituals. For this, a special category of rituals must be performed to minimize dosa. The typical planetary ritual performed for those suffering from *graha dosa* is *bali*, the ritual I am going to discuss in the next section.

2.3 Planetary rituals

Rituals dealing with the planets can be found in various forms, like other rituals performed by the *berava aduras*. They organize and perform many planetary rituals varying in size and complexity. One writer has used the term "grahaism" *(graha*: planets) to characterize this area of ritual activity (De Silva 1865-66:12). The making of offerings collectively referred to as *bali* links all rituals falling into this category. According to both the encyclopaedia of Buddhism (1966) and the Sankrit-English dictionary (1956), the term *bali* means offering a gift or oblation and is for relatively lower deities

in the cosmic order. In a broader sense, *bali* is used as a generic term for a ritual category, which has its feature in appeals, and offerings made mainly to planetary deities, where they are represented by images and pictures. However, certain demons are also honored with the dedication of *bali* images to them. *Bali* images to Maha Sohona, Kalu Kumaraya and Riri Yakka are frequently dedicated in the *yak tovil* ceremonies in the Southern Province. However, for the most part, *bali* images are associated with the planets and related phenomena such as lunar asterisms *(nakat)*, zodiac *(rashi)* and their overlords. To a great extent the term *bali* has become synonymous with such images, but the term, in fact, refers to all offerings made in these rituals. According to most ritual experts there are thirty-five different types of offerings *(pan tis bali)*. These offerings are made from cooked rice *(bat bali)*, flower offerings *(mal bali)* and hand held clay images of the sun *(ath bali)* and so on[21]. The classification of rituals as *bali* is different from other Sinhala Buddhist rituals such as *yak tovil, gammaduwa, kankariya,* etc. In a more strict sense of the term, the rituals which comprise this category do not come under "exorcisms", but deal with more specific misfortunes

[21] My informants described thirty-five types of offerings (pan-tis bali) as: (1) ath (hand), (2) bath (rice), (3) Vali (sand), (4) Mausa (flour), (5) Dewa (deities), (6) Nara (human) (7) yuga (period), (8) Varusa (year),(9) Masa (month), (10) Paksha, (11) Thithi, (12) Dina (day), (13) Nakshathra (asterism) (14) Rashi (zodiac) (15) Chakra (ecliptic) (16) Hin hathra (four cardinal point), (17) Ata rakusu (eight raksha) (18) Rupa (pictures) (19) Prathima (status) (20) Kalyana, (21) Mangala, (22) Madulu (pulp) (23) Ves, (24) Dasa (Period), (25) Ashta (eight), (26) Saka (wheel), (27) Yaga (sacrifice), (28) Yak (demon) (29) Pisasun, (30) Antha, (31) Kada (cloth), (32) Mal (flower), (33) Yathra (yatch), (34) Ahas (sky), (35) Kulu (window)

which come from the planets. *Bali* and related rituals provide one of the few courses of action, which can be taken in the face of misfortune, which explicitly acknowledge the underlying significance of astrology. But, theoretically, *bali* cannot eradicate *dosa* that comes from the planets. What it can do is to minimize, or at least ward off this *dosa*. This idea is summed up neatly in a metaphor used by one informant who stated that if it looks like rain, one is wise to take an umbrella. Taking an umbrella does not stop the rain but in the face of what looks like the inevitable, one can achieve a degree of protection. The *bali* provides such an umbrella against misfortune one might expect during the passage of a bad planetary period.

2.4 Astrology and *Bali* Ritual

Astrology plays a fundamental role in the mechanisms which underlie the practice of *bali* in Sinhala Buddhist society. It is necessary to have some understanding of this complex system and the actions that are based upon it. The connection between *bali* and astrology stems primarily from the belief that from birth to death, an individual passes through periods *(dasa)* over which certain planets have rulership. The duration of these periods can be known by referring to the horoscope[22] when studying the planetary movements *(graha maru vima)* and configurations *(graha pihitima)* within the period. By looking at the configurations and movements of the planets within a certain period, an astrologer can make predictions and assessments of what kind of period is dangerous for an individual. It is unlikely that people have any precise awareness of the periods through which they are going, but it

[22] In both Tamil and Sinhala communities, parents will rarely fail to have a horoscope written after the birth of a child.

is not uncommon for people to get their horoscopes read routinely by an astrologer, particularly when embarking upon mundane activities. Baker emphasises that astrology plays a tremendous role in the lives of the villagers, as it does in the lives of most Sri Lankans (1998:43). According to an astrologer in Bentota, the purpose of formulating a horoscope *(janma patra hadima)* is for finding auspicious times *(nakat balima)* for events such as the first eating of rice *(bat kavima)*, the first learning of letters *(akuru kiyavima)*, entering a house for the first time *(geta gevadima)*, at the starting of businesses and political campaigns. Matching horoscopes for compatibility at marriage *(porondam balanava)*[23] is also common. Baker has pointed out that, whether it is an event of the breaking of the first sod for building an important water reservoir, the starting of the cultivation season, or even the time for leaving the house to take an examination, astrology is a common practice all over Sri Lanka (1998: 43-44). The determination of time for such activities by an astrologer is carried out by examining the person's horoscope. The technical aspects of calculation in a horoscope are not discussed here, since it is a complicated mathematical operation that should be carefully understood. When life is in trouble *(karadara)* or when one feels entirely "down," people visit the astrologer for advice and suggestions for action. One of the things he would do in such a case is to look for the existence of good, and identify bad periods. This process, called *"phalapala vistara kiyanava"* points to the fruitful and fruitless periods. When a fruitless period *(apala kalaya)* is identified, he recommends some alleviating action. He also gives suggestions about which planets are more directly responsible for the misfortune. The periods of Saturn[24]

[23] Steven Kemper has given details about compatibilty at marriage (porondam balima) (See, Kemper 1979: 482-493).

[24] Fuller, C.J. gives details about malignancy of Saturn (senasuru), (See, 1992: 241-244).

(senasuru), Mars *(kuja or angaharu)* Rahu and Ketu are the worst periods *(naraka dasa)* that are supposed to bring misery to the people. As is believed, these periods are unlikely to be overcome without some serious alleviating action being taken. These are referred to as times of *maraka* (fatal), *bhadaka* (obstacle) and *erastaka* (relinquish). Each one of these configurations augurs particularly bad impediments in the life of the victim. Out of the *maraka, badaka* and *erastaka,* the *maraka kalaya* (literally 'fatal time') is the most difficult to pass. In a sense, this is the starting point for the *bali* for it is up to the organizers of the ritual *(bali karayo)* to interpret such readings made by themselves or others. *Bali* is then able to act upon these effects in the "gaze" of the dominant planets. One of the main objectives of the *bali* is to ritually clean the patient, to remove all *dosa* such as sickness, mental disorder and sin, all of which might attract negative attention. For that, extensive recitations of praises of the Buddha and the gods are sung. These recitations primarily relate to the events of the Buddha's life and his previous lives as well *(jataka stories)*. In order to instil the goodness and virtues of the Buddha in the patient's consciousness and then to fortify the mind, the *dosa* have to be expelled through the planetary rituals. This whole removal of *dosa* from the body and mind of the patient takes place primarily through verses *(kavi)* known as *sirasapada* (head to feet verses), *kata pahadiya, set kavi* and *asirvada kavi* (blessing poems) etc. The other way of removing *dosa*, which is central to the aim and intent of *bali*, is to absorb *dosa* into auspicious objects *(mangala vastu)*. For example, clay pots *(pun kalas)*, clay lamps *(mati pahan)*, leaves *(kola)*, flowers *(mal)*, cloth *(viyana)* are among the highly auspicious symbols, which are placed in the *bali* ritual arena, and absorb *dosa* into them. Taking into consideration these issues, a key aim of *bali* is to calm *(santhosa)* and tranquil the patient's *(atura)* body and mind *(hitha)*. In the next section I intend to examine how *bali* originated, and has been practiced in Sri Lanka.

2.5 On the Origin and Legends of *Bali*

Bali has developed over many years and relates back to many of the earlier myths and legends of kings, queens or princes who fell into sickness and affliction. In this section I am going to look at the myths and legends which are believed to narrate the origins of *bali*. But this is not an attempted exercise in historiography. What I can attempt is an explanation of certain myths related to *bali*, and their role in maintaining the ideology of the ritual today.

There are two sets of long myths narrated by ritual specialists which are related to the origins of *bali*.[25] I will summarize these in this section. According to the first story it is believed that *bali* originated in India *(Dambadiva)* at the time of the Buddha. More precisely, it appeared in the mythical city of *Visala (visala maha nuvara)*, at that time ruled by the Lichavi kings. Whatever actual historical connections between *bali* and this particular place and time exit, the *bali* is given a powerful legitimacy by this association with the Buddhist mythological tradition. The particular events which led to the creation of *bali* offerings are to be found in a well-known story, which tells how the Buddha was able to subjugate non-humans *(amanushaya)* who were destroying the Lichavi Kingdom. In the city the Buddha sprinkled holy water *(pirit pan)* and chanted holy verses *(pirit)*, notably the *Ratana Sutta*. His supreme benevolence *(ana guna)* was to restore prosperity to the city of *Visala*. In popular versions in connection with *bali*, the story now continues to include an arrangement made

[25] One of my informants also mentioned that the very first *bali* ritual was performed by Brahmans in Sri Lanka *(Tambapanni)* for King *Panduvas*, the son of Vijaya's brother who was afflicted by mental disturbances and skin disease *(hame rogayak)* as a result of the malign attentions of *Kuveni*, Vijaya's queen.

between the Buddha and the demons *(yakku)*, which is the following: that the demons may continue to cause their afflictions upon people, but upon receipt of appropriate offerings *(bali)* they will desist from causing suffering:

එදා අප මුනි සිරිරද. විසල් පුර මත නද
සිටි විලස සිපද. යකුන් හට වදාලේ මේලේ
උදෙසා මෙ තොප හැම. බලි දෙන රැ දවාලෙම
මෙ නුවර දනෝ හැම. රකිව් සෙත සලසමින් පෙම

(The Buddha, when he visited the city of Visala which had fallen prey to demons (yakku), addressed the yakku, you protect the people in this city, they offer you meals (bali) day and night).

ඒ විසල් පුර ඒකල. ඇති විය මෙ බලි පිළිවෙල
සුදනනි ගුණ නිමල. වඩව් බැති සිත් වෙමින් ලොල

(At that time, this ritual of bali came into existence therefore, cultivate feelings toword bali with feelings of devotion).

The responsibility for creating the appropriate offerings fell to the sages *(Isivarayo)* who set about making the ritual offering which was to become the *bali* ritual:

සිරි සද සතර නැත
උගත් බමුණු පෙර දින
ඉසි බස ලෙස පොරන
යාග උපනක් සැදෙ මෙලෙසින

(bali came into existence in accordance with the words of Sages and Brahmins who had been educated well).

Since that time, whenever the demons[26] affect people, the making of offerings, as created by the sages *(Isivarayo)* at that time, will bring relief. However, in statements given by informants and in the verses *(kavi)* related in the course of *bali* rituals, the emphasis is not on the *Visala* story but on the story of the Lichavi prince, who is the victim of sorcery cast by the demon king *(Vesamuni Raja)*. As a result of the sorcery, the prince fell into a coma. Then sages came and constructed an image of the prince in sand *(vali bali)* and offered it to the demons. From this original event, the offering of images *(rupa)* to the demons cure subsequent afflictions in a variety of substances such as sand, clay, flower and rice on behalf of the patient:

ලිච්ජවී රජ උපත. ඔනුන් කුමරුන් සිය වෙත
පන්සිය කුමරු වෙත. ගියෝ වැලි කෙළි උනුන් සිය වෙත
ඉන් එක් කුමරු හට. දොස් වැද වැටී එම විට
තනා වැලි රුවක් කොට. දමා මල් පැන් සියක් කොට

ඒ විට දොස් යන්නේ. කුමරා නැඟ සිටින්නේ
බුදු අනුභසින් නේ. එදා සිට බලි පැවත එන්නේ

(At the time of Lichchavi, five hundred young princes were playing in the sand. Suddenly one prince fell ill. Then some of them made a figure with sand and offered flowers and blessed with sprinkling water. As a result all defects (dosa) of the prince dissappeared. With the power of the Buddha, the bali ritual continues to exist from that day).

As we can see, there is a fundamental connection between events recorded in myths, which supposedly took place in ancient India at the time of the Buddha, and ritual action at

[26] In the context of *bali*, the demons are identified as the planets and associated phenomena.

present. By following the instructions of the sages, as they are believed to have come down in verses *(kavi)* and stories transmitted primarily in an oral mode, it is believed that victims in the present can be cured.

The origin of the *bali* in ancient India is only one part of the story *(katava)*. On the other hand, there are other stories which are narrated by informants *(aduro)* concerning the arrival of various ritual forms, including the *bali* in Sri Lanka. The stories are related to a time when the knowledge to perform rituals for the bestowal of blessings by the making of offering *(puja)* did not exist in the island. At that time Brahmans *(bamuno)* came from India, more correctly from the *Soli Rata*, to perform for the royalty in the country. They were the only people in Sri Lanka *(lakdeepaya)* endowed with resources necessary to hire them. These Brahmans were skilled and had extensive knowledge of healing rites such as *yaga*, *homa* and *santi karma*. Having performed these rites for the aristocracy, shiploads of gifts *(thagi-boga)*, goods *(badu-muttu)*, wealth and grain *(dhana dhanya)*, money *(milamudal)* and cloth *(redipili)* were taken away to India *(Dambadiva)*. While this was happening, an encounter occurred between a Brahmin and a Buddhist monk. My informants identified the monk as Sri Rahula of Totagamuwa. This monk, Rahula, is the disciple *(golaya)* of Vidagama thero, the poet-monk in the Kotte period. And the disciple was more skilled than the teacher in every respect. Rahula invited a Brahmin priest to his temple (at *Totagamuwa*) to perform a blessing ceremony *(santi karma)* related to the planets. Unknown to the Brahman, Rahula had hidden in his wardrobe one of his acolytes who was skilled in dictation. His skill was such that he was able to write down everything that the Brahman was saying using a stylus *(panhida)* and ola leaf *(puskola poth)*. Having finished the *santiya* and the book *(puskola poth)*, the monk Rahula said that he also has such a book in the temple but it still has

not been applied with *kalu* (for blackening the letters) *(tava kalu madalat na)*. As this indicates, the book that had just been written was shown to the Brahman. Then the Brahman saw stars! *(taru penuna)*. Realizing that he had been tricked, he became very ashamed *(lejja una)*. Thus, it is believed that the Buddhists got the ritual knowledge to perform *bali* through the monk Rahula during the period of Bhuvanekabahu V (1372-1408). Rahula deliberately stole the knowledge of *bali* from the Brahman and gave a Buddhist appearance by placing it under the authority of Buddha. And he also thought that the power of the Brahmans should be reduced even more. That is why the lowest caste *(berava)* was given knowledge on rituals by the Buddhist monks. And it is from that time that *bali* exists among *berava* in their caste line *(paramparaven paramparavata)*. Likewise, the contemporary performers claim legitimacy by having been taught by particular teachers *(gurunnanse)* who, in turn, were taught by particularly well known teachers, so that ritual knowledge and skills can be traced back in the form of a pedigree referred to as one's *paramparava*. In the next chapter I shall be examining the *bali aduru paramparava* (tradition) in the Bentota area.

3
Ritual Specialists in the Bentota Tradition

> "Except for Navandanna, the berava is the only numerically important caste preserving an artistic tradition in Ceylon" (Ryan: 1953: 124).

In the Bentota area, most ritual specialists *(aduro)* belong to the *berava* caste *(nakathi)*. This is generally the case throughout Sri Lanka too. The *berava* are identified with certain types of rituals and artistic knowledge and skills that are passed down as tradition *(paramparava)* within the caste. Such traditions are embedded in families and individuals and are identified through the knowledge and skills they have acquired (Kapferer: 1983; Simpson: 1984). These traditions operate as dynamic entities for those within the *berava* caste that have some transmissible knowledge or skill. Nowadays, the *berava* are one of the few castes who have retained a strong identity in terms of their traditional ritual occupations. But in reality, traditional occupations are practiced by a minority within the caste. Nevertheless, the identification with such occupations, either through direct practice or familial association *(paramparava)* is an important source of the *berava* caste's low status and social position as an integral part of its identity.

But the *berava* in the Bentota area are not confined to their traditional ritual activities. Several other writers (Seneviratne: 1978, Silva: 1992, Gunasekara: 1994, Sorensen: 1996, Simpsion: 1997) have pointed out that the hereditary occupations among low castes are rapidly being given up, or at least pay much less attention by *berava* in contemporary Sri Lanka. In the Bentota area, many *berava* people are currently involved in non-ritual activities such as temple painting *(siththara veda)*, carpentry *(wadu veda)*, masonry *(mesan vada)*, mask making *(ves muhunu kapima)*, baking *(bakery veda)*, working in hotels and garment factories, migration to the Middle East (mainly female *berava*), joining the armed forces or working as unskilled labourers. These diverse occupations indicate that the *berava* have become internally differentiated, in accordance with their participation in changing societal processes. Given the practical purpose of this book, I am not going to look at the *berava's* non-ritual activities in detail, hence, the emphasis on the ritual activities. This is not to underestimate the overwhelming significance of these other economic activities.

3.1 Ritual Specialization

The *berava* have been historically associated and identified with the control of the supernatural to alleviate this worldly suffering. For a long time, they have been in command of the traditions of exorcism and healing located within the supernatural beliefs of the Sinhala Buddhists (Kapferer 1983, 37-48, Simpson: 1984). They have been the carriers and the generators of many complex ideas, beliefs and artistic ritual traditions in Sinhala culture. Yet, these activities regularly place them in subservient positions in Sinhala society in terms of its caste hierarchy (Ryan 1953: 292-294, Seneviratne 1978:151, Silva 1992: 67, Simpson 1997: 45-49). However,

the energies of ritual specialists from the *berava* caste, which are always directed towards the identification, propitiation, and banishment of supernatural disorder, provide short-term relief in the face of intractable suffering among Buddhists. On the other hand, ritual specialists are given very low identity in the Sinhala caste structure as the persons who confront and control the negative forces operating in the pantheon. But in their performances they create a meaningful transformation of the patient's mind and body: illness *(leda)* to health *(sanipa)*, disorder to order, sadness *(duk)* to happiness *(hita santosa kirima)* from both human and non-human malign attention. In comparison to the number of *berava* living in the area, only small numbers of *berava* families are now engaged in such activities in the Bentota area. These *berava* family traditions have produced well-known ritual specialists whose influence was felt throughout the Southern Province. Nowadays these families provide a wide range of services to the surrounding area and have a strong reputation for having produced skillful performers *(daksha minissu)*. People even come from far and seek out the services of the men of these families, and they, in turn, travel all over the island providing their services. The services provided by the *berava* specialists can be broadly categorized into three areas:

(1) Drumming (in healing rituals, in temples, in processions *[pereharaval]*, in state and public ceremonies, etc.)

(2) Performing *yak tovil* (exorcism) and *bali* ritual

(3) Astrology.

I am not going to discuss all three parts here, but will focus on *yak tovil* and *bali*. Included under this category is a wide

range of activities which are practiced by the *berava* ritual specialists alone without the co-operation of specialists from other castes[27]. The ritual services of *yak tovil* and *bali* are supplied to individual patrons whenever the need arises. The performances, which comprise this category, draw upon knowledge, skills and techniques, developed over many generations among the family traditions. These rituals are primarily focused on beings such as demons *(yakku)*, spirits *(pretayo)* and planetary deities *(grahayo)* who cast their malevolent "gaze" *(distiya)* upon humans. The rituals *(yak tovil* and *bali)* performed by the *berava* in the area can be conveniently grouped into five main categories:

1. The *Sanni Yakkuma:* Ritual of the group of the eighteen sickness-causing demons,

2. The *Mahason Samayama:* Ritual of the great cemetery demon,

3. The *Suniyama:* Ritual of the witchcraft-demon,

4. The *Rata Yakkuma:* Ritual of the black demon *(Kalu-Yaka)* and the seven female demons,[28]

5. The *Bali:* Ritual of the planetary deities,

[27] Bob Simpson shows that this situation appears to have changed considerably, ritual activities once dominated by the *berava* shifting into the control of other groups, particularly Goyigama (Simpson:1997:53-54). But in the Bentota area, *berava* performers are still dominating the performance of healing rituals.

[28] This ritual is performed mainly for female patients against childlessness, menstruation and pregnancy complaints etc.

The rituals described are highly complex events using dance, song *(kavi)*, comic sequences, rhythm, costume, colour, spatial organization and an elaborate system of offerings to achieve their effects. Each category could easily be the subject of a whole volume. Some of the areas such as *Sanni yakkuma* (Obeyesekere 1969: 174-216), *Mahason Samayama* (Kapferer: 1983), *Suniyama* (Kapferer: 1997), *Rata yakuma* (Kapferer: 1983:164-165) have already been documented by a number of scholars. Here I focus on the category of *bali.* People who perform rituals in the first four categories are known as *yakaduro* (exorcists). Those in the fifth category are known as *bali aduro*. I will discuss this category in the next section.

3.2 The *Bali* Aduro

Bali aduro[29] are high status persons among the *berava* ritual specialists. They often maintain their status in terms of the ritual work in which they are primarily engaged. The *yakadura,* who mainly perform *yak tovil* associated with *yakku,* are widely viewed as lower in status than those who regularly perform *bali* rituals for the higher planetary deities. The high standing among *bali aduro* is generally achieved through the long- term accumulation of knowledge and skills in the ritual discourse. The standard *bali aduro* must reach includes mastering of numerous mantras and songs *(kavi gayanaya),* the art of molding and painting images *(ambhima* and *chithranaya)*, building ritual structures, the art of dancing *(narthanaya* or *natum)* drumming *(vadanaya)* and so on.

However, individually, a *bali adura* can achieve a high reputation through his excellence in two or more of the arts

[29] I use the term "aduro" as in the plural sense and "adura" as in the singular sense.

of *bali* rituals, which a *bali adura* known to me described as an "art without limits" *(simavak nati sastrayak)*. It is told by a *bali adura* that there are 7,707 *bali* images alone, each with its own descriptive poems *(kavi)*, accompanying prayers and dedications. Each *bali adura* has a repertoire of particular *bali* images *(bali rupa)* he knows to construct in clay and dedicate with appropriate recitations. The power of retention *(dharana saktiya)* is a recognized quality among *bali aduro.* They are also expected to be good Buddhists *(silvath)*[30]. These qualities are entirely different from the *yak adura* who often take alcohol or *ganja* (cannabis) in order to deal with demons *(yakku)*.

All the *bali aduro* whom I interviewed, named a number of teachers *(gurunnanse)* from whom they had learned various aspects of *bali* (see Figure 1). They began their apprenticeships at a young age. Instructions usually begin with dance *(natum)*. Initially, five basic poses *(matra)* with the carefully-patterned movements of the dancers and co-ordinated with the rhythms of the drum *(tala)* are taught.

[30] For example:

තුන් ගුණ දත් මුනිදුගේ ගුණ	රදනා
කන් කළු සමහර බස් නිති	කියනා
වත ගුණ නැණ තුනු රැසිරෙන්	සොබනා
එන් පරසිදු ඇඳුරන්	විමසමිනා
රැඹර ගුණ වඩමින් කර	රදනා
ගොමර ගණ ළමැදේ ඉසෙමින්	දිලෙනා
ඒ හැර නිතරම පන්සිල්	රකිනා
මෙ සැටි ගුණ ඇඳුරන්	කැදවමිනා

(Looking for performers (aduro) who know the qualities of the Buddha and who have kind and attractive words and physical features. Inviting performers with fascinating physical features who also observe the five precepts continuously for bali ritual).

Starting from the dance, the young performers proceed to learn the specific drum rhythms, mantras, poems *(kavi)*, and the art of sculpting and painting *(bali abima)*. On the other hand, they complained that sometimes their teachers actually passed down wrong information to them, leaving out verses from poems and mantras, which make their eventual performances less effective. Criticism *(doskima)* and jealousy *(irshiyava)* are more common among teachers and the pupils *(golayo)* as well as among the performers. Some aspects of the above description can be illustrated by a brief case study of the learning career of a reputed *bali adura* in the Bentota area.

Case Study

Edin is one of the most respected and reputed *bali aduras* in Southern Sri Lanka. He is also much in demand for other ritual activities, such as *Suniyama, Sanniyakuma* and *Rata Yakuma.* Edin was born in Tunduwa in 1934. He left school at the age of ten. He studied at Tunduwa Junior School up to grade 5. From the age of seven he has been participating regularly in rituals performed by his father. At that time he had little to do with ritual performances but he helped his father in the ritual preparations and decorations. At the age of thirteen he successfully finished his 6 year apprenticeship under Amaris (C4). Amaris was a brother of Edin's grandmother who had mastered many aspects of the dance. Edin's father taught him moulding *(abima)* and painting *bali* images *(bali rupa)*. Then he came into contact with his close kin who had expertise in various fields of healing rituals.

In particular Edin learned drumming, the art of *Suniyama*, the art of *Ratayakuma,* mantara and astrology. In addition to that, he also learned mask-making *(ves muhunu*

kapima) from them. However, he was keen on developing his expertise in *bali* performance and later on became a well known *bali adura* in the Southern area. With his excellent reputation, Edin is in considerable demand from various groups of ritual performers and clients from all over the island, particularly in the Southern and the Western Provinces. He practises large and small scale rituals to provide cures for protection from malign supernatural forces. In addition, he performs at public displays *(sandharshana)* mainly for entertaining local people and tourists. He has even performed his dance routines in several European countries. His reputation has been enhanced after winning a number of awards including *Kala Buhushana*[31] in 1988, organised by the Ministry of Cultural affairs. Edin is acknowledged as a skillful and "good teacher" *(gurunnanse)* and has attracted around him a large number of students both relatives and non-relatives *(golayo)*. As a result of this, his monthly income is fairly good, and by performing private healing and protective rituals alone, he individually earns a significant amount of money. In addition, he earns thousands of rupees for organizing larger public performances *(sandharshana)* and also for performing modified versions of traditional dances at the large tourist hotels along the southern coast. He has a van which carries performers around the country for public performances. He also has a cellular phone that he uses to contact his clients who seek his services. Edin has two sons and a daughter. His elder son is undergoing training as a drummer, and the younger one is a dancer. Both of them always accompany their father

[31] Since 1984 this award of merit has been given by the Ministry of Cultural affairs to traditional artists *(kalakarayo)*. In the Bentota area in which I worked, the award was also a source of intense personal dispute among performers.

to the rituals, particularly to public and tourist performances. The daughter has got married to a bank clerk, and lives in her husband's house in Panadura.

Edin maintains close relationships with members of the *berava* community in the area. However, he is now not on friendly terms with his fellow *aduras* because of personal disputes, which mainly occurred due to jealousy of Edin's success in the field. As a result of these disputes, Edin left his native place and settled down in a neighbouring village. As indicated by the above summary of Edin's individual history, *aduras* undergo their training with a set of close relatives (see **figure 1**). They have acquired extensive knowledge of poems, magical formula *(yantra-mantra)* and chants etc., as well as purely technical skills, such as the art of dancing *(natum)*, drumming, sculpting, painting etc. This knowledge and livelihood normally would provide them with a high status within the caste, particularly after becoming *bali aduro*. The transmission and ownership of ritual knowledge and skills give them a virtual monopoly over the highly specialized realm of the healing and curing system of Sri Lanka, particularly in the sphere of *bali* ritual. The troupe of the *bali aduro* whom I closely associated with still maintains its ritual monopoly in and around the Bentota area. When there is a demand for a larger national or public performance, they come together and represent their own tradition *(paramparava)* very proudly. However, while they compete amongst themselves for business, individuals also perform smaller types of rituals and accept dancing contracts from large tourist hotels in the South. But one remarkable feature of this troupe of performers is the extent of their cooperation at the public level of ritual performance. When the occasion demands for a larger-scale *bali,* they invite their relatives for the performance. In the next section I am going to discuss the formation of this troupe of performers *(kattiya)*.

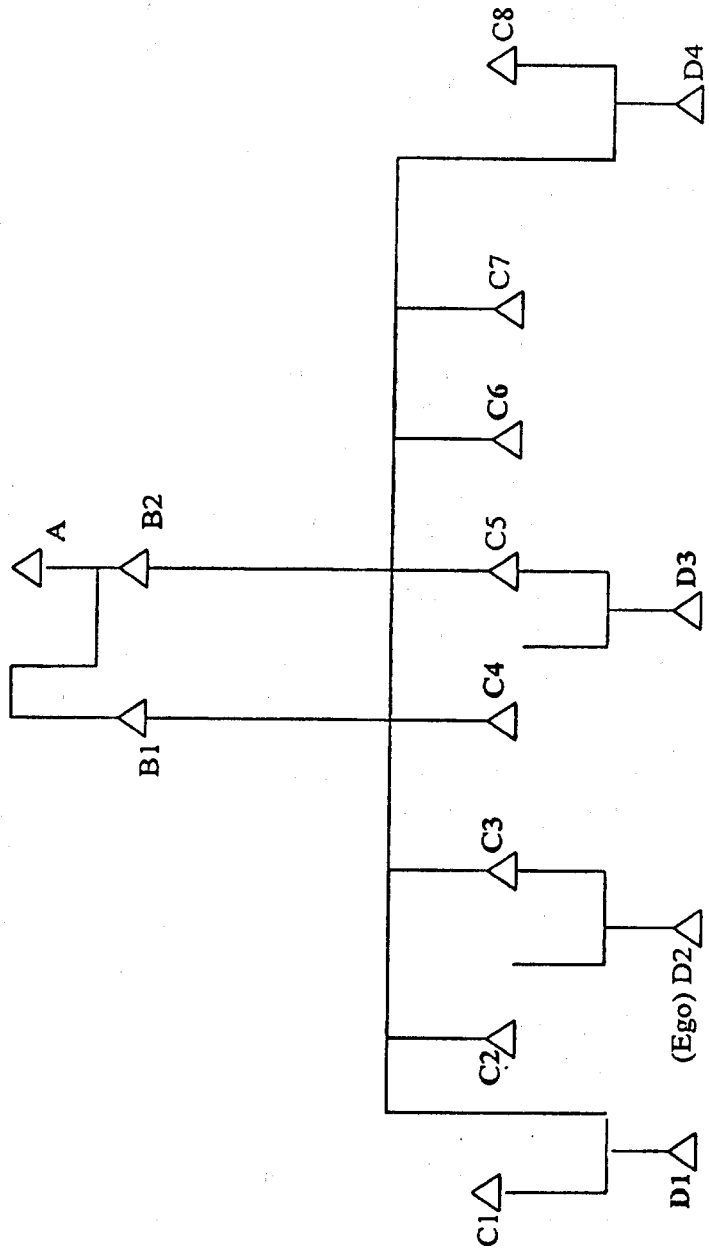


Figure 1: Main Performers from whom Edin learnt

Figure 1
Main performers from whom Edin learnt ritual skills and knowledge

A Sima	- Well-known *bali* adura to whom Ganasira traces his knowledge in *bali*.
B1 Ganasira	- Drummer and expert in *bali* ritual.
B2 Sinda	- Dancer who trained Amaris (C4).
C1 Guneris	- Drummer.
C2 Sediris	- Edin (D2) learnt the art of *Suniyama* from him.
C3 Seyaneris	- Edin's farther, drummer in all forms of ritual, and also artist and sculptor, taught Edin how to mould clay images of *bali*.
C4 Amaris	- Well-known *adura*; Edin's main teacher who taught him dancing, mantra, and verses (kavi).
C5 Arnoris	- Dramatic actor.
C6 Pindoris	- *Bali adura*, who taught Edin astrology
C7 Sauneris	- Sculptor and artist.
C8 Liyaneris	- Drummer.
D1 Peter	- Drummer who taught drumming to Edin
D2 Edin	- (ego)
D3 Suraniris	- Who has taught Edin *suniyama* and *rata yakuma*
D4 Palis	- Dancer, with whom Edin worked together before Palis' death.

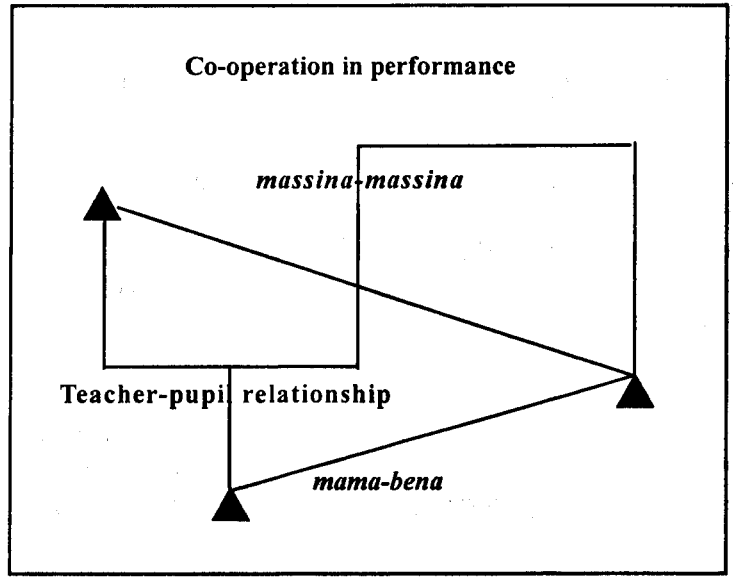
3.3 The Structure of the Troupe

The formation of troupes is almost always based on kinship. Only very rarely would a man perform with a completely unknown troupe. For a troupe to operate effectively in performance, there must be co-operation and familiarity, and this is often built up over many years of performing with teachers who are also kinsmen. This process makes the performance of ritual a living milieu for the transmission of knowledge and skills through kin-based troupes. Inspection of genealogies further reveals that among performers, there are also marked patterns of generational repetition. Ritual troupes which came together to perform in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's are mostly repeated in those formed by their sons, grandsons, nephews and grand-nephews in the present day. Such repetitions bind performers together with the key relationships such as relations between brothers-in-law *(massina-massina)* and maternal uncles and nephews *(mama-bena)*.

Troupes are typically formed out of these brothers-in-law and maternal uncles and nephews relationships (see **figure 2**). Certain combinations regularly work together and in the example which follows, it is illustrated how these relationships operate in the formation of the troupe I was closely associated with (see **figure 3**).

Four of the eight main performers *(bali karayo)* live close to one another in the village *(Tunduva)* and four of them were from three different villages, though still closely related (D1, D2, and E2), with the exception of Jayanetti (E1) who belongs to the Govigama caste. The troupe represented in figure 3 was brought together for the public performance of major *bali* in the Southern coastal area in Bentota (described in chapter 04). The *baliya* was a major public event and drew together eight performers of considerable skill and reputation. The public rituals were normally organised by Edin (D3) or

Figure 2
Key relationships in performance and apprenticeship



Suraneris (D2). Both of them are renowned *aduro* or *balikarayo* in the Bentota area. In this role, the *adura* has the title of *bara mahattaya* (the man who accepts responsibility). As the organiser or chief *adura*, Edin or Suraneris normally took charge of the opening recitations which are often the most difficult, as they are lengthy and include many Sanskrit couplets *(soloka)*. Edin (D3), Suraneris (D2), Jemis (D5), Kirimanis (D6), Primin (E2) and Jayanetti performed the singing and dancing together in combination of two's and three's to the accompaniment of Semaris (D1) and Adwin (D4) on the drums. Edin was given special responsibility for the construction of the *Viskam baliya*, the main deity to which the offerings were to be made. Edin also conducted the dedication of the image in the course of the ritual. Edin's

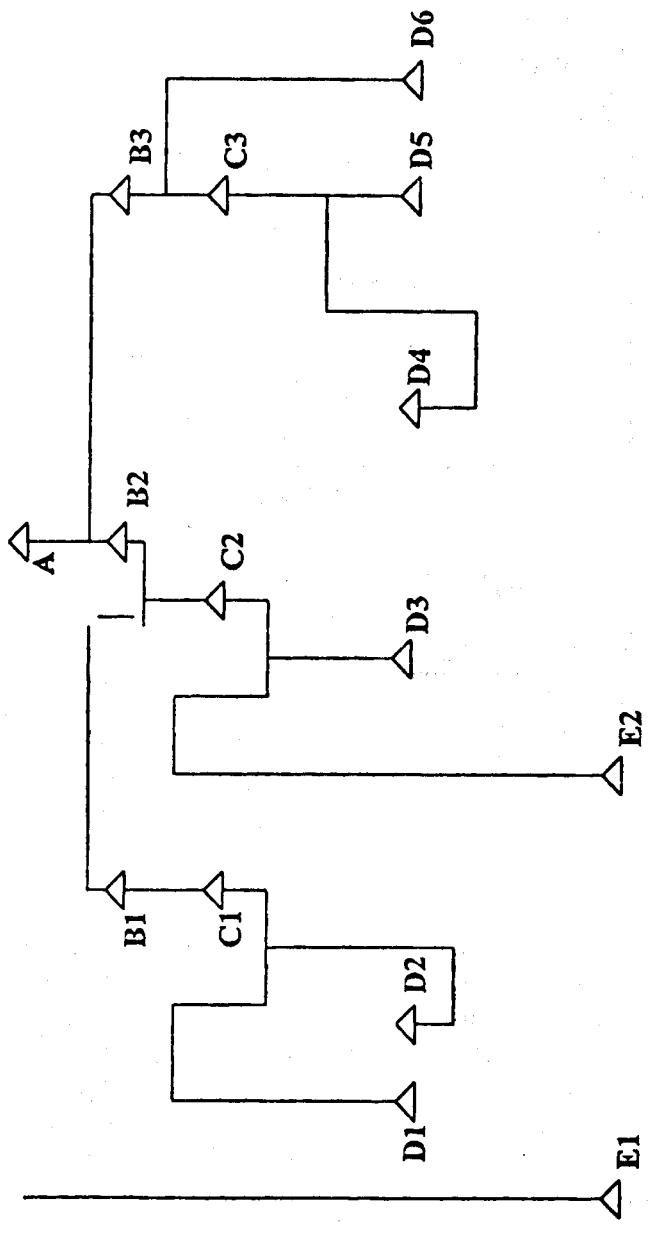


Figure 3: The formation of troupe for a major or public *bali* performance

appropriateness for this task arose from the fact that Saraneris (C2), Edin's father had been the most renowned sculptor of images of *Viskam baliya* in the Southern Province. This skill had been passed on to Edin.

Combinations of performers in which Edin, Suraneris, Premin, Jemis and Kirimanis figured predominantly, carried on the recitations. Not only do these five have close kinship ties, but they can all trace their knowledge and skills in *bali* performance back to a single individual, the great grand-farther of Edin, Sima guru (A1). He taught his own sons, Ganasira (B2) and Sinda (B3). Both these men passed on their skills to their own sons (C2, C3), again from them to their sons (D3, D5) and grandsons. Enda (C3) taught his nephew Kirimanis (D6), and Premin (E2) learnt some skills from his uncle Edin (D3). Suraneris (D2), who acquired much dancing skills under the apprentice-ship of Amaris (C1) and married Amaris's daughter. One remarkable feature of this troupe formation is the inclusion of one *adura* (E1) outside the *berava* caste. It is relatively a recent phenomenon that non-*berava* are operating in the field of rituals that are performed by *berava*. However, individuals outside the *berava* caste do not have the tacit knowledge possessed by the *berava* troupes through their long established ritual traditions. But at present mixed troupes are not uncommon in the Southern area. Bob Simpson in a recent article states that ritual activities once dominated by the *berava,* are now shifting into the control of other groups, particularly the *Goyigama* (farmer) caste (1997: 53). But the troupe that I was closely associated with was still dominated by a *berava* majority. However, Jayanetti (E1) regularly visits Edin at his house to get advice and information on rituals. According to my field experience, it is clear that the ritual field of *bali* is still in *berava's* hands. My main informer, Edin said that they are not interested in teaching outsiders *(pita ayata)* how to perform *bali* in a correct manner. He also pointed out that *bali* is the only ritual that cannot be

performed by others, without acquiring hereditary knowledge and skills, still confined to "our people" *(ape minissu)*. As a result of the difficulty in acquiring knowledge and skills, the Goyigama *bali* performer is very keen to perform private or domesticated rituals which mostly comprise of recitations *(kavi and yathika)*. Jayanetti told me that he acquired most of the ritual knowledge from published sources. In turn, that knowledge helps him to work and associate with well-reputed *bali aduras* in the Bentota area. In the next chapter, I am going to look at the way in which these performers come together and perform *bali*. I will also illustrate some insights and the dynamics of the practical operation of the ritual.

4
Bali: A Ritual to Propitiate Planetary Deities

> "This ceremony may best be characterized as an offering ritual for the nine planets" (Paul Wirz: 1954, 119)

As we have seen in the earlier chapter, the *berava* supply Sinhala society with an important body of ritual specialists, and their appropriateness to fulfill the ritual task derives internally from the transmission of knowledge and skills through their *paramparava* or traditions. In this chapter, I am going to examine certain aspects of the *bali* ritual from the perspective of the Bentota tradition particularly its types, structures and events it demonstrates.

4.1 Types of *Bali*

Unlike other rituals performed by the *berava* ritual specialists, *bali* are virtually tailor-made for each individual case. *Bali* are always organised according to the patient's *(athura)* condition and the planetary forces most likely to impinge on his or her life. In other words, the size of the ritual is directly

linked to the individuality of the patient and the misfortune suffered. The size and content of the *bali* ritual vary from the standard smaller *bali*, to larger *bali*. Smaller rituals, such as *at-bali*, in which hand-held clay images of the Sun are moved around the patient's head (see **plate 2**), and *mal bali* are relatively standard in their content. There are three types of *mal bali* (flower altars). The first one is, *Nava gabe mal baliya* which consists of nine squares *(gaba)* (see **plate 3**) each one constructed for rice offerings *(bojana)* to the nine planetary deities. The second one is *Visi pas gabe mal baliya* (twenty five squares), and the third one is *Asu ek gabe mal baliya* (eighty one squares), each of the additional squares having its own particular cosmic referent.[32]

Larger rituals vary according to the specificity of the individual's horoscope. These rituals are categorised as *ambum bali* (moulded bali), which involve more than just the *mal baliya* where a number of other clay images are also introduced into the ritual. The minimum number of clay images which involved in *ambum bali* is called *"tun baliya"*, three offerings, in which a clay image is placed on either side of the eighty one squared *mal baliya* (see **plate 4**). This pattern can be seen

[32] The significance of each of the 81 squares is summarised in a poem at the beginning of the *mal baliya* sequence:

හින් රකුස්‍ස හතර ද. අටවිසි නැකැත් දෙවිදු ද
ශනි ශක තිමොත ද. අප්ට රකුසන් දෙවනාව ද
දොළොස් රැස දෙවිදු ද. සෙනාධිපති යකහු ද
නිති පහලොස් දෙවිදු ද. නව ග්‍රහා දෙවියන් සමග ද
එක් අසුවක් පමණ දෙවනාවුන් දැන ගෙන ද

"The raksa of the four corners, the gods of the twenty-eight *nakat*
Sani saka and the trinity, the eight *raksa* godlings
The gods of the twelve zodiac, the chief of all the demons
The gods of the fifteen *tithi*, also with the gods of the nine planets
Come to know these eighty one godlings".

Plate 2
ath-bali (hand held clay image)

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 3
***mal baliya* (81 squares)**

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 4: *ambum baliya* or *pas baliya*
(molded five images)

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

in placing two, three, and four images on either side of the *mal baliya* up to seventeen, which is the largest *ambum bali* that can theoretically be performed, the *pan tis baliya* of thirty five offerings.

In theory, the type and size of the ritual is directly linked to the individuality of the patient and the planetary configuration being passed. But in purely social terms, larger rituals are also linked to the person's role and status in the ordinary world (Simpson:1984). It is important to note that currently large-scale rituals are being performed not only on personal grounds but are also heavily linked to Sinhala nationalist interests as well (see, chapter 5). Significantly, the type, size and duration of the ritual also depend on expenditure involved.

The larger and smaller types of *bali* which I outlined above can be applied in a wide variety of social circumstances. For example, it is quite acceptable to perform these rituals for a Buddhist monk[33]. This is in contrast to *yak tovil* which only on very rare occasions, are performed for Buddhist monks. Similarly, *bali* can be performed for elites and high government officials without fear of comment or criticism. As such, types and size of *bali* cannot be identified only on individual terms (patient condition), but also depend heavily on socio-economic and cultural factors.

4.2 Ritual Structure

Whatever the size of a *bali* performed, the general procedure is always the same. In general terms, all types of *bali* follow a three-fold structure which corresponds to a 'tri-partite

[33] I have observed two smaller *bali* performed for two Buddhist monks at their temples in Colombo and Bentota.

movement in space and time' (Turner 1974:13). In this context, the patient undergoes periods of separation/segregation, liminality/transition and reaggregation/incorporation, as in the classical anthropological paradigm identified by Van Gennep in the structure of rites of passage. In larger public performances of *bali*, these three phases can be clearly identified by distinctive ritual actions and performances. In the first phase, the patient is introduced to a pre-constructed ritual arena. He/she is separated from the mundane world. There is a sequential introduction to the various objects to be used in the ritual through their descriptions in verse. The patient *(athura)* is instructed to see, feel, touch, hear and smell certain things. Both *aduras* and the *athura* are gradually transformed into a state of maximum preparedness. In the second phase, requests and offerings are made to all possible sources of relief, and removing a patient's *dosa*.

In the third phase, the patient is separated from the ritual space and he or she is returned to the real world. Now I will attempt to elaborate the ritual events, which fit into the tri-partite structure outlined above. The ritual events given below indicate the essential constituent components of *bali*.

The First Phase: Separation

1. The first event of the *bali* ritual is **the seating of the patient** *(athura vadi kirima)*: One of the performers *(bali adura)* escorts the patient, who normally wears white, into the ritual arena and sits the patient on a mattress *(athura pandalama)* in front of the *bali* structure.

2. **Observance of the five precepts** *(Pansil ganima)*: The patient, performers and the audience observe the five precepts along with the blessings of the Triple-Gem *(thi sarana)*.

3. **Ceremonial drumming** *(magul bera vadanaya)*: The drummers beat the auspicious festival note to inaugurate the ritual. This is normally done at most opening or inauguration ceremonies in Sri Lanka (this event can not be seen in smaller *bali)*.

4. **Consecrating the patient** *(athura pe kirima)*: In this event, the chief adura applies *nanu* (a mixture with coconut milk and turmeric water *(kahadiya)* on the head of the patient to ritually cleanse the patient.

5. **Offering lights and a fruit basket** *(pahan puja - palathuru puja)*: The lights and fruits are offered to the Buddha, Gods and Planetary Deities *(Budun ge Deviyan ge namata)*. The offering includes a basket of fruit consisting of nine types of fruits and a coconut. While the lights *(pahan)* and fruit are offered by the patient *(athura)*, the *bali adura* chants a lengthy plaint *(kannalauva)*, and makes an appeal to acknowledge the offerings.

6. **Charming the incense** *(suvada dum methirima)*. Mantras are intoned over the incense which is used to purify the ritual arena and various images.

7. **Salutation to the three refuges** *(trivida ratnayata namaskara)*: The verses are uttered in memory of the Buddha, his teachings and the priesthood. A series of verses *(trivida ratna stotra)* consisting in part of Sanskrit couplets *(sloka)*, and in part of Sinhala verses *(sanna)* are sung. At the end of *trivida ratna namaskara*, some verses which describe how Gautama Buddha defeated *mara* (Death) are also sung. These popular verses are commonly recited at all major Buddhist rituals.

8. **Songs about the flower and betel tray** *(mal bulat tattuwe kavi)* During this process, various objects which are kept on the tray, are described and offered to deities.

9. **Handing over of the thread to the patient** *(athurata pirit huya dima)* One end of this thread is tied to the *bali* image, while the other end is attached to a bunch of red ixora flowers *(rat mal)*, a piece of arecanut flower, a lime, a ring and a coin. These are handed over to the patient by the adura. Before the thread *(pirit huya)* is handed over to the patient, a couple of verses that describe the origin of the thread are sung.

10. **The unveiling of the curtain to display the *Baliya*** *(kadaturava hera bali dakvima)* From the beginning of the *baliya*, a white cloth is held between the patient and the bali structure, blocking the patient's view of the *baliya*. At this point, the curtain *(kadaturava)* is removed and the *baliya* is shown for the first time to the patient. Then the *adura* sprinkles water *(pan)* onto the *baliya* and introduces the *baliya* to the patient.

11. **Placing the patient's feet on the eight auspicious objects** *(ashta mangala vastu paya thabima)* These objects are understood to have curative and protective powers. A series of verses that describe the origin of each object is recited. This event marks the conclusion of the first phase of the ritual.

The second phase: Transition

12. **Description of the shed** *(Bali madupuraya):* Before the dedication of images, verses are sung which refer to the *maduwa* or shed where the ritual takes place, stressing

on its construction, preparation and decoration and also how *aduro* have prepared themselves. Throughout the recitations, the drumming becomes louder and the dancing intensifies. The dancers-perform a series of steps before the patient, ring bells and cry "long life!" for the patient (this event does not appear in smaller rituals).

13. **The dedication of baliya** *(bali pavadima)*. The dedication of *baliya* is comprised of several sub-sections, each consisting of verses and actions appropriate to particular images.

    (a) *Triple Gem* each sequence commences with praises to the Triple Gem *(thrividha ratna namaskaraya)*.

    (b) *Sloka and sanna* Verses are sung, usually in Sanskrit couplets *(sloka)*, and their Sinhala meaning *(sanna)*, in which reference is made to various archetype places and events such as the city of Visala, the Lichchavi kings, the king Panduvas, and afflictions of various mythical figures. These archetype encounters are recited, informing the patient of the mythical sources of the event now being experienced.

    (c) *Bali vistara kavi bali* description verses *(abum kavi)* are sung of each of the images arranged before the patient: their appearance *(svabahavaya)*, weapons *(ayudha)*, vehicles *(vahana)*, colours *(pata)*, the offering they favor *(bohojana)* and the disorder *(leda)* for which they will bring relief, are all described in detail. This is followed by a spoken invocation in which the various deities *(graha)* are requested to bless and

protect the patient from particular illnesses and malevolent conditions. Such requests are repeated often at the end of verses throughout the ritual :

"noyek dosa me baliyen yaya ada"
(may various misfortunes *(dosa)* disappear today by this *baliya*).

(d) *Set kavi or asirvada kavi* Verses of blessing are sung, which refer to *jataka* stories and events from the Buddha's life. These verses also incorporate requests that *dosa* be removed from the patient's body, and that there be a healthy and prosperous future. At the end of each verse, blessings are shouted over the patient's head:

ayu raksa vanda , avada, ayu bo veva!
(Protect life, may life be long, may age increase).

(e) *Sirasapada* The final verses in the dedication of images are 'head to foot verses' or *sirasapada kavi*. In these verses, blessings are linked to different parts of the patient's body descending from head to foot (see: page 83). The *dosa* are driven out in the face of the power, which arise from references to stories from Buddha's previous lives. Each story related makes reference to a particular part of the body, and it is from these parts of the body that *dosa* is expelled. For example, a story is told of how the Buddha in a previous life, while travelling with his mother, was shipwrecked and swam for seven days with his mother on his shoulders until they reached land. On the basis of this story it is

requested that the *dosa* be driven from the shoulders, elbows and fingers. The verses move down the patient's body with *adura* drawing attention to particular areas. For the most part, the ritual is taken up with this middle phase in which rounds of recitation following a pattern similar to what is outlined above are sung. The recitation continues throughout the night, until the early hours of the morning when all the images assembled before the patient have been described, activated and dedicated, and their power focused on the patient (in the smaller *bali*, these recitations are not so long).

14. **Blessing with small cloth torches** *(pahan thira avadima)* Soon after the dedication of *baliya*, a cloth is given *(mottakkiliya)* which the patient places over his or her head. The children on either side of the patient are given fifty four small cloth torches *(pahan thira)* (2 x 54 = 108), which they are instructed to light and cast into the pots of turmeric water at the end of each recitation (when the hand bell is rung). This episode is also known as the *Una vidiya*, the path of the fever, and is associated with the removal of heat from the body. At the end of the event the patient slowly moves down the cloth from his head to foot, and casts it back onto the *baliya*. This event marks the conclusion of the second phase.

Phase three: Re-aggregation and the return to reality

15. ***Bali* Hamaraya** *(ending bali):* In this final episode the patient is disconnected from the source of power and

taken out of the ritual arena. The patient performs a number of repeated actions, each of which is highly significant in the separation from the ritual arena: the lime and thread *(pirth huya)*, which the patient held in his/her hand for most of the time is cast onto the *baliya* after the patient has it passed down his/her body, and likewise the curtain *(kadaturava)* which has been used to absorb *dosa*. Also the patient is asked to cast away his/her *dosa* by moving his/her hands in a "casting" motion three times from his/her temples in the direction of the *baliya* as the *adura* utters the significant phrases. More importantly, the *athuraya* must also repeat phrases such as the following with the *adura*:

Dasa maha dosa nivarnayi !
(the ten great misfortunes are cured)

Asu maha dosa nivarnayi !
(the eighty great misfortunes are cured)

Kotiyak dosa nivarnayi !
(the million misfortunes are cured)

Tinduyi, tinduyi, leda hondai !!
(finished, finished, illness is cured)

This event is called *'muna ata pisa damima'* (sweeping face and hand). These actions are intended to end the *bali (bali hamaraya)*, and mantras are intoned to ensure that all misfortunes *(dosa)* have gone into the *baliya*.

4.3 The Order and Events of the *Bali* Ritual

Having given an account of the underlying structure of the *bali*, an attempt will now be made to describe how this

structure is brought into a ritual performance. The technique and strategy employed to do this will be a straight narrative description of a *bali*, which I attended. For the ritual description I chose a particular *bali* ritual that my informant (Edin, D3) recommended was a fine one *(niyama baliyak)*. This consisted of five offerings *(pas baliya)* made on behalf of troupe member Kirimanis's (D5) brother-in-law, named Genaris of the *berava* caste. Genaris had been suffering considerable hardship owing to lack of business in his trade as a carpenter. He had also had a bad kidney pain *(vakugadu amaruvak)*, which had not responded to any treatment over a number of months. Having taken his horoscope to an astrologer, he was told that he was under the bad effects of the "great period of Saturn" *(Senasuru maha dasava)*, and he was going through a *senasuru apala kalaya* (fruitless period of Saturn). Upon hearing this, Genaris's brother in law, Kirimanis suggested that a *baliya* be performed, and that he be allowed to organize it. The troupe which came for the occasion consisted of the individuals shown in Figure 2, in page 54.

Dancers: Suraneris (D2), Edin (D3), Jemis (D5), Kirimanis (D6), Jayanetti (E1), Premin (E2)
Drummers: Semaris (D1), Adwin (D4)

Edin who performed the majority of dedications, acted as chief *bali adura* on this occasion. In view of the kinship link through Kirimanis, the performers had agreed to remit the bulk of their fees to make sure that a larger than normal ritual could be performed. Despite this arrangement, however, the normal charge for this type of a ritual is in the region of Rs.10,000. The date for the ritual was set for the 27th October 1994 and it was to be performed at Genaris's house in Tunduva. The following ritual description is taken directly from my field notes and supplemented by later discussions with the performers.

Preparation for the *baliya* got underway at the patient's house from early morning on the day of the performance. A list of materials, which had been given by the chief *bali adura* to the household, had to be provided for constructing and decorating the ritual structures. The list of items requested was fairly typical of the basic materials which have to be collected for the performance of any major public *baliya*. For example: banana tree trunks, coconut leaves *(gok-kola)*, coconut and arecanut flowers, wooden poles, clay *(mati)* etc. The performers began to build the structures, making and painting images, and preparing food and flower offerings with the assistance of the male members of the house, male kin and neighborus. The shed *(bali maduva)* was built and decorated beautifully and transformed into a splendid ritual arena *(ranga mandalaya)* where the gods are offered performances that please them. The four clay images *(rupa)* which stand on either side of the central *mal baliya* were moulded on the prepared wooden frames *(masi)*. The clay used in forming the images was mixed with powdered sandalwood and water, and puddled to the proper consistency. As the image developed, proportions were checked using a makeshift yardstick *(viyath)*. Once the shape was roughly mapped out, the surface was smoothed with wet hands to produce an image. Once the shapes of the images were completed, they were beautifully painted in bright colours of red, yellow, blue, green and black (see: **plate 5 & 6**). The end product must be pleasing to the eye *(lassana rupayak)* as well as incorporating all the distinctive features of the deity such as colour, vehicle, weapons and general appearance. With the completion of the clay images comes the difficult task of putting these images in a row *(bali esa vima)*. Each image was very carefully placed with the assistance of a few strong men on a preconstructed strong horizontal bar which is called the *dandiyama*.

By looking through from right to left the five assembled images were as follows (see: **plate 7**):

Plate 5
Molding a *bali* image

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 6
Painting a *bali* image

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 7
The five assembled *bali* images - *viskam baliya* and *sunkara raksha*

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

(1) *Dasa Krodha baliya*
(2) *Senasuru Erastaka baliya*
(3) *Asu-ek Gabe Mal baliya*
(4) *Viskam baliya*
(5) *Sunkara Raksha baliya*

In addition to the images, a tray of flowers and betel *(Mal bulat tattuva)* was made. It is usually kept on a chair, and it is dedicated to a host of deities, specially the Earth Goddess, *Sriyakantha*. The tray consisted of a comb, a wig *(hawariya)*, a turmeric water pot, flowers of five colours, a mirror, a cloth, incense *(suvanda dum)*, some areca flowers *(puwak mal)* and betel leaves. Under this offering a chair, a pot of incense and a bowl of red hot charcoals *(aguru kabala)* were kept. At either side, and the center of the *baliya*, three clay pots which contain coconut flowers *(pun kalas)* were placed. In front of the assembled images, the following eight auspicious objects *(mangala vastu)* were kept: crinum leaves *(tholabo)*, reed bag *(malu pita)*, pieces of a vine *(hirassa)*, a leopard's skull *(divi hisa)*, a lime *(dehi)*, a coconut *(pol gediyak)*, raw rice *(kakulu hal)*, and a paddy pounder *(mol gaha)*.

Shortly before the ceremony commenced, the chief adura Edin, performed the dangerous task of putting in the eyes of the images[34]. This small ceremony is known as *Nethra Thabima* or eye-laying (see Gombrich 1966: 23-36; Scott 1994: 45). Edin took a pot, which consisted of lamp-black *(dali)* and oil, and mixed it while reciting a mantra and brought it to life *(jivan kara)*. Then he took a small paint brush *(thili kura)* and painted dots in the eyes of each image. Performing the eye-laying ceremony should be done very carefully because, if the

[34] According to Richard Gombrich putting in the eyes of image of Buddha is considered potentially harmful than deities(1966:23-26).

adura makes a mistake at this point, it would bring misfortune *(dosa)* and sickness to him.

In the late afternoon, the preparations for *baliya* were finally completed. It was also ensured that all items required later in the ritual were ready in a convenient place.

Phase 1

The crowds gathered on all sides of the ritual arena. Meanwhile, inside the house Genaris was getting ready to enter the ritual arena. He was dressed in a clean white sarong and shirt. A cloth was placed over his head. Then Edin escorted Genaris and asked him to sit on the mattress *(atura pandalama)*, which was placed behind the white curtain *(kadaturava)*. Six children sat on either side of the *atura* and remained ready to bless with the expression, *ayubo weva* (long life) until the end of the *baliya*.

Edin announced to the audience that they would take the Five Precepts *(pan sil)*. Then the relatives, friends and neighbours, knelt down with hands together and took the Five Precepts. Following the precepts, Semaris (D1) and Adwin (D 4) played the auspicious festival note *(magul bera)*. They stood facing the *atura* and bowed with their hands together to greet him *(ayu bovan!)*. With the completion of *magul bera*, the drummers, once again, bowed with their hands together. As a custom, Genaris gave them a few coins *(panduru)* wrapped in betel leaves and they accepted it with both hands. After that, both drummers took up the position where they sat throughout the ritual.

Edin once again turned to the centre of the arena dressed in a white cloth around his lower body, and a white cloth was also wrapped around his head. The ritual assistant

(kottoruva)[35] gave a pot of *nanu* (a mixture with coconut milk and turmeric water) to Edin and while he was holding it to his lips he intoned *mantara* into it. Then, he applied *nanu* on the head of Genaris thrice. Following it, Edin took a clay pot filled with tumeric water *(kahadiya)* and once again intoned *mantara* into it, and flicked *kahadiya* onto the images, the ground and the area in Genaris's vicinity using a branch of areca nut flower. Edin indicated to the *kottoruva* to bring a bowl of red hot charcoals *(anguru kabala)* and bowl of incense *(suvada kudu)*. Edin took a pinch of the powder, and while holding it to his lips, intoned *mantara* into it *(suvanda dum methirima)* and put it into burning charcoals *(anguru)*. The charmed smoke wafted onto each of the assembled images.

Nine clay oil lamps *(mati pahan)* were placed in front of Genaris and Edin chanted on rounds of lengthy plaints dedicated to Buddha, gods and planetary deities *(budun ge deviyan ge namata)*. After the completion of lengthy plaints *(kannalauva)*, Genaris was requested to fill each lamp with medicinal oil made from five oils *(pas tel)*, and to light each of them with his own hand. He was instructed to worship each of the lamps three times, after they were carried and positioned by Edin. Again, Edin chanted a lengthy plaint and made a plea to acknowledge the fruit offering *(palaturu vattiya)* for the nine planets. This event was concluded by all types of offerings.

Then, Suranaris (D2), also a well known *bali adura*, took the floor. He was dressed in white, and held a small hand bell *(seenuwak)* in his right hand. He commenced singing a series of praises in memory of the Buddha, his teaching *(Dhamma)* and the priesthood *(Sangha) (trivida ratnayata)*. This lengthy

[35] The kottoruva is normally provided by the patient's family, although he need not be a kinsman. He fulfills a crucial role in the ritual. It is his responsibility to assist the *adura* in their actions.

series of recitations was mixed with Sanskrit couplets *(sloka)* and parts of Sinhala verses *(sanna)*. At the end of each verse, he quickly rang the bell, a signal to the children on either side of Genaris to bless him *"ayo bo"* or long life. As they did so they simultaneously casted a few beads of areca nut in to clay pots of turmeric water situated at their feet. The periodic shouts were resumed throughout the ritual.

Suranari's recitations now drew attention to many of the items which would be used throughout the ritual. The origin of the thread *(pirit huya)* and the lime *(dehi)* were narrated. During this recitation, Suraneris took the ball of thread attached to the image of 81 squares *(Mal baliya)*, and moved it across the top of each image, before bringing it over the arena, and handed it over into Genaris's hand:

දෙස්ස සමග ගෙන රත් මල් පොකුරු
පස් වග මුදු නුය ගලතා සැපිරු
තොස්ව මෙහැම සමගින් ගෙන පඬුරු
දොස් හැර ආතුර සුරතට පැවරු

(By taking the lime with the branch of red flower (ixora), a ring and a coin with a thread by leaving all of them in the hand of the patient dosa will disappear.)

At the end of the thread was a lime, a bunch of red ixora flowers *(rat mal)* a ring, and a coin; these remained in Genaris's hand for the rest of the ritual. He was instructed to pierce the skin of lime with his nail, inhaling the smell of lime thrice *(thun varak)*.

Verses were sung describing the curtain *(kadaturava)* which hung on before Genaris, and upon their completion, Suranaris removed the *kadaturava*:

වැද නැත නෙක කරවන අසෙවන්ත රා
වැද ගත ඉන් පැමිණි හැම දොස් තද සිරු රා

ලෙඩ කළ හැම පිරිපත ලෙස යයි උරු රා
කඩ තිර හැර දක්වම් බලි මෙ ආතු රා

(Healing all disease and other defects (dosa) in the body of the patient, will remove the curtain and show the bali to the patient.)

This act, known as the 'display of the baliya' *(bali dakvima)*, enabled Genaris to gaze for the first time on the *baliya*. Suranaris got a pot of water *(pan)*, and sprinkled it onto the *bali* images and introduced each *bali* image to Genaris. The first phase was brought to a close with a general request to the planetary deities, that was stated as *'bali kannalauva'*.

Meanwhile, Edin (D3), Jamis (D5), Primin (E2), and Jayanetti (E1) were getting ready for the next phase of the ritual. The first item to be worn was white cloth around their lower bodies, called *helaya*. Over the top of the *helaya* was worn a bright red band *(patiya)*. They each hung around their necks, home-made necklaces *(kara pati malava)* made from sequins, beads and bits of cloth. Around their upper arms and wrists various rings *(valalu)* were worn. Their legs were covered with small bells *(gejje)*, and their ankles were decorated with jingling bracelets *(silambu)*. The dancers took great pains in preparing themselves, and ensured that every detail of their own and each other's dress was correct.

The dancers were fully dressed and waited in the centre of the arena for the proceedings to restart. A spokesman for Genaris stood up and granted permission for them to continue the ritual. In turn, Edin, chief *bali adura*, also spoke. With the conclusion of this speech the dancers bowed with hands together to Genaris, who responded likewise *(achara karanava)*. The dancers quickly went around the assembled audience offered their greetings.

Phase II

The dancers assembled in a circle in the middle of the arena and the drummers responded by breaking into a slow and forceful rhythm *(thala)*. Suddenly all was sound and movement as the dancers moved around in a circle. Twisting, stamping and bending, they moved around the arena, first clockwise, then anti-clockwise. One dancer broke the circle to act his master steps (see: **plate 8**) and then another, and another, until each had made his contribution. Recitation commenced as they danced. The Verses sung described the *maduwa* (shed) in which the ritual was taking place (see: **plate 9**), its construction, preparation, and decoration:

බලි මඩුව කෙළෙසින. සරසා නොයෙක් ලෙසකින
බදවා උඩු වියන. ඒතත සරසා නොයෙක් ලෙසකින

(How should be decorated the hall (shed) where the bali should be kept? It should be done by fixing canopies, and decorated with various things.)

නත් විපත් දුරු කොට. සැපක් සලසා සතහට
පැවති ලොව පෙර සිට. කියමි බලි මඩු පුරය කවි කොට

(By removing all the ills and extending happiness for all, will recite in verse the description of the hall where the bali was placed in.)

They also told how *aduro* had prepared themselves for the ritual: cleaning their teeth, bathing, applying sandalwood to their bodies and dressing in clean white clothes. Throughout the description of the shed *(bali madupuraya)* the drumming became louder and more powerful. The rhythm of dancing was fast and with the conclusion of each sequence of verses, the

Plate 8: Jayanetti (E1) and Jemis (D5) take the floor

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 9: *bali maduwa* (shed)

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

dancers performed a series of steps before the patient, amidst the ringing of the bell, and wished long life to the patient.

At the end of this event, there was an interval while tea was served and refreshments were taken. At around 1.30 a.m the proceedings recommenced with the dedication *(pavadima)* of the *bali* images. For almost seven hours the patient was subjected to rounds of recitation and dance, step by step *aduro* were told what the performance was about through verses of origin, descriptions and verses of dedication. Throughout the night a large number of illnesses, disorders and conditions which may be obstructing the patient's good fortune were accumulated and requests were made for relief from each *bali* image. The patient heard verses which tell of the virtues of Buddha *(jathaka stories).*

For example, consider the following verse selected from Kusa Jathaka :

වත දැක කුස නරණ ළද පබව තා
සිත දුක වැද ගියෙන් කුස නරණ තා
සත තෙක තෙද බෙලෙන් මත පරමී තා
සතවක සිංහ කරණ හැර පිරිප තා

(King Kusa, seeing the face of the lady Pabawati, King Kusa was struck with deep sorrow. Through the powers of the future Buddha, who practiced great virtues (paramitha), let all dosa disappear pertaining to satavaka (seventh day) in the karana of the lion (De Silva: 1911:145).

In view of the length of the ritual and the considerable numbers of verses recited in its course, it has been necessary to select and constrict sequences from the second phase. The overall structure of this phase was repetitive, the same things being said and done over and over again with slight variations each time. It was, therefore, possible to provide an illustration of

one particular dedication without losing any of the overall feel of the impact of the second phase of the ritual.

The dedication to be described was that of *Viskam Baliya* (see: **plate 10**) which was the largest *baliya* to be performed over a period of one and half hours. *Viskam baliya*, possibly the most important image to be dedicated during the *bali* ceremony, was a representation of *Visva Karma*, the Divine Artificer of crafts and craftsmen. Its inclusion in this ritual was intended to remove any *dosa* which Genaris might have accrued as a result of his profession as a carpenter *(waduva)*. By far the greatest attention was paid to this image in its construction and dedication.

The image of Visva Karma stood almost six feet high and portrayed an impressive ten-armed, five-headed deity with a yellow body. The central face was carefully sculpted, whilst the other four were flat. His neck, arms and chest were decorated with ornaments and on his feet he wore a pair of anklets *(salamba)*. Around his neck hung a snake *(uranga malavak)*, a common feature in the representation of lesser gods and demons.

Around his legs a bull *(gona)* sat; that is the vehicle of Visva Karma. In his hands he held a variety of objects associated with crafts and craftsmen. The dedication to Viskam was led by Edin, and accompanied by Premin and Kirimanis, who followed his recitations. The dedication of each image was the responsibility of a particular *adura* who was supported by one or two of the other performers. Throughout the night, different combinations of performers came together for each dedication. The drummers, however, were not afforded periodic rests and beat tirelessly for almost the entire night. Edin took the floor and, while walking slowly around the arena, commenced the recitations with brief praises to the Triple Gem *(thi-sarana)*

Plate 10: The *Viskam baliya*

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

තෙරුවන් නැම ද නිති. වෙනකත් බෙලෙන් තෙද ඇති
ඉන් බැහැර අදරති. සියල් රෝ දුක් දුරුර ඉක්බිත

(By worshiping continuously the triple gems, and other powerful gods, and blessing all, thus healing all the diseases.)

Then, Kirimanis and Primin, accompanied by Edin, walked around the arena and began reciting Sanskrit *slokas* and their Sinhala meaning *(sanna)*, offering praise to Viskam and Nine planets *(nava graha)*, inviting them to leave their over lords *(adipathi disava)*, and come to the ritual arena *(ranga mandala)*. Edin sung two lines and Kirimanis responded with two of his own. After every four lines, the hand bell was rung signalling to the children to make their appropriate wish *'ayu bo veva'* (may you have a long life!). During this recitation drummers got a small break but they took this opportunity to tune their drums.

The recitation turned to the description of *Viskam baliya*. Edin took up a position to the right of the image accompanied by the slow rhythm of the drums. Using his burning torch *(pandama)* Edin drew attention to the *Viskam baliya*. The patient was instructed to see the image *(bali dakvanava)*. The colour, size, weapons, vehicle and appearance of the deity were all described in verses known as moulding verses *(ambun kavi)*. With the completion of the descriptions of the *Viskam*, requests were made for the protection and relief of the patient by the power of the *baliya*. Such requests were repeated often at the end of verses throughout the ritual, such as:

"noyek dosa me baliyen yaya ada"
(May various misfortunes go today by this *batiya*)

"Set salasa me atura dina dina rakina"
(Bring relief and protect this patient from day to day)

The recitations once again increased as requests were made for cure from the diseases *(roga)* to which the patient was inclined during the Great Period of the Saturn *(Senasuru)*, such as headaches, stomach pains, eczema, untimely death *(akala maranaya)* and fever. The patient was assured that by the hearing of the verses *(kavi)* benefits will be received:

කියන කවි අසා සෙත සලසන් නොලසා
සෙනසුරු මහ දසා වෙන් වෙන රෝග වනසා

(Hearing the spoken verses brings relief to the diseases which come from the Great Period of the Saturn).

Once again the verses ended in sound and movement as blessings were shouted over Genaris's head:

ayu raksa vanta - protect life
avada, avada - life be long !
ayu bo veva - may life increase !!

Edin stepped forward to deliver another recitation known as a *"katapahadiya"*, literally 'clearing the mouth'. He requested the deity, the ruler of the great period *(maha dasa adipathi divya rajayan vahanse)*, to grant relief *(pihitavenna)* to the patient. This recitation ended with a request for relief from the 98 diseases *(ata anuvak roga)*, the 99 disturbances *(nava anuvak viyadhi)* and the 203 dangers *(desiya tunak aturu antra)*.

At the end of Edin's recitation, he was joined by Kirimanis, and Primin and they started with a lengthy recitation, known as *set kavi* or *asirvada* (praise verses). Each verse tells of the places where Buddha spent the rainy season *(vas kalaya)*, and each verse ends with a request that by listening to and thinking of the events brought to the mind

(matak karala), the patient may receive peace and tranquility *(setak santiyak)*:

දන සවනේ බුදු වූ පත් තිස් වසිනේ
ඉසිපතනේ පළමුව වස්වැස වෙසිනේ
එම සදනේ මේ ඔබට සෙත සදනේ
ලොව නිතිනේ යස මේ ඔබ රදනේ දින දිනේ

(Buddha reached enlightenment at thirty-five years of age. He spent his first vas period at Isipatana. From that event may you receive blessings, and always in the world may you have a good and prosperous existence.)

Similarly, 20 verses were sung in more familiar rhythms and the recitation concludes with the moving of Edin's hands over the patient's head and the blessing:

"Ayu raksa vanda, avada, ayubo veva!"
(protect life, may life be long, may age increase.)

The final verses in the dedication of the *Viskam baliya* were "head-to-feet" verses *(sirasapada)* literally meaning head *(sirasa)* and feet *(pada)*. These verses were sung in order to make the *dosa* descend *(dosa bassavima)* from the upper to the lower parts of the patient's body. The *dosa* was driven down in the face of the power which arose from reference to stories from Buddha's previous lives. For example:

මඩ පලේ හෙව තියත විවරණ ඒ දිවකුරු මුනිදුගෙන් ලන්තේ
තද කැලේ තොව සුරැකී පිවිතුරු පවර දිවකුරු දහම් ඇත්තේ
තද බලේ යති රුදුරු මරසෙන් පරදා ඒ මුනි විජය ලන්තෙ
බඩ වැලේ හැම දොස දුරු කොට ඔබට එම දෙවෙනි නිත්තෙ

(The Buddha who got blessing from the earliest Buddha Divakuru lying down on a puddle developed spiritual powers from a long time. In this birth he defeated Mara and became the Buddha. With the blessing of the Buddha, may all the bowel and intestinal defects disappear.)

Each of the stories related made reference to a particular part of the body and it is from these areas of the body that *dosa* are removed *(behera venava)*. For example, in the verse given above, the power of Buddha defeated *mara* (death), the *dosa* that comes from the intestine *(bada vala)* is expelled. These type of verses were moved down the patient's body with the *adura* drawing attention to particular parts. One *bali adura* explained that the *dosa* moves down from the head *(hisa)*, the forehead *(nalala)*, the two eyes *(as deka)*, the mouth (*mukaya)*, the cheeks *(dekammul)*, the neck *(bella)*, the two shoulders *(deura)*, the two elbows *(devalimita)*, the ten fingers *(dasangilli)*, the chest *(lamada)*, both sides of the body trunk *(delalath, ila eta)*, the stomach *(bada)*, the hip *(ukula)*, the genitals *(rahasa)*, the two thighs *(dekalava)*, the shanks *(kenda)*, the two knees *(dedana)*, the two ankles *(devalukara)*, the instep *(pita patul)* and the ten toenails *(dasaniya)*.

The verses sung in the *sirasapada* were delivered rapidly, and these verses also have efficacious effects that derived from the virtuous power of the Buddha. With the usual praise of dancing, singing, ringing and drumming the dedication of *Viskam baliya* was brought to a close. Edin, Kirimanis and Primin moved from the arena to rest, whilst the floor was taken by Suraneris, Jemis and Jayanetti, who continued with the next dedication.

Throughout the night the recitations continued, focusing on the assembled images. The form remained the same but the varying combinations of performers provided diverse content of recitations by using their extensive knowledge on the particular images that they have specialized. The overall

impression in this part of ritual was a continual flow of words, wishes and ideas.

The ritual stops briefly at 3.00 a.m after the dedication of *Asu ek gabe mal baliya,* when all took an opportunity to rest with a cup of coffee or tea. This break is known as *maha te,* literally 'the big tea'. The *maha te* interlude figures in all major all-night performances and it provides refreshments for all participants. Oil cake *(kavum)*, biscuits and bananas were served followed by tea, coffee, cigarettes and betel. The ritual recommenced at 3.45 a.m and continued until the dedication of the images was completed at 7.00 a.m.

At the end of the dedication of the final image, that of the *Sonkara raksha baliya*, the patient was blessed with small torches *(pahan thira)* performed by Edin. At the beginning of the event Genaris was given a white cloth *(mottakkiliya)* which he placed over his head. The children on either side of him were each given 54 small cloth torches *(pahan thira)*, which they were instructed to light and cast into the pots of turmeric water *(kaha diyara)* at the end of each verse when the hand-bell was rung. The 54 short verses were recited by Edin and at the end of each, the children shouted *"ayu bo veva"* and each casted a burning thira into turmeric water (2x54=108, a number of great magical significance). It is said that this event was associated with the removal of heat *(Una)* from the various parts of the body. Each concluding line of the verses made reference to a part of the body and a request was made that the heat may be expelled therefrom:

ඒ වරා දෙපසෙ පැන් බත්	වඩවා
සොදුරා මොට්ටැක්කිලියක්	පොරවා
අවුරා කඩ රෙදි වළ ගිනි	දල්වා
සපුරා දෙපසෙ සිට ආ	වඩවා

(Covering patients' head with a white clean cloth, and lighting small cloths (phan thira), and blessing him with them in the either side.)

මුනි රජ බොා මුල වැඩ වීදු රස්තේ
බැඩ හිද බුදු බව ලැබ එහි දස්තේ
ලද පුද හිස කෙස් එම සුර අස්තේ
හිස තද රද උන ඒ යසසින් බස්තේ

(The Buddha was seated on the Diamond Throne under the Bo-tree. The darshana of his attaining Buddhahood while thus seated! Then he gave his ***hair relu*** *to the gods. By (the power of) those virtue may be painful headaches and fevers depart.*

In the course of the recitation Genaris was directed to move the cloth *(mottakkiliya)* slowly down his body, from head to shoulders, from shoulders to chest, from chest to waist until it reached his feet where it remained until the verses were completed. Having completed the recitation, Genaris was told to throw the cloth onto the *mal baliya*. With the casting of the cloth there was a long break for breakfast. The performers washed, ate and relaxed.

Phase III

At 9.00 a.m efforts were made to restart the ritual. All performers assembled for the final phase of the ritual. This phase was marked by the separation of the patient from the sources of power which had been invoked in the ritual.

The episode commenced with a series of elaborate dances for the entertainment of the audience. The dancing steps *(adau)* and drum steps *(sural)* were stretched out for almost one hour before being brought to a close. The accent in this phase was entirely based on entertainment and enjoyment that mainly focused on pleasing the mind of the patient *(atura hita santosa kirima)*. For the first time in the ritual, incense *(dummala)* was used with burning torches *(pandam)* and it produced enormous flames *(kira gahanava)* which periodically spread out to the entire arena.

The way was open for Genaris to rid himself of all his afflictions. Firstly, he was asked to cast away his ills *(leda)* by moving his hands in a casting motion three times *(muna ata pisa damima)* from the upper part of his face in the direction of each of the five images. This was a procedure by means of which the *dosa* was systematically removed from the body of the patient *(aturaya)*. He was now told to worship each of the five images *(bali rupa)*, and after this action Edin and Suranaris took the weapons from each of the images.

Attention was focussed onto the central *mal baliya* as Genaris was requested to cast the betel leaf and coin offerings *(panduru)* onto the *baliya*. The white curtain *(kadaturava)* was also cast into the *mal baliya*, followed by the lime and thread *(pirit huya)* which Genaris had held in his hand for most of the night. These actions were marked by the disconnecting of the patient from the ritual arena.

Edin took a cock, which until this point had been waiting patiently with its legs tied together, and stands holding it before Genaris's eyes. Edin intoned *mantara* which intended to cause any malevolence still affecting Genaris to be transferred to the cock. Edin took the cock behind the *bali* images and banged it against the framework of the *bali* image. This action was marked by the final transferance of *dosa*. Genaris was instructed to move from the ritual arena to the house.

All five performers *(aduro)* took the floor for the final dance. They provided maximum entertainment with acrobatic dances which were also accompanied by thunderous drumming. Following this dramatic action the *mal baliya* was pulled from its frame and carried to the Bentota river and cast into the river. The clay images were also pulled *(bali iggillima)* from their frames and carried to the garden and propped against a tree where they were left to decay. Within a short period of time the house and compound came back to their normal state. Floors were swept and the offering trays were taken away as rubbish.

Finally, Suraneris sat with Genaris in the veranda, quietly intoning an amulet *(yantra)* named *Sani murtun jaya* which he tied to Genaris's upper arm as a final protection for the passing of a fruitless period or *apala kalaya* of Saturn. Having bathed and dressed, the performers offered their farewells and in turn thanked and gave their good wishes to Genaris and his family.

4.4 The Significance of the ritual stage

The ritual I have described above is performed in a manner which does not vary from occasion to occasion. The *bali* is undoubtedly an ancient ritual which has been the subject of accretions and changes over the centuries of its performance. Such a ritual would make fascinating layers of meaning which lie secreted in each ritual performance. It is a very difficult task to unveil all the levels of meaning which underlie the ritual. What I propose to do in my analysis is to select certain key themes and illustrate how these are demonstrated by means of symbols during the course of a ritual performance. The traditional anthropological approach to the study of ritual symbolism goes back to Turner's analysis of Ndembu symbolism (1967). 'Symbols are the smallest units of ritual which still retain the specific properties of the ritual' (1967:19). By careful examination of the use and characteristics of certain symbols we can understand what it is that the symbol stands for and the type of meanings it brings together. Symbols are like storage vessels and it is the task of the anthropologist to unpack the many meanings which the symbol embodies (Sperber1975: 16). The aim of the ritual symbolism is to uncover the multiple meanings that each symbol embodies.This multitudinous aspect of ritual symbols set apart from the ordinary discourse where we normally assume that one symbol has only one meaning.

Dan Sperber (1975) argues that symbols are not simply elements in a conscious or unconscious code, and that exegesis does not so much represent the 'meaning' of symbols, but rather an extention of symbolic discourse itself. Sperber's critique based on Turner's Ndembu examples emphasizes the way that symbols create an indeterminate state of meaning rather than carry fixed and unambiguous meanings.

Leaving aside the very important critiques of symbolic action (eg. Schneider 1980), I now undertake the interpretation of the symbols which lie at the centre of the healing process in the *bali* ritual. In the *bali,* the dominant expressive modes consist of song, dance, drama, artistic imagery, drumming and a host of other essentially non-ordinary modes such as offerings and dedications.

In *bali,* as in drama, the creation of a stage, the marking off of a ritual space by the use of decorations and various other boundary producing mechanisms, separate the inside from the outside, the sacred from the mundane. For the duration of the ritual, the performers transform a domestic compound *(midula)* into a spectacular ritual arena *(ranga mandalaya). Ranga* means "dance" and the Sanskrit word *mandala* here means "stage". It also is known as a shed *(bali maduva)* where the gods are offered performances that please them. The *bali maduva* is, then a shed, a dance arena, a *mandala* of divine influence. It is also a place where gods are reassembled on earth. The impression which the *bali* ritual creates, consists of a supra-mundane spectacle and atmosphere as would suit a god in heaven.

The patient *(atura)* is brought into this place of heavenly transition and transformation in order to be given a new life. Significantly, the deities, ranged before the patient, are also attracted and brought briefly to life in this place. The patient enters into the ritual arena marked by the separation from the mundane world. When the patient takes up his position, he is

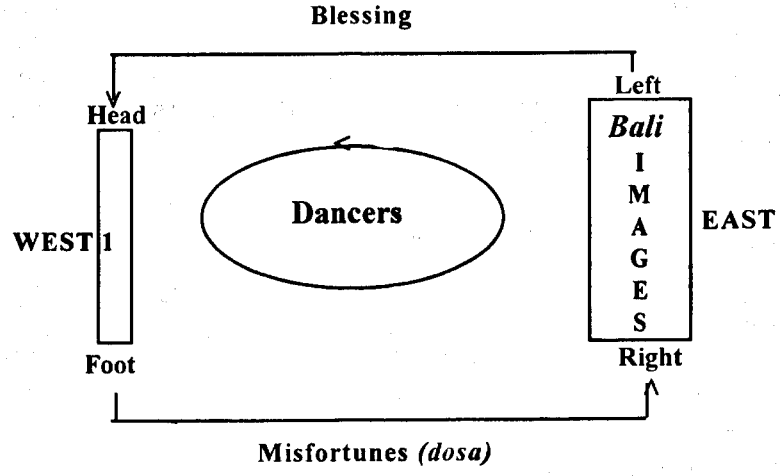
in the West, and facing him in the East is the line of *bali* images. The images ranged in the East suggest a link with the horoscope which is always determined according to the position of the planets and asterisms *(nakat)* over the eastern horizon at the moment of birth.

The ritual commences as the sun sets behind the patient in the West *(varuna diga)*, an inauspicious direction which is associated with decay. Natural light is replaced by artificial light. For the duration of the night, it is the ritual itself which imitates and parallels the overall movements which the natural cycle of the Sun creates. The images are dedicated from right to left, that is in an anti-clockwise direction. It is suggested that horoscopic calculation is also based on anti-clockwise direction. The patient is physically connected to these images by means of a thread which passes over the arena and down into his hand. Blessings are repeatedly pronounced over the patient's head, and by means of the head-to-foot verses, the *dosa* are driven down his foot into the images. The whole cyclical movement is further seen in the movements of the dancers who spin between the opposite poles which are represented by the patient and the assembled images (see: **figure 4**).

The patient receives the blessing of the assembled deities through the thread *(pirit huya)*, which connects him directly to them and metaphorically through their gaze under which he sits. The grant of blessings upon the patient gives impact to the removal of *dosa* from his body, and also through a series of casting onto assembled imagery.

Also, the *dosa* are absorbed by the eight auspicious objects *(ashta mangala vastu)* which lie at the patient's feet. The ritual consists of a series of acts in which the patient physically casts away the various objects and offerings, which are believed to have absorbed the *dosa*. In casting away the thread onto the images he severs his connection with the now

Figure 4
Spatial movements in the *bali* ritual



polluted sources of blessing. The separation is further reinforced by casting the white cloth and wiping the face with the patient's hands *(muna ata pisa damima)* towards the assembled images. Following this, the images are disposed of as lifeless, even powerless, clay images which have absorbed all the *dosa* from the patient. The ritual is brought to a close with the patient making the inverse journey he made eighteen hours earlier, that is, the ends up with his walk back to his house. In the above analysis, I have treated *bali* as a healing ritual with curative transformation, and demonstrated some more general inferences about the nature of ritual performance. My interpretation remains incomplete. I am saying this because in my study, I could only open one door. There are many more doors that have to be opened, such as musical structure, dramatic structure, the nature of symbols and many more areas of the *bali* ritual.

5
Bali Ritual: Disappearance or Transformation?

> "Traditional specialists must themselves reconsider the meaning of acts and objects that are brought into novel contexts" (Appadurai: 1986).
>
> "The cultural scheme is shaping the practices, as much as the practices are constituting the grounding of the scheme" (Ortner 1989:76).

The account of the *bali* ritual provided in Chapter Four gives us an idea of how the *bali* ritual operates in a particular local setting. However, this account does not provide a clear picture of its changing forms in the present socio-economic context. Therefore, in this chapter I will explore how *bali* has survived or continues as a 'traditional' healing ritual by changing its forms. By presenting changing forms of the *bali* ritual I will examine the dynamic qualities of traditional rituals in Sri Lanka and argue that traditional Sinhala rituals, particularly *bali*, still play an important role in contemporary Sri Lanka, even under the influence of the globalization process. Sri Lankan society, like many other societies today, is changing faster than ever before. Changes in contemporary society have,

according to Gombrich and Obeyesekere, destroyed the village communities of the past:

> "Traditional Sinhala Buddhist society was based on peasant agriculture. Most people passed their lives in villages or hamlets with a clear communal identity. These villages in turn consisted mainly of kin groups. Most traditional households consisted of nuclear families .... the nuclear family was embedded in a wider network of kin .... The kinship system was a structure to guide and support the individual ... This pattern of life is eroded by population growth, mobility, mass education and urbanization ... Only in remote parts of the island, do traditional village communities now survive. On the west and south coasts, roughly from Chilaw to Matara, and for miles inland and in the central provinces around Kandy, the countryside is so full that it looks like city overspill ... (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988: 67-69).

As a result of these changes, Gombrich & Obeyesekere argue that once village-based, communally and collectively organized exorcist and healing rituals such as exorcisms *(yaktovil), gammaduva* and *bali* are disappearing or declining. Based on my ethnographic research, I would argue that these rituals, particularly *bali*, are not disappearing, but continually evolving into new forms, at two different levels. At one level, I would argue that traditional, once village-based and collectively organized *bali,* are shifting away from the public arena to a much narrower focus on the family or the individual. This process can be identified as 'personalization' of once village-based public rituals. One remarkable feature of this personal or more correctly, private ritual, is the removal of the public performance aspect (dancing, drumming and comic episodes etc.) of the *bali*. At the second level, the public and performative dimensions of *bali* such as drumming, singing, dancing and dramatic episodes are taken into an entirely new

context as public or national performances. The healing aspect of *bali* has been given second place and the nationalist dimension of them as evidences of a nation's "heritage" have come to the surface. These public events take the form of cultural display or *sandarshana* such as ***maha bali santhi sandarshanaya (Great bali ceremony)***. These new dimensions of traditional ritual practices have become increasingly common in most parts of the country. In this Chapter I explore these developments in some detail.

5.1 The Public Aspects of *Bali*

Certain traditional practices have always been subject to change, re-invention and transformation, in keeping with ideological or discursive requirements of a society. This is most clearly manifest in the activities of national movements that are often concerned with the preservation and revitalization of local culture. Recent Sri Lankan cultural discourses and practices are no exception in this regard. Certain influential social groups in Sri Lanka have criticized the cultural changes that have been brought about by globalization. Some critics have expressed the view that these global forces are destroying the long established Sinhala Buddhist culture of the country and eventually the nation *(jathiya)*[36] .

These kinds of nationalist ideas can be constructed and expressed in many forms. Writing is one such form through which nationalist ideas are transformed into a medium of communication (Amunugama:1979, Gombrich & Obeyesekere: 1988; Kapferer: 1988; Spencer: 1990; Tennakoon: 1990; Kemper: 1991). In the recent past, some writers such as Nalin de Silva and Gunadasa Amarasekere have

[36] See *Dharmista Samajaya* (1982) by Sarchchandra.

also contributed to the development of a form of Sinhala nationalist consciousness through a movement they have called Nationalist Thinking *(Jathika Chintanaya)*. In addition, three recently formed Sinhala organizations, namely the National Sangha Council, Sinhala Veera Vidhana and The National Movement Against Terrorism are also playing a vital role to promote Sinhala Nationalism at the popular level. While the educated Sinhala Buddhist promotes and fosters nationalism by means of writing, printing and discussion, certain youth organizations *(tharuna sanvidana)*, traders organizations and local level political patrons are moving away from such intellectual interventions to adopt a more populist method to sustain ethno-religious or cultural identity and nationalist sentiments.

Simpson has pointed out that there appears to be a growing demand for 'traditional' cultural forms throughout the Sinhala community to express their nationalist sentiments (Simpson: 1997). According to my field observations, some traditional healing rituals such as *bali, gammaduva, suniyama* and *sanni yakuma* are now (mis) used by certain groups to explore and express their national and local collective identities[37] (see: **plate 11**). This change indicates that once village-based, larger exorcist and healing rituals are moving away from their healing aspects to more a national or public performance mode where they become popular foci of nationalist sentiments.

As one organizer pointed out, the main purpose of these major public ritual performances is to preserve or conserve the traditional cultural heritage *(urumaya)* of the Sinhala nation *(jathiya)* for the next generation. He further said, "*bali*

[37] It is important to note here that one of the most popular ways of expresing nationalist sentiments of Sinhala Buddhist through ritual is by conducting bodhi poja. See (Tambiah: 1992; Horst: 1995: 88-98).

is becoming rare. It is our duty to preserve it *(araksha kara ganda)* for the next generation *(ilanga paramparava)*". An assertion like this indicates the production of nationalist commitment through public ritual performances. As some anthropologists have pointed out, the production of nationalist sentiments or symbolic unity among the Sinhala at the national level or even in a local context can also be seen in the promotion of archaeology, mythical history, religious festivals and development (projects) rituals (Kapferer: 1988; Tennakoon: 1988; Nissan: 1989; Spencer: 1990; Kemper: 1991; Brow: 1995; Roberts: 1997,1998; Walters: 1997)[38].

I would like to draw attention to how a traditional ritual like *bali* undergoes a process of transformation in order to become a mode of nationalist representation in contemporary Sri Lanka. Before discussing this, some general remarks need to be made about these new types of public or national events. These public events are largescale, spectacular, expensive and usually involve large audiences. They also provide maximum entertainment *(vinodaya)* in the form of drumming, dancing (see: **plate 12**) and comic episodes for large audiences. The news of these performances are publicized over large areas and draw huge audiences and, therefore, have to be staged in school halls and other public areas. The audience also participates actively in the event by clapping, whistling and laughing. The most active participants in these events are young men, typically dressed in 'western' clothes and educated in the Sinhala language. These performances are often videotaped and shown on national television. As I mentioned before, certain youth organizations, traders' organizations and

[38] There have been some recent studies to provide more ethnographies of Sinhala nationalism in peripheral areas where nationalist ideology accompanies growing state penetration. see, for example, Brow (1988, 1990,1995) Woost (1993).

local and national level political patrons usually host these public rituals. Some aspects of the above remarks can be illustrated by one major public *'baliya'* which I attended. This was sponsored by the Western Province Cultural Ministry and was called *'maha bali santhi sandarshanaya'*.

It was staged at a public playground for an audience of well over two thousand participants. Before the performance, the Chief Minister of the Province raised the Sri Lankan national flag. It was followed by the hoisting of the Buddhist flag by the Minister of Cultural Affairs of the Province. The stage was also decorated with beautifully molded images of *bali (bali rupa)*, (see **plate 13**) which normally figure in the major rituals intended to dispel bad planetary influences. This moulded baliya *(ambum bali)* consisted of eleven images. The ritual was conducted by performers belonging to two different traditions who came from Matara and Bentota areas of the Southern Province. Both troupes consisted of sixteen dancers and five drummers and were led by Suraneris (D2) from Bentota.

. Maximum publicity was given through the media, mainly through state-controlled media, as it was presented as a national event. The SLBC[39] broadcast a live commentary of the event and television personnel and journalists were also there to report on the event. An officer from the Provincial Cultural Ministry said that nearly 150,000 rupees was spent to organize the *baliya*. Out of this amount, Rs. 65,000 was given to the performers. The emphasis of this event was to promote national cultural identity, by preserving the traditional rituals for future generations. According to one of the organizers from the Cultural Ministry of the Province, the *baliya* was organized to preserve the decaying cultural heritage *(urumaya)* of the nation. My informer *(adura)* stated that the performance was also aimed at bestowing ritual protection to

[39] Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation.

Plate 11: The banner at the Ceremonial display of *gammaduwa*. It was stated: "The major gammaduwa is aimed at bestowing ritual protection to the military and police in North & East, all traders in Maharagama, the country and the nation (Sinhala)".

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 12: Dancers entertain the audience

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

Plate 13:
Eleven images displayed at the major *bali* ceremony

Photograph by Premakumara de Silva

the country *(rata)*, nation *(jathiya)* and the military and the police *(thri vida hamudava saha policiya)*. This pronouncement reveals that the purpose of the contemporary major *bali* is shifting away from its traditional objective of healing a particular patient, to "healing" the whole nation. It is clearly indicated in this *baliya*. Apart from the blessing and ritual protection of the country, there was also the element of entertainment. The dance, drumming and visual aspects of the performance were clearly focused on entertainment *(vinodaya)*.

It is obvious that these types of events help revive traditional rituals with new meanings, and projecting them into the future. Though it is difficult to see how these public performances can protect traditional forms of culture from external influences *(bahira balavega)*, particularly from the process of globalization, they nevertheless seem to reinforce a shared cultural identity and some form of ethnic unity among the Sinhalese. It is important to stress that *bali* and Sinhala nationalism are not linked historically, ideologically or functionally. So, the above attempt to link it to Sinhala nationalism is predominantly of recent origin. This shows us something about the power of the cultural and nationalist discourse in present day Sri Lanka.

5.2 The Private Aspects of the *Bali*

Before I go into private or individual aspects of the *bali* ritual let me highlight some characteristics of the typical *baliya* that I have presented in Chapter Four. It will help us to understand the private form of the *bali* ritual in contemporary Sri Lanka. As we can see, *baliya* was performed together by a troupe of *berava* men for the purpose of healing an individual patient. This spectacular healing performance was carried out with drumming, dancing and comedy within a minimum of eighteen

hours during the entire night without sleep. The family of the patient was provided with an extensive list of materials, needed to carry out the performance. There, the host family had to mobilize a substantial amount of money to meet the cost of the ritual. Such rituals are also public and a large number of kin and neighbours offer support, and participate in them. Hospitality plays an important role in such events, as it is routine to provide meals and refreshments for the guests. Rounds of cakes, sweetmeats and biscuits, tea and coffee, cigarettes and betel leaves are served throughout the night.

These characteristics of the major *bali* ritual *(pas baliya)* that I have described in Chapter Four have undergone a transformation due to several socio-economic factors from more public or community level to the more family or individual level in contemporary Sri Lanka. The main reason for this transformation is the increasing cost of production. Most of the clients and performers whom I interviewed emphasised this. The amount of money spent on major healing rituals and the goods needed to make the ritual a public success are very expensive. One performer said that until recently, not much money was needed to put on a major healing ritual, partly because the performers were paid in kind. He also added that the bulk of the material required for the ritual could be gathered locally, often from any home garden plot in the villages. Furthermore, the kinsmen, neighbours and friends could also support the patient's family. Village women also assisted in the task of preparing food for guests and performers. But "today nothing can be done without money". High cash expenses incurred to purchase materials, payments of performers and providing meals and refreshments for participants during the course of a major ritual cannot be afforded by many families today. These circumstances have compelled clients to go for smaller scale performances, involving fewer performers. The cost is a major consideration

in deciding on the size and nature of the ritual to be performed. An adura (performer) usually takes the nature of the disorder as well as the financial situation of the patron or patient in arriving at the decision. In comparison to major rituals, today most performers recommend their clients to have a smaller ritual, which costs less, is affordable and shorter in duration. The most common smaller ritual practiced in and around Bentota area is *ath bali* (hand held image of sun) and the *mal bali* (flower altars) (see plate 2 & 3). The popularity of smaller *bali* rituals among the clients of the area is further revealed in **Table 2**. The table[40] shows that the bulk of the rituals performed by Edin (D2) and Jemis (D5) during the period of 1994 to 1995 were *ath* bali and *mal* bali. The smaller *bali* rituals that I observed did not include dance, drumming and comedy, but focused more on recitations with the participation of one *adura*, rarely two or more. The removal of the more elaborate visual and entertainment elements of larger *bali* resulted in the disappearance of the audience hitherto invited to participate in the performance and enjoy the patron's hospitality. In the smaller ritual performances, the number of participants is always limited to the patient's immediate family. In comparison to night long, larger *bali*, the smaller *bali* does not require many hours. If it is an *ath baliya*, it requires at most four hours to complete, but if it is a *mal baliya*, it would take a maximum of eight hours. This type of smaller rituals may cost up to Rs.3,000[41], but half of that amount goes to the performer. If the performer was from the region, his charges would not exceed Rs. 700. Performers justified their charges in terms of current cost of living in the country. The patron's limited budget always pushed them for more individualised,

40 I have formulated this table by using the diaries of two performers in 1994 and 1995.

41 This amount is subjected to change if amulat protection is needed at the end of the ritual.

Table 2: Diaries of Jemis and Edin in 1994 - 1995

Jemis

Type of *Bali*	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
Ath Bali (hand held clay image of Sun)	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95	94 95
	10 07	04 06	08 06	02 04	06 02	04 02	03 06	04 02	02 01	04 03	03 05	02 03	52 48
Mal Bali (flower-alter)	04 04	02 04	03 05	01 04	02 01	02 03	01 04	- 04	02 03	03 -	02 01	03 01	25 34
Ambum Bali (moulded bali)	- -	- -	- 02	- -	- -	- -	01 01	- -	- 02	- 01	- -	01 01	04 04
Edin													
Ath Bali	- 04	- 03	- 04	01 -	03 04	05 05	01 02	03 05	02 01	03 02	01 02	06 03	25 35
Mal Bali	- 03	- -	05 02	05 -	01 -	02 02	03 03	- 02	03 01	03 01	01 04	03 05	14 35
Ambum Bali	- -	- -	- 02	- -	- -	- -	01 01	- -	03 -	- 02	- -	01 01	05 06

smaller ritual performances rather than larger performances. But this shift is not simply a matter of high cost of the ritual alone. Here, the changing social conditions must also be taken into consideration. The time commitment which the larger ritual demands of the patient's family, relatives, neighbours and friends, is generally a minimum of twelve hours and an evening without sleep, and is simply not practical for those who now have to cope with a fast moving capitalist economy. As Bob Simpson has correctly observed, at the time of civil unrest *(kalabalakalaya)* in the South, in the late 1980's, the once largely organized major rituals had to be scaled down to a more individualized or family level. The fear and suspicion that undermined everyday social interaction throughout this period contributed to this reformulation (1997:52-53).

The popularity of smaller *bali* is hardly confined to a particular social class. But Kafferer has emphasized that exorcism is predominantly a peasant and working class practice which was often devalued by the middle class (1983:18). According to my ethnographic data, *bali* is not confined to a single class. I have witnessed a number of smaller rituals at the houses of wealthy businessmen and professionals who belong to the middle class. Smaller rituals have also been organized by wealthy Buddhist monks in their temples in the city of Colombo and in the south. According to a wealthy car salesman in the South, the removal of drumming, dancing and comic drama are essential requirements to stage a *bali* ritual in their houses because of the time factor, and the desire to maintain the privacy of their family in the community. He says that this kind of ritual should be practiced without informing others. "Beating drums informs others of what was going on in my house". Assertions like this reveal the salient feature of capitalist ideology of individualization in the practice of *bali*. The "individualization" of *bali* is by definition small scale, confined to the interior of the patient's house, costs less, short

in duration, involves no entertainment and largely focuses on recitation, and mainly concentrates on individual interests.

Some aspects of the above changes can be illustrated by one smaller *baliya* that I attended at a wealthy businessman's house in the South. Gunasekere[42] had been suffering considerable hardship owing to lack of business in his trade as a car salesman. He also had a consistent headache *(hise amaruvak)*, which had not responded to any treatment over a number of months. He had visited several doctors including a specialist in a Colombo hospital. After each diagnosis Gunasekere had gone further seeking a more considered opinion and spending increasing amounts of money and time in search of a meaningful explanation and cure. Meanwhile, his wife took his horoscope to an astrologer. The astrologer, after carefully examining the horoscope *(palapala visthara)*, said that Gunasekere was passing through the unfavorable period of the Sun[43] *(hiruge maha dasava)*. The astrologer had recommended several remedial actions as: verses of blessing *(seth kavi)* were to be composed and recited for god Kataragama by a person skilled in the art of *seth kavi*. Secondly, a protective talisman *(yantaraya)* was to be made, and a *baliya* were to be performed, specifically designed to combat the malevolent influence of the planet sun. Upon hearing this, Gunasekere's friend, also a businessman (a shop owner), recommended the name of a well known *bali adura* in the Bentota area. This *bali adura*, Jemis (D5), also an

42 The name appearing in the case study has been changed.

43 The favourable influence of this planet enables a person to win general esteem, to attain a high position in life, to become popular and respected, and to gain wealth and opulence. The unfavourable effects, on the other hand, are: disappointing experiences and lack of success, ingratitude, suffering from fever and headaches (Wirz 1954:115).

accomplished astrologer, examined the horoscope again and visited Gunasekere's house. He made a somewhat similar interpretation of the horoscope to that made by the previous astrologer and emphatically recommended a *baliya*, and in addition, a protective talisman was to be drawn up and intoned over 108 times *(ekasiya ata varak japa kirima)*.

Jemis 'in his discussion with Gunasekere and his wife' came to an agreement on the charges, the size and the nature of the *baliya* to be performed. Initially, Jemis's recommendation was the performance of a larger *baliya* which consisted of five moulded clay images *(abum baliya or pas baliya)* but it ended up with a cheaper and smaller *ath-baliya* (a hand held clay image of the sun) which was relatively standard for any patient's condition.

On the following day, Jemis asked me to attend this smaller *baliya*. He had already informed the client of my presence during the ritual. By the time of my arrival in the afternoon, Jemis was already making a flower and betel tray *(mal bulath tatuva)* where the *ath-baliya* was normally kept. Within another half an hour, the preparation for the *baliya* was completed. The limited number of materials (flowers, coconut leaves and areca leaves and other medicinal leaves etc.) required for this ritual were supplied by Jemis himself, who charged an additional sum for these supplies.

Except Jemis and I, the ritual was limited to Gunasekere's immediate family members, his wife and his brother, two sons and daughter. Gunasekere was dressed in a clean white sarong and shirt. The ritual commenced at about 5.30 p.m. and it ended up at 10.00 p.m. At the beginning of the ritual, Jemis asked Gunasekere *(mahattaya)* to sit on the mattress, which was placed in the dining room of the house. Then the five precepts were observed by the family members and Jemis followed through with the ritual proceeding in the following sequence[44]:

(1) Consecrating the patient *(athura pe kirima)*

(2) Offering lights *(meti pahan pujava)*

(3) Charming the incense *(suvada dum methirima)*

(4) Salutating to the three refuges *(trivida ratna namaskara kavikima)*

(5) Reciting the flower and betel tray verses *(mal bulat tattuve kavi kima)*

(6) Handing over of the thread to Gunasekere *(aturaya ta pirit huya dima)*

(7) Placing Gunasekere's feet on the eight auspicious objects *(ashta mangala vastu paya thabima)*

(8) The dedication of *ath baliya (ath baliya pavadima)*. At this point, *ath baliya* description verses are sung. At the end of each verse, head-to-feet verses *(sirasapada kavi)* were also sung. Then, Jemis took the *ath-baliya* into his left hand and held it above Gunasekere's head and blessed Gunasekere by moving it clockwise and then anti-clockwise.

(9) Blessing with small torches *(pahan thira avadima)*

(10) Ending *bali (bali hamaraya)*. At the end of the *ath-baliya* Gunasekere was instructed to perform a number of actions:

[44] This ritual proceeding is quite similar to the structure of *bali* that I presented in chapter 4 (see: chapter 4).

(i) Casting a thread *(pirit huya)* onto the flower and betel tray *(mal bulat tatuva)*.

(ii) He was asked to cast away his ills *(leda)* by moving his hands in an outward motion three times *(muna ata pisa damima)* from the upper part of his face in the direction of *ath-baliya*.

Finally, Jemis sat in front of the *mal bulat tatuva* quietly intoning a yantra *(Vishnu aghora)* which he attached as a final protection to Gunasekere's gold chain that he wears around his neck. For this particular ritual, Jemis asked Rs. 1500 from Gunasekere's family. Having dressed and taken dinner, Jemis offered his good wishes to Gunasekere and his family and stated: "after this work (ritual) your (gentlemen's) troubles will be over"*(me vaden passe mahattayage karadara ivarai)*.

Taking into consideration the ethnographic information presented above in this chapter, it is clear that a major change has taken place in the pattern and practice of *bali* ritual in contemporary Sri Lanka, particularly in the South. On the one hand, the ritual is now largely confined to the family level. On the other hand, it clearly shows that certain influential social groups wanted to preserve or protect certain aspects of local culture from the outside forces, and have tended to make use of the public aspects of *bali* to express their nationalist sentiments. Though it is difficult to see how these public/ national level *bali* performances can protect traditional culture from external influences, these groups nevertheless seem to reinforce a shared cultural identity and some form of ethnic unity among the Sinhala. This major change in the traditional ritual sphere shows more the cultural nationalism discourse in the present day Sri Lanka than a resistance against "cultural homogenization" through global forces. The emerging cultural nationalism indicates that Sri Lanka has not passively accepted the impact of globalization on culture.

As I have pointed out in the introductory chapter, the assertion made by Obeyesekere and Gombrich that the *bali* ritual in contemporary Sri Lanka is on the decline, cannot be substantiated by the ethnographic evidence that I have presented in the last two chapters. This ethnographic information clearly shows that *bali* has retained its basic elements by changing its traditional form into two different levels (national and personal) in response to contemporary cultural, socio-political and economic changes in Sri Lanka.

6
Summary and Conclusions

Thus far, I have presented and analyzed ethnographic data on the practice of the *bali* ritual in Southern Sri Lanka, particularly in the Bentota area. One of my main aims throughout this thesis has been to present comprehensive ethnographic information concerning the dynamics of the *bali* ritual as well as the transformation in the lives of ritual specialists. *Bali* has never been extensively studied or analyzed by anthropologists who examined Sinhalese rituals. I have made an attempt to do so, in some relation to the process of globalization. Initially, globalization was seen by some as a homogenizing process which undermines local cultural traditions and replaces them with a global culture. But my findings do not substantiate this idea. What my ethnographic information indicates is how traditional forms of rituals, particularly *bali*, have responded to the process of globalization by transforming itself in two different levels. Therefore, it is very important to note here that the "cultural homogenization" argument fails to see that the so-called "local cultures," particularly traditional rituals, are engaging in continually innovative practices as they continue to elaborate on some elements of the local cultural identities or reassertive of "local" identities. However, it might be asserted that

globalization has not entirely removed the identities and specificities of local cultures but it reconstitutes a sense of locality.

In the introductory chapter, I noted three reasons why I focused attention on the *bali* ritual. I also looked at some theoretical perspectives, in particular the concept of globalization, which is useful to understand the changing situation of traditional Sinhala Buddhist rituals. The theoretical discussion prepared the groundwork for an understanding of the ethnographic material, such as how and why traditional rituals are being transformed in contemporary Sri Lanka.

In addition, I have discussed the way in which some anthropologists have interpreted traditional Buddhist ritual practices and their limitations in understanding mutating forms and dynamics of traditional Buddhist rituals in the context of globalization.

Chapter two examined the link that exists between astrology and Buddhism, or more precisely, between Buddhism, astrology and planetary rituals. It consisted of five closely related sections. In the first section I explained the underlying belief system associated with the *bali* ritual, where I pointed out that karma and rebirth are central to the belief in astrology and planets. In the second section of the chapter, I discussed how planetary deities are accommodated in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. The third section looked at some characteristics of the ritual category, which mainly deals with the planetary deities. In the fourth section of chapter two, I discussed how astrology plays a vital role in the mechanisms which underlie the practice of *bali* in Sinhala Buddhist society. In the last section, I explained how *bali* rituals originated and have been practiced in Sri Lanka. There I attempted to indicate how this *(bali)* ritual 'knowledge' came to Sri Lanka and more particularly how it came to be associated with the lowly *berava*

performers. In a broader sense, chapter two provided the background to the *bali* ritual complex in terms of its constituent elements such as the beliefs, myths and ideas, which underlie this category of rituals.

Chapter three discussed the ways in which ritual knowledge and skills have a profound significance in the lives of ritual specialists, particularly *bali* performers in the Bentota area. I also discussed the underlying logic of the formation of ritual troupes in the area that was predominantly based on kinship.

Chapter four presented a discussion on the *bali* ritual, mainly its types, structure and events. It was my aim to demonstrate how the performance of a *bali* is organized. In the latter part of this chapter I gave an analysis of the ethnographic material, presented the aim of expressive logic of the *bali* as a healing ritual with curative transformation and dismissed the nature of ritual performance.

Chapter five dealt with the question of the disappearance of traditional forms of ritual in contemporary Sri Lanka, particularly *bali* ritual, as claimed by Gombrich and Obeyesekere. Contrary to this assertion I found that the *bali* ritual in this area retained its basic elements while undergoing changes in response to on-going socio-economic changes.

Obeyesekere and Gombrich assert the existence of a unidirectional movement in the processes of change, that is, new forms of religious practices in contemporary society have come into being by displacing traditional ritual practices. However, I have attempted to demonstrate here the dynamic nature of rituals, which allows the changing of their old form to appropriate and innovate new forms while continuing to elaborate on some elements already central to the traditions. I have argued that "traditional rituals", particularly *bali,* have not disappeared or died out but continues to play a significant role in contemporary Sri Lanka. One of the main points I have stressed in my argument is that traditional rituals are not

necessarily declining, but continually developing into new forms, at two different levels. As I have pointed out in chapter five, on the one hand there appeared a definite shift away from the publicly visible aspects of ritual oriented to the wider community, towards a much narrower focus on immediate family. One remarkable feature of this family or private level ritual is the removal of the public display aspects of the ritual, such as dancing, drumming and comic drama. Due to several socio-economic factors, it concentrates now only on its healing aspect. The main factor for this transformation is the increasing cost of the ritual. This process marked personalization of once village-based public rituals. I have clearly presented the personal or private aspects of *bali* by providing the case study of Gunasekere in chapter five.

I also attempted to present how the performative or public aspects of *bali* (drumming, singing, dancing and comic drama etc.) are reappearing in an entirely new context, namely in the national ritual performances. There I argued how traditional rituals (particularly *bali*) reforming, rearranging and more clearly reconstructing, are modes of expressing Sinhala nationalist sentiment in contemporary Sri Lanka, rather than an attempt to preserve or conserve the traditional rituals from the influence of global culture. The public aspects of *bali* ritual has clearly shown us more about the discourse of cultural nationalism in present day Sri Lanka than a resistance against cultural homogenization through global forces. While it is difficult to see how these public performances can protect traditional forms of culture from external influences *(bahira balavega)* particularly from the process of globalization, they nevertheless seem to reinforce a shared cultural identity and some form of ethnic unity among the Sinhalese. Above all, my study indicates how a traditional ritual like *bali*, undergoes a process of transformation in order to become a mode of nationalist representation in

contemporary Sri Lanka. This transformation of the *bali* ritual practice in southern Sri Lanka asserts that globalization has not entirely removed the identities and specificities of Sri Lankan cultures.

The present work is expected to be a contribution to the body of ethnographic literature on Sri Lanka. It has dealt with a neglected aspect of Sinhalese rituals. It is also a contribution to the work carried out by Gombrich and Obeyesekere in *Buddhism Transformed* (1988) where they have presented rich ethnographic material on the ways in which the Buddhist religion undergoes change in contemporary Sinhala society. While providing further ethnographic materials for the transformational process that Gombrich and Obeyesekere uncover, my thesis has specially examined the changing and dynamic nature of *bali* ritual practices in contemporary society under the influence of globalization. My research on *bali* ritual would hopefully encourage the development of globalization discourse.

References

Ali, A.

1996. 'The Sri Lankan Ethnic Crisis in the Light of Global Capitalism'. In *Pravada*, Vol. 4, No. 8, pp. 9-11.

Ames, M. M.

1964. 'Buddha and the Dancing Goblins: A Theory of Magic and Religion'. In *American Anthropologist* 66: pp.76-82.

1966. 'Ritual Presentations and the Structure of the Sinhalese Pantheon'. In Manning Nash (ed.) *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism. S.E. Asia Studies* , Yale University Press, New Haven.

Amin, S.

1994. *The Future of Global Polarization*. Binghampton, New York.

1997. *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society*. London: Zed Books.

Amunugama, S.

1979. 'Ideology and Class Interest in One of Piyadasa Sirisena's Novels: The New Image of the 'Sinhala-Buddhist' Nationalist'. In M. Roberts, (ed.) *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Marga Institute.

Appadurai, A.

1986. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1997. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Baker, V.J.

1998. *A Sinhalese Village in Sri Lanka: Coping with Uncertainty*, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Bell, C.

1992. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bond, G. D.

1988. *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Breman, J.

1998. 'The End of Globalization?'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. February 14, pp. 333-336.

Brow, J.

1988. 'In Pursuit of Hegemony: Representations of Authority and Justice in a Sri Lanka Village'. In *American Ethnologist*, 15:2, pp. 311-327.

1990. 'Nationalist Rhetoric and Practice: The Fate of the Village Community in Kukulewa'. In J. Spencer, (ed.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. London, Routledge.

1995. *Demons and Development: The Struggle for Community in a Sri Lankan Village*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Carrithers, M.
1983. *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Chandraprema, C. A
1991. *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror, the JVP Insurrection 1987-89*, Colombo: Lake House.

Coppet de, D.
1992. (ed) *Understanding Rituals*. London: Routledge.

Corea, G.
1996. 'Sri Lanka and the Global Economic Environment', *Lanka Guardian*, Vol.18, No.20, March.

De Silva, Gunaratna, D.
1865-66. 'Demonology and Witchcraft in Ceylon'. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Ceylon Branch). Vol. IV: 1-117.

De Silva, Premakumara
2000. 'Sri Lankan Culture Under the Impact of Globalization: Revitalization or Homogenization'. In S. T. Hettige & M. Mayer, (eds.) *Sri Lanka at Cross-Roads: Dilemmas and Prospects After 50 years of Independence*. London: Macmillan Press.

De Silva, W.A.
1911. 'Note on the Bali Ceremonies of the Sinhalese', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Ceylon Branch). Vol. XX11: 140-160.

Durkhiem, M.
1915. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. from French by J. W. Swain. Glencoe: Free Press.

Featherstone, M.
1990. (ed) *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity,* London: Sage Publication.

Fuller, C.J.
1992. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gombrich, R.F.
1966. 'The Consecration of a Buddhist Image', *Journal of Asian Studies.* Vol. XXV1: pp. 23-36

1971. *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

1990. *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Banares to Modern Colombo*. London: Routledge.

Gombrich, R. F. and Obeyesekere, G.
1988. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gunasekera, T.
1994. *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism: Caste, Class and Power in Sinhalese Peasant Society*. London: Athlone Press.

Gunasinghe, N.
1984. 'Open Economy and its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka'. In *Committee for Rational Development, Sri Lanka, the Ethnic Conflict: Myths, Realities and Perspectives*, Delhi: Navrang.

1989. 'Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Perceptions and Solutions', In *Alavi*, H. (ed.) pp. 247-255.

Hettige, S. T.
1988. 'Migration of Sri Lankan Workers to the Middle East'. In *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.1, No. 1 and 2.

1995. 'Economic Liberalization and the Emerging Patterns of Social Inequality in Sri Lanka'. In *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* 18, 1&2, pp. 89-115.

1998. (ed.) *Globalization, Social Change and Youth*, Published by the German Cultural Institute, Colombo. pp. 71-83.

Hewamanne, S. K.
1997. *Migration as Resistance to Paternalistic Control: Recovering the Lost Voice*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas.

Horst, J. van der
1994. *'Who is He, What is He Doing' Religious Rhetoric and Performances in Sri Lanka during R. Premadasa's Presidency (1989-1993)*. Amsterdam: VU University Press.

Humphrey, C. and Laidlaw, J.
1994. The Archetypal Action of Ritual. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Jayathilaka, R.
1998. *Globalization and Rural Women: A Case Study of Two Villages in the District of Galle*. Published by The Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo.

Kapferer, B.
1975. 'Entertaining Demons: Comedy, Interaction and Meaning in a Sinhalese Healing Ritual'. *Modern Ceylon Studies.* Vol. 6: pp. 1-55

1983. *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

1988. *Legends of People, Myths and State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

1997. *The Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kariyawasam, T.
1986. Baliyaga Pilivela, Colombo.

Kemper, S.
1979. 'Sinhalese Astrology, South Asian Caste Systems, and the Notion of Individuality', *Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. XXXVIII, No: 03.

1980. 'Time, Person and Gender in Sinhalese Astrology'. *American Ethnologist* Vol.7, no. 4, pp.744-758.

1991. *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics and Culture in Sinhala Life.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Keyes, C.
1983. 'Merit-Transference in the Kammic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism', in C. Keyes and V. E.

Daniel (eds.) *Kamma: an Anthropological Inquiry,* University of California Press.

Knox, R.
1911. (ed.) *An Historical Relation of Ceylon.* Glasgow: James Ryan.

Lakshman, W. D.
1986. 'State Policy and Its Economic Impact', 1970-85, in *Upanathi*, Vol.01, No.01, pp. 5-38.

Leach, E. R.
1962. 'Pulleyar and the Lord Buddha: An Aspect of Religious Syncretism in Ceylon'. *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review*, vol. 49, no. 21 pp. 80-120.

1968. *Dialectic in Practical Religion.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Malalagoda, K.
1976. *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change.* London: University of California Press.

Mallikarachchi, D.
1998. *'Religion' 'Ritual' and 'Commercial Practice' of the Sinhalese Buddhist Traders in the City of Kandy Sri Lanka.* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University College of London.

McGrew, T.
1992. 'A Global Society?'. In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.) *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 62-113.

Narada Thero
1988. *The Buddha and His Teaching,* Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Nissan, E.
1985. *The Sacred City of Anuradhapura: Aspects of Sinhalese Buddhism and Nationhood*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London.

1989. 'History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist Nation'. *Social Analysis*, No 25, September 1989.

Nevill, H.
1956. *Sinhala Kavi. (Volumes 1, 11 and 111).* Colombo: Colombo National Museums Publications.

Obeyesekere, G.
1962. 'The Sinhalese Buddhist Pantheon and Its Extensions'. In Nash (ed.) *Proceedings of the Conference on Theravada Buddhism*. New Haven: Yale University.

1963. 'The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism'. In *Journal of Asian Studies.* Vol .22: pp. 139-153.

1966. 'Theodicy, Sin and Salvation in a Sociology of Buddhism'. In *Dialectic in Practical Religion,* E. R. Leach (ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1969. 'The Ritual Drama of the Sanni Demons: Collective Representations of Disease in Ceylon'.

Comparative Studies in Society and History. Vol. 11 (2): pp. 175-216.

1972. 'Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon'. *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1, No 1.

1977. 'Social Change and the Deities: The Rise of the Kataragama Cult in Modern Sri Lanka'. *Man*, ns, 12: pp. 377-396.

1978. 'The Fire-Walkers of Kataragama: The Rise of Bhakti Religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 36: pp. 457-476.

1982. 'The Ritual of the Leopard's Pot: The puna yagaya', In *E.F.C. Ludowyk Commemoration Volume*, forthcoming.

1984. *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1986. 'The Goddess Pattini and the Parable on Justice'. *Modern Sri Lankan Studies* 1 (1): pp. 1-14.

1995. 'The Two Faces of Colonel Olcott: Buddhism and Euro-Rationality in the Late 19th Century'. In *Buddhism and Christianity: Interactions Between East and West*. Ulrich Everding (ed.) Colombo: The Goethe-Institute.

Ortner, S. B.
1989. *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Perera, S.
1995. *Living with Torturers and Other Essays of Intervention: Sri Lankan Society, Culture and Politics in Perspective.* Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Perinbanayagam, R. S.
1982. *The Karmic Theatre: Self, Society and Astrology in Jaffna.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Petras, J.
1997. 'Critical Reflections on Globalization'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 06,

Pieris, R.
1956. *Sinhalese Social Organisation: The Kandyan Period.* Ceylon University Press Board. Sri Lanka.

Roberts, M.
1997 & 1998. *Sri Lanka Collective Identities Revisited*, Volume I & II. Michael Roberts (ed.) Marga Publication, Colombo.

Robertson, R.
1992. *Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: Sage Publications.

1990. 'Globality, Global Culture and Images of World Order'. In *Social Change and Modernity*, H. Haferkamp and N. Smelser (eds.) Berkeley: University of California.

Ruhunage, L. K.
1995. 'Sri Lankan Labour Migration: Trends and Treats'. In *Economic Review*, Vol. 21, No.10.

Ryan, B.
1953. *Caste in Modern Ceylon*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Sarachandra, E. R.
1966. *The Folk Drama of Ceylon*. Department of Cultural Affairs, Colombo: Ceylon Government Press.

1982. *Dharmista Samajaya*. Kelaniya: Samanala Publisher.

Schneider, D.
1968. *American Kingship: A Cultural Account*. Englewood Cliffs: N.J. Prentice-Hall.

Scott, D.
1994. *Formation of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Sederaman, J. E.
1964. *Lankave Bali Upata*. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena.

Seneviratne, A.
No date. *Udarata bali yagaya*. Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

Seneviratne, H. L.
1978. *Rituals of the Kandyan State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1999. *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneviratne, H. L. and Wickremeratne, S.
'Bodhi-puja: Collective Representations of Sri Lankan Youth'. *American Ethnologist* 7, No. 4, pp. 734-743.

Silva, K. T.
1992. 'Capitalist Development, Rural Politics and Peasant Agriculture on High-land Sri Lanka: Structural Change in Low Caste Village'. In *Agrarian Change in Sri Lanka* J. Brow & J. Weeramunda (eds) New York: Sage Publication.

1994. 'The Transition from Welfare State to Market Economy and its Effects on Social Development in Sri Lanka'. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 17 No. (1&2).

Simpson, R.
1985. *Ritual Tradition and Performance: the Berava Caste of Southern Sri Lanka*. Ph.D Thesis, University of Durham.

1993. 'Tourism and Tradition: from Healing to Heritage in a Sri Lankan Community'. *Annuals Tourism* , Res. 20, pp. 164-181.

1995. 'Possession, Dispossession and the Social Distribution of Knowledge among Sri Lankan Ritual Specialists'. *The Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol: 3, No. 1, pp. 43-59.

Sorensen, B. R.
1996. *Relocated Lives: Displacement and Resettlement within the Mahaweli Project, Sri Lanka*. Amsterdam: VU University Press,

Southwold, M.
1983. *Buddhism in Life*: *The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Spencer, J. R.
1990. *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. London, Routledge.

1990. 'Tradition and Transformation: Recent Writing on the Anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka'. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*. Vol.XX1 No. 2.

1990. *A Sinhalese Village in Times of Trouble:Politics and Change in Rural Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Sperber, D.
1975. *Rethinking Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spiro, M. E.
1967. *Burmese Supernaturalism: A Study in the Explanation and Reduction of Suffering*. New Jersey: Prentice - Hall Inc.

1970. *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Stephan Markel
1995. *Origins of Indian Planetary Deities*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Tambiah, S. J.
1970. *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1981. *A Performative Approach to Ritual*. Proceedings of the British Academy. LXV 1979. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

1984. *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1984. *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1986. *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1992. *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Tennakoon, N. S.
1988. 'Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme of Sri Lanka', *American Ethnologist* 15: pp. 294-311.

Turner, V. W.
1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Van Gennep, Arnold.
1961. *Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vitharana, V.
1992. *Bali Yagaya*. National Institute of Education, Maharagama.

Waters, M.
1995. *Globalization*. London: Routledge.

Weber, M.
1958. *Religion of India*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Winslow
1984. 'A Political Geography of Deities: Space and the Pantheon in Sinhalese Buddhism'. In *Journal of Asian Studies*, 43, No. 2, pp. 273-292.

Wirz, P.
1954. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*. Bril. Leyden.

Woost, M.
1993. 'Nationalizing the Local Past in Sri Lanka: Histories of Nation and Development in a Sinhalese Village'. *American Ethnologist*, 20:3, pp. 502-521.

Yalman, N.
1962. 'The Structure of the Sinhalese Kindred: A Re-examination of the Dravidian Terminology'. *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 64, pp. 548-574.

1964. 'The Structure of Sinhalese Healing Rituals'. In *Religion in South Asia*. E.B. Harper (ed.) Seattle: University of Washington Press.

1967. *Under the Bo Tree*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

"This provocative work is a study of religious change in southern Sri Lanka, concentrating on ideas and rituals surrounding astrology, specifically focusing on the popular ritual known as the *Baliya*. According to the received wisdom in recent studies of religious change in Sri Lanka, rituals like this should be declining in importance, but de Silva shows that, instead, they have been revitalized, albeit in rather, a different form. On the one hand, as domestic rituals, they have been drastically scaled down and privatized; on the other hand, as self-conscious markers of national culture and national heritage they have been incorporated into cultural shows for mass audiences. This is a quite exceptional piece of work: well-structured and beautifully written, it combines a comprehensive critical assessment of the literature on social and ritual change in Sri Lanka with some remarkable original evidence and original arguments."

Jonathan Spencer, *University of Edinburgh*

"Sri Lanka has a rich ritual tradition which has been the focus of much attention by anthropologists, sociologists and historians. One of the least well studied aspects of this tradition is the wide range of astrological rituals known as *Bali*. In this work Premakumara has produced a clear and well-researched account of these important rituals. He provides a useful overview of astrology, ritual tradition and performance and identifies significant issues for our understanding of ritual transformation and continuity".

Bob Simpson, *University of Durham.*

Premakumara De Silva is a senior lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. His research interests include religion and ritual, nationalism and globalization. He has published several papers in Sinhala and English languages. His recent article is entitled "Sri Lankan Culture Under the Impact of Globalization: Homogenization or Revitalization?" (2000).

ISBN 955-580-053-7

Printed by: Unie Arts (Pvt) Ltd., Colombo - 13.