

A Study of "Kavadi" Dance Performance in Devinuwara Perahera Ceremony and its Modern Trends and Dynamics

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Abstract

Sri Lankan culture consists of various cultural events all over the year. "Perahera" is such an event. Devinuwara village is primarily famous because of the Vishnu Maha Devalaya. Annually, the Esala Festival is held in Devinuwara. Devinuwara Kavadi dance is a beautiful form of worship that shows religious devotion to the God Vishnu in the Devinuwara Esala Festival. This Study's objectives were to investigate the uniqueness of the "Kavadi" Dance performance in the Devinuwara perahera ceremony and to identify its modern trends. Data was collected through the literature survey and field study for research purposes. "Kavadi" is a term used to describe a ceremonial practice often associated with the Tamil Hindu community, particularly during the festival of Thaipusam. However, due to the integration of Buddhism and Hinduism, the Kavadi Dance was performed in

Buddhist festivals in Sri Lanka. In the Devinuwara Esala festival, the Kavadi Dance was performed. Devinuwara Kavadi dance differs from Katharagama Traditional Kavadi Dance due to the Structure and Materials of Kavadi Koodu, Costumes, Arts, tattoos, and customs. This year (2023), new rules and regulations are implemented for the Kavadi Dance. Such as limiting the participators to one Kavadi group, having a Limited number of instruments, only ten selected Grama niladhari Divisions can join the Kavadi dance, and every participator must fill an application form. Some new trends in the Devinuwara Kavadi Dance emerged due to the new rules and regulations enacted by the Newly appointed Basnayake Nilame. Due to the above rules, the Kavadi Culture in Devinuwara has gradually changed.

Keywords: Devinuwara, Kavadi, Perahera, Trends,

1. Introduction

Sri Lanka consists of various cultural aspects. Different ethnic groups, such as Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Sri Lankan Malays, and Burghers, live here. Each ethnic group has unique Cultural features and unique practices. Buddhism is proclaimed as the State religion of Sri Lanka. It has been given particular advantages in the Sri Lankan constitution, such as the government is bound to protect and develop Buddhism across the nation. As Buddhists, people organised and performed various events over the years. Perahera is a significant religious and cultural event in Sri Lanka. Devinuwara, located three miles south of Matara, historically known as Mātota, along the Nilwala estuary to the south, has a rich history reaching back to ancient times (Sirisunanda, 2009).

At its most magnificent in the 13th-15th centuries, Devinuwara has long been a busy seaport and a famous pilgrimage and religious site. It had been a landmark with its beautiful temple and a gilded copper roof that flashed far into the water, and it had helped those who sailed the great Indian Ocean. The numerous stone pillars with diverse forms and shapes are evidence of this town's beautiful shrines and temples that overlooked the ocean until the latter half of the 16th century. According to legend, Devinuwara was a flourishing city in the time of King Rawana and is connected to the Indian Epic of Ramayana. The 15th-century "*Paravi Sandeshaya*," a poetical work, describes the deity at Devinuwara as a destroyer of Asura. Thus, it can be believed that this same deity is also the "Rama" of the Ramayana (Amazinglanka, 2023).

According to recorded history, the temple and the Devalaya (Shrine) were built by King Dappula I (Dappula-sen) during the 7th century (Mahavamsa, 1967, Chapter 7). Thome de Sousa's Portuguese troops raided this sacred city in 1587, destroying and stealing any riches in the places of worship. However, King Rajasinghe II (1635 – 1687) of the Kandyan Kingdom freed the Matara from the enemy and built a Devale at Devinuwara for the deity Vishnu. It is said in the Rajavali that King Dapulusen II, King Agbo IV, and after him, King Mahaladapano immunised Devinuwara. Prince Vijayabaha ruled in Devinuwara until the 9th Dhamma Parakramabahu was executed. Various kings have also lived here (Sirisunanda, 2009). Devinuwara is recognised as a multi-religious site, and its primary deity was Lord Vishnu. Annually, the Esala festival is held in Devinuwara every July or August. The genesis of the Esala festival of Devinuwara goes back to King Parakramabahu II, who restored the damaged temples during his reign (Amazinglanka, 2023). The Esala Ceremony mainly consisted of "*Kapsituweema*,"

Esala Perahera, *Esala fair*, "*Maha Deva Thowilaya*," and "*Maha Kiri Danaya*." *Devinuwara Esala Perahera* is prominent among *Esala* festivals all around Sri Lanka. There are Seven Processions included in the *Devinuwara Esala perahera*. Processions are held daily in the first six days, known as '*pele perahera*.' After Day Seven, the main procession, the '*Randoli maha perahera*,' is performed. At the beginning of the procession, two drummers walk telling the historical news of *Devinuwara*, followed by a person carrying an Oil Lamp. After that, other dancing items are performed (Amazinglanka, 2023). *Kavadi* Dance performances exist in *Devinuwara Perahera* culture. *Kavadi* dance can be identified as a Cultural feature of *Devinuwara*. It is an Intangible heritage to *Devinuwara*. *Kavadi* dance is a beautiful form of worship used to show religious devotion; however, before *Kavadi*, dance could be seen in *Randoli perahera*. Time by time, new cultural trends are emerging, and existing cultures are dynamically changing. As a Cultural feature, *Kavadi* Dance Performance is also highly affected by modern trends and dynamics. Due to that, *Kavadi* dance performances are dynamically changed. This Study is based on the Historical and Sociological approach to *Kavadi* Dance performance and its Modern Trends. This research focuses on the following main research objectives.

1. To observe the historical and sociological approaches of *Kavadi* Dance performance.
2. To investigate the uniqueness of the "*Kavadi*" Dance performance in the *Devinuwara perahera* ceremony and to identify its modern trends and dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Heritage pertains to the cultural, historical, and natural assets that are inherited from preceding generations and are regarded as priceless and significant to a specific community or society. It encompasses a diverse array of concrete and abstract components that Mold our sense of self, safeguard our customs, and establish a linkage to our origins. The tangible aspect of heritage denotes those elements that can be physically perceived and experienced through the sense of touch, while the intangible facet encompasses those elements that are abstract and cannot be physically grasped. This intangible heritage is predominantly rooted in the knowledge systems and belief systems that have been passed down from generation to generation. An example of such intangible heritage can be found in the realm of dance, which serves as a means of expression and communication transcending geographical boundaries and serving as a universal concept that is not limited to any particular country or nation. Numerous scholars and researchers have dedicated their efforts to studying and examining the various aspects and dimensions of dance

as an intangible heritage, shedding light on its significance and impact on societies and cultures worldwide. The article by César Naranjo in 2023 explores the concept of the intangible in relation to the cultural heritage of dance. He examines two perspectives on the intangible: one from the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the other from the sociological discourse on movement. He argues that the intangible is not only an intellectual or linguistic phenomenon, but also a performativity and material one, as it is embodied in the practices, expressions, and skills of dance. He discusses the implications of this understanding for the recording, safeguarding, transmission, and valuation of dance heritage. He proposes a research perspective that considers the situational and processual aspects of dance, as well as the interplay of tangible and intangible elements. He illustrates his approach with examples of dance practices and situations from different cultural contexts. The paper named "The Tangible and Intangible: Dance and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" by Jane Carr in 2023 explores the meanings and definitions of the term 'cultural heritage' as it may be applied to dance, in the context of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The author, Jane Carr, examines the debates and challenges that arise from the dualist privileging of mind over body, which shapes the language and implementation of the policies intended to sustain both dance and intangible cultural heritage. The author draws on her experiences as a dancer, dance teacher, and researcher, and reflects on a project that involved researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to explore approaches to safeguarding Creole intangible cultural heritage. The author argues that for both dance and intangible cultural heritage, it is important to support the activities and interactions that facilitate the continuation of practices and to recognize the necessity of those debates that interrogate the changes in those practices. Chapter from the book "Dance Practices as Research: Approaches to the Safeguarding and Transmission of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Dance", by Jasur Eshmo'minov in 2023 explores the potential of the 'intangible materiality' of dance practice as a new perspective of research. The author, Jasur Eshmo'minov, discusses the concept and roles of the guardians of dance-related intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which is a form of living culture that is taught by personal example as well as oral instruction. The author analyses the current situation and challenges of the protection and inheritance of dance-related ICH and proposes a safeguarding mechanism of multi-guardian cooperation, which involves the participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, such as inheritors, communities, governments, researchers, and media. The author argues that this mechanism can help promote the vitality and development of dance-related ICH in the context of globalization.

Dancing, an ethereal legacy that transcends borders, is an intangible manifestation of cultural heritage inherent to every nation. The rich tapestry of dancing heritage is interwoven with a myriad of traditions that have been passed down through generations. One such tradition that exemplifies the profound significance of dancing heritage is the Kavadi dance. This captivating dance form, deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of its origin, has piqued the curiosity of numerous scholars and researchers who have undertaken extensive studies to unravel its intricacies and unravel its historical significance. The Kavadi Dance Tradition, with its mesmerizing movements and symbolic gestures, has garnered considerable attention and analysis from the academic community, leading to a plethora of profound observations and insightful findings. These scholarly endeavours have shed light on the diverse facets of this tradition, ranging from its historical origins to its social and cultural implications, offering a comprehensive understanding of the Kavadi dance tradition and its indelible impact on the cultural heritage of the region. Schechner, R. (2001) observed the Artistic Elements of the Dance. According to him, The Kavadi dance is a religious practice and an art form. It combines intricate footwork, traditional music, and elaborate costumes, contributing to its aesthetic appeal. Narayanan, V. (2015) observed Cultural Preservation and Transmission. According to him, Various cultural organisations and temples have played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the tradition of Kavadi dance from one generation to the next. Jayasekera, R. (2019) observed the Modern Trends and Adaptations of Kavadi Dance. According to him, the Kavadi dance has seen modern adaptations in recent years, with contemporary choreography and the incorporation of new technologies in performances. Blackburn, A. (1998) observed the Social and Cultural Impact of the Kavadi dance. According to him, The Kavadi dance has been pivotal in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural understanding in Sri Lanka, transcending religious boundaries.

The Kavadi dance in the Devinuwara *Perahera* Ceremony has its historical roots, which serve as the basis for this vibrant cultural and religious expression. The dance is deeply embedded in its cultural and religious context, giving it a strong foundation and significance. Many scholars and researchers have dedicated their efforts to studying this unique event, offering various insights and observations that shed light on its cultural and religious value. The intricacies and symbolism of the Kavadi dance have been analysed and documented, providing a comprehensive understanding of this cherished tradition. The historical origins of the Kavadi dance in the Devinuwara *Perahera* Ceremony are essential in comprehending the depth and richness of this cultural phenomenon. Seneviratne, H. L. (1999) observed the Historical Significance of the Kavadi Dance. According to him, The Kavadi dance holds significant historical importance in Sri Lanka, particularly in the Devinuwara

Perahera Ceremony. Its roots are deeply connected to the Hindu traditions in the region. Obeyesekere, G. (1984) observed the Religious and Ritualistic Elements in the Sri Lankan Context. According to him, The Kavadi dance is a vital component of the Devinuwara *Perahera*, symbolising devotion to Lord Vishnu. It involves intense rituals, including carrying Kavadi structures as acts of penance. Lekamnamage, W. (2017) provides the Socio-cultural importance of the Devinuwara Village and the importance of the Devinuwara *Esala* Festival. It also discussed the Karava Caste people's contribution to the Devinuwara *Esala* Festival. This source revealed that most Karava caste people engaged in Kavadi Dance performances. It finally mentioned that the Devinuwara *Esala* festival could be identified as a cultural event contributing to established equality.

However, no in-depth analysis is made targeting the uniqueness of the "Kavadi" Dance Performance in the Devinuwara *Perahera* Ceremony and its Modern Trends. Due to that, this research fills that research gap. This is the uniqueness of this research.

3. Materials and methods

The present study employed a qualitative research methodology. In accordance with this approach, the data was procured through an extensive review of literature and an in-depth investigation in the field. Within the literature survey, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. The primary sources encompassed the Mahavamsa and the official documents containing rules and regulations issued by the office of Devinuwara *Basnayake Nilame*. Meanwhile, research papers, books, and online resources served as secondary sources of information. In the field study, in-depth interviews and participation observation were conducted. To ensure the accuracy of the data, one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with 50 individuals, incorporating open-ended questions and cross-cutting questions for further clarification. The interview sample for the study was purposefully chosen, adhering to the purposive sampling method. Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling from the Devinuwara area and who engaged with Kavadi Dance Performance. This approach is anticipated to yield fresh, reliable, and comprehensive data.

A field study was conducted on areas that belong to the Devinuwara divisional secretariat (DS Code: - 3245). A significant number of individuals hailing from various regions within the Southern province partake in the Kavadi dance performance during the Devinuwara *Perahera*. Nevertheless, the sample of interviews was specifically chosen from the Devinuwara vicinity in order to procure abundant and dependable information, as this area is directly linked to *perahara* activities. Furthermore, the annual Devinuwara *Perahara*, which is celebrated in the

Devinuwara region of the southern provinces, observes a higher rate of participation in the Kavadi dance compared to other regions within the southern provinces. Consequently, it is anticipated that a substantial amount of information can be derived through the selection of a highly responsive geographical area with the primary research approach. The utilization of suitable research methodologies is of utmost importance in order to obtain comprehensive and ample data on a precise research theme. In this context, one researcher opted for a direct participatory methodology to explore the designated theme. This approach entailed active involvement and engagement with the participants, thereby allowing the researcher to gather profound insights and foster a nuanced comprehension of the subject matter.

The selection of the subsequent key stakeholders was made in order to carry out comprehensive interviews that are consistent with the primary research goals.

Table 3.1

Groups Represented in Interviews

Group	Number of Individuals
Kavadi Dance Group owners	10
Kavadi Music band owners	5
Kavadi Dancers	35
Total	50

Throughout the interview sessions, a voice recording device was employed to document the responses, while the interviewer concurrently jotted down notes on paper to document any supplementary information. At the end of the interviews, all received details were carefully categorized and analysed under the thematic content analysis method. During the data analysis process, details that were unrelated to the research objectives were omitted, and only the most pertinent data was included in the final analysis. By comparing and contrasting the data gathered from various sources, plausible conclusions were drawn.

3.1. Field Location (Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat)



Note. Resource profile, 2021, Map of G.N. Divisions in Devinuwara Divisional Secretariat, Map, Captured on Resource profile-2021.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Legends related to Devinuwara

Vijaya, the North Indian Prince Regent, and his seven hundred subjects were blessed by the deity Upulvan upon their arrival in Sri Lanka in 543 BC (Mahavamsa, 1967, Chapter 7). The God Upulvan emerged for the second time in the 7th and 8th centuries, and his name reappeared as the god par excellence in the 13th and 14th centuries after a long absence. Though the God Upulvan is named the protector deity of Sri Lanka, the first mention of Upulvan worship dates back to the 13th century (Mahavamsa, 1967, Chapter 7).

Kotte era poem "*Parakumba Siritha*" describes how the God Upulvan transformed a "*kihiri*" tree log and sailed it to the sea beach of Devinuwara kingdom in southern Sri Lanka (Amazinglanka, 2023). The reigning king, King Dappula I (661-664), had a dream regarding the arrival of this transfigured "*kihiri*" wood the night before the incident. As a result, the king and his subjects raced to the beach to retrieve the "*kihiri*" log. They carved the God's figure from the "*kihiri*" timber and took it to be enshrined ceremonially. According to the poem, the wood of the stated "*kihiri*" log was also employed as a medicine to heal numerous maladies. The name of the wife of God Upulvan is "*Sandavan Biso*," according to the "*Paravi Sandesaya*" authored by Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera in the 15th century, and they have a son named "Dhanu," also known as "Janak." Local deities like Upulvan, Katharagama, Saman, and Vibhisana came to be worshipped as island protectors throughout the medieval period. The first reference to Sri Lanka's guardian deities is found in a 14th-century inscription by King Buvanekabahu IV. During the same century, Nissanka Alagakkonara built the Kotte castle and four shrines for the guardian deities. The most popular of these guardian gods appears to have been Upulvan, whose primary temple was located in Matara at Devinuwara. Devinuwara Devala *Sannasa* speaks about land dedicated to the temple by Sri Lanka's ancient kings. In Kegalle District, King Parakkramabahu IV built a second temple for the God Upulvan in Aluthnuwara, Satara Korale. Evidence suggests that land and other gifts were made to this temple until the early 17th century (Sirisunanda, 2009).

4.2. Devinuwara Esala perahera

The Devinuwara Perahera is the oldest Pooja Perahera in Sri Lanka. The first procession was held in the month of Esala in 612 AD. That is to say, the beginning of this procession goes back to 1258 AD. King Panditha Parakramabahu the Great, who ascended the throne at Dambadeniya, started the Esala Perahera to prove his vow to the god Upulvan of Devinuwara to save his country from the Javanese king Chandrabhanu. History also states that he had his son-in-law, Prince Weerabahu, start an educational institution called "Nandana." The Devinuwara *Esala Perahera* is based on the God Sri Vishnu Uthpalavanna concept. Due to the immense devotion and reverence for Lord Vishnu, the *Deva Pooja Perahera* is held in the month of "*Esala*" (July) or "*Nikini*" (August) (Sirisunanda, 2009).

This is a Deva Pooja not only for Devinuwara but for Southern Sri Lanka. The best proof is that on the eve of the Poya day, when the Deva Perahera begins, every house in South Sri Lanka is cleaned of dung, and a lamp post is lit in a holy place to prepare for the Devinuwara Deva Ceremony. It is also believed that the stalks from Kataragama for the Devinuwara *Esala Perahera* were made for all purposes. Esala Poya: The people of Ruhuna call it the Holy Poya. Before this Holy Poya, the

people of the villages east of the Benthara River lit lanterns for the sake of the Buddha, who gave light to the world and for the protection of God (Weerasuriya, 1949).

The Devinuwara *perahera* ceremony includes numerous rituals, beginning and ending with the Kap-planting and "*Maha Kiri Danaya*" ceremonies. After the Kap-planting Ceremony, The Devinuwara *Esala* Festival began. There are Seven Processions included in the Devinuwara *Esala perahera*. Processions are held daily in the first six days, known as '*pele perahera*.' After Day Seven, the main procession, the '*Randoli maha perahera*,' is performed. At the beginning of the procession, two drummers walk telling the historical news of Devinuwara, followed by a person carrying an Oil Lamp. The main reason for carrying the oil lamp was that the *Esala Perahera* was held at night, but due to economic problems and various reasons, the present *Esala Perahera* Travels during the Daylight.

Before the traditional *perahera* begins, the organizers of the *perahera* start the entire service on both sides of the road. Next, the survey team travels, followed by the flag procession. These flags are a tribute to King Sri Parakramabahu. The Sun and Moon flags carried out in procession are said to reflect the Sun and Moon dynasties (Weerasuriya, 1949). Next up, the drums and heavy Hewitt trumpets march, followed by the traditional dance troupe. After the traditional dance troupes, the people in charge of the *Devalaya* and their cadre will be in the procession. "*Basnayake Nilame*" in the procession, followed by four "*Arachchilas*" on both sides. Afterwards, the Chief Priest in *Vishnu Devalaya* joins the procession, and after that, the priests in charge of the seven *Devala* sing hymns and play instruments. Today, the *Esala Perahera* is further enhanced by the influx of elephants from various parts of the country.

4.3. Emergence of Universal Concept of Kavadi Dance

When considering the origin of Kavadi performance, "Kavadi" is a term used to describe a ceremonial practice often associated with the Tamil Hindu community, particularly during the festival of Thaipusam. Thaipusam is a Hindu festival celebrated in honour of Lord Murugan, the Hindu god of war and victory.

During the Thaipusam festival, devotees participating in the Kavadi ceremony carry out acts of devotion and penance. The Kavadi refers to a large, ornate structure usually carried on the shoulders of the devotee. The structure is often decorated with flowers, peacock feathers, and other embellishments. Carrying the Kavadi is seen as a physical burden that symbolises the devotee's willingness to sacrifice for their faith and seek blessings or favours from the deity. Devotees participating in the Kavadi procession often go through a preparation period, including fasting,

prayer, and spiritual cleansing. On the festival day, they may pierce their bodies with hooks, skewers, and other small items as an additional act of devotion and sacrifice. This practice is believed to help them enter a trance-like state and transcend the physical pain. On the day of Thaipusam, the Kavadi bearers, often in a trance-like state, carry their Kavadi and dance to the rhythm of traditional music. The dance is a form of thanksgiving to Lord Murugan for blessings received or to seek his blessings for various purposes, including healing, personal intentions, or gratitude. During the procession, devotees may sing devotional songs, chant mantras, and offer prayers to Lord Murugan. The atmosphere is filled with spiritual fervour and devotion.

Thaipusam is a personal act of devotion and a community event where friends and family often support and accompany the Kavadi bearers. The entire community comes together to celebrate and participate in the festival. After the procession, the Kavadi bearers reach the temple dedicated to Lord Murugan, where they perform certain rituals to conclude their acts of devotion. The piercings are typically removed, and offerings are made to the deity.

The Kavadi dance is a visually captivating and spiritually significant practice that demonstrates the deep faith and devotion of the participants. It is also a cultural and religious tradition passed down through generations.

4.4. Kavadi dance in the Devinuwara Perahera and its Uniqueness

Deva Perahera is one of the primary functions of the Devinuwara *Esala* Ceremony held in July or August for Lord Vishnu. This perahera travelled for seven days, and the perahera that travels in the first six days is known as "*Peli Perahera*." The last *perahera* is "*Randoli Perahera*" or "*Mahaperahera*." After the "*Kapsituweema*" festival, the first procession of the Devinuwara *Perahera* festival occurs. Then, on the sixth Day, the 6th "*Peli Perahera*" day, Kavadi groups performed their dances.

There are several Kavadi Dance groups in the Devinuwara area. Each Kavadi group has a leading organiser, and he organises and manages everything in the Kavadi dance group, including participants and the Kavadi Music band group. The Kavadi music band group is essential to the Kavadi Dance group. The Kavadi Music band group provide the Music for Kavadi Dancers. That Music is called "*Papare*". The organiser of the Kavadi group takes Rs.20000-25000 from the participants for the Kavadi dance. On the 6th *Peli perahera* day, the Kavadi groups line up on the Road behind the Sri Vishnu *Maha Devalaya*, known as "*Sinhasana Road*", and prepare for the dance. Kavadi groups queue up according to the number they have received. When their turn comes, the respective Kavadi group joins the procession. There, they worship the Vishnu Maha Devale and join the procession. Then, the Kavadi

band starts playing music, and the Kavadi dancers dance accordingly. It was observed that every Kavadi troupe, regardless of age, from small children to older people, engaged in Kavadi dance (see Figure 2).

The procession started from the back gate of Devinuwara temple (this place is known as "*Hadagala*"). It joined the Matara Tangalle main road in a clockwise direction. After that, perahera turned from Devinuwara Main Clock Tower Junction and went along the lighthouse road to the place known as "Sinhasana Kovil." At that place, all the members of the Kavadi group worshipped Kovila. Then came along the path called "Sinhasana Road" and reached the Sri Vishnu Maha Devala shrine. Then, once all the Kavadi groups move around the Sri Vishnu Maha Devalaya and finish their dance. During this Kavadi dance, the researcher could observe several things. It was revealed that the participants of the Kavadi dance are very pious; they dance to pay their respects to Lord Vishnu, and despite what the outside viewers say, the Kavadi dancers do not use alcohol during the Kavadi dance; they drink soft drinks to relieve their fatigue. Thus, it could be concluded that the villagers of Devinuwara accept the Kavadi dance as a significant and unique thing. Accordingly, it became clear that the Kavadi dance is the most unique and popular feature of the Perahera, one of the main parts of the Devinuwara *Esala* festival.

There are a lot of Kavadi Dance performances in various parts of Sri Lanka, including Katharagama, Seenigama, Tangalle, Beliatta, Kudawella, Ambalangoda, Gandara, Trincomalee and Jaffna. However, Katharagama Kavadi has been identified as a traditional Kavadi Performance in the Sri Lankan Society. Katharagama Kavadi is directly inherited from Hindus from India. Accordingly, the comparison will be between Katharagama Kavadi's performance and Devinuwara Kavadi's performance to identify the uniqueness of Devinuwara Kavadi's Performance.

The Katharagama Kavadi is a form of religious observance and penance associated with the Katharagama Devalaya in Sri Lanka. This Devalaya is dedicated to the Hindu deity Lord Murugan, who is revered as Kataragama *Deviyo* or God Kataragama in Sri Lankan Hinduism. The practice of the Katharagama Kavadi is a significant part of the rituals and festivities at this temple. The Kavadi, in the context of Katharagama, refers to a decorated portable shrine or structure that devotees carry on their shoulders as an act of devotion and penance. The Katharagama Kavadi is often adorned with peacock feathers, flowers, and other ornate decorations. It serves as a symbol of the devotee's commitment to Lord Katharagama.

Figure 1

Katharagama Kavadi



Note. www.airforce.lk, 2022, Katharagama Kavadi, photographs, <https://www.airforce.lk/news.php?news=5558>

Figure 2

Devinuwara Kavadi



Note. Eranda Johan, 2019, Devinuwara Kavadi, photographs, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=CjJGnl_sKjQ

Here, can be identify the difference between Katharagama Kavadi and Devinuwra Kavadi. While Katharagama Kavadi was brought on the shoulders, Devinuwara Kavadi was Brought on the head. Also, the structure and materials that built the Kavadi of Katharagama and Devinuwara differed. Colourful lights are used to decorate the Devinuwara Kavadi. Meanwhile, Katharagama Kavadi is decorated

using Peacock Feathers. That is the significant uniqueness of the Devinuwara Kavadi.

Figure 3

Costumes of the Katharagama Kavadi



Note. Discover, 2023, Costumes of the Katharagama Kavadi, photographs, <https://www.discover.lk/destinations/hambantota/kataragama/>

Figure 4

Costumes of the Devinuwara Kavadi



Note. Devinuwarasilanka, 2022, Costumes of the Devinuwara Kavadi, photographs, <https://www.devinuwarasilanka.com/hayawana-peli-perahera/#>

Figure 5

Costumes of the Devinuwara Kavadi



Note. Devinuwarasilanka, 2022, Costumes of the Devinuwara Kavadi, photographs, <https://www.devinuwarasilanka.com/hayawana-peli-perahera/#>

Here, can be identified the difference between Katharagama Kavadi's Costumes and Devinuwra Kavadi's. Katharagama Kavadi's Costume is mainly related to red colour. Meanwhile, Devinuwara Kavadi's Costume is related to Blue and White. The reason is that Lord Katharagama indicates red, and Lord Vishnu indicates Blue. Although Devinuwara Kavadi sarongs are painted Blue and White, there are Unique drawings (tattoos or Art) in the sarongs. This drawing differs from each Kavadi group. This aims to demonstrate the group's identity through that Art. In Figure 5, see one of Devinuwara Kavadi's group, and here can identify that this Kavadi group sarong's drawing differs from the Kavadi group sarong, which can be seen in Figure 4. That is also one of the uniqueness of the Devinuwara Kavadi.

Another feature that can be seen in Katharagama Kavadi is the majority of Tamil people engaged in Katharagama Kavadi Dance performance. However, in Devinuwara Kavadi, all people engaged in Kavadi dance performances are Buddhists. That is also another uniqueness of the Devinuwara Kavadi.

Before the 6th *peli perahara* day, Devinuwara Kavadi Dancers perform " *Madubaseema*", a traditional function celebrated by villagers. This tradition is unique to Devinuwara and cannot be seen in Katharagama or any other area.

Figure 6

Tattoos and arts of Kavadi dancers in Devinuwara



Note. Devinuwarasilanka, 2022, Tattoos and arts of Kavadi dancers in Devinuwara, photographs, <https://www.devinuwarasilanka.com/hayawana-peli-perahera/#>

Figure 7

Kavadi tattoo drawn on researcher's dorsal



Note. Captured by author, 2022, Kavadi tattoo drawn on researcher's dorsal, photographs.

Here, Devinuwara Kavadi dancers draw Unique art styles on their dorsal. As seen in Figure 6 and Figure 7, this art or tattoo differs for each Kavadi group. Each Kavadi group has a unique tattoo and art. The group's identity is revealed through that painting. The colour spray is used for that. However, this feature cannot be identified in the Katharagama Kavadi Dancers. So, Devinuwara Kavadi is different from the traditional Kavadi in Katharagama.

Katharagama Kavadi was mainly offered to the God Katharagama. Devinuwara Kavadi was mainly offered to the God Vishnu. According to the above findings, it is arguable that. Devinuwara Kavadi is different from traditional Katharagama Kavadi. Those differences can be considered as the uniqueness of the Devinuwara Kavadi.

4.6. Modern trends and dynamics related to Kavadi Dance Performance in Devinuwara

It was discussed above how unique the Kavadi dance is to the Devinuwara Perahera. Can be concluded that the Kavadi dance is a prominent cultural element in the Devinuwara area. However, from time to time, new trends and dynamics are inevitably emerging for any sector of society. As such, the Kavadi Dance of Devinuwara also shapes according to the new trends and dynamics.

"About ten years ago, the Kavadi groups danced in the 6th "Peli Perahera," and the last Randoli Perahera, but Basnayake Nilame, who was appointed at that time, brought a rule that the Kavadi groups should only perform in the 6th "Peli Perahera." Therefore, that rule continues to this Day. So, Still, Kavadi groups perform only in the 6th "Peli Perahera." (Key informant, 2023).

Thus, it appears that in the past, the Kavadi dances, which used to be performed on two days of this *Perahera* festival, are now limited to only one Day. Accordingly, a long-standing tradition appears to have changed in the twenty-first century. It was revealed in the interviews that some Kavadi dancers drank alcohol while they were dancing in the Kavadi. In *Randoli Perahera*, Lord Buddha's relics are brought by Elephant. *Randoli Perahera* can be impure Due to drunk Kavadi Dancers. Because of that, *Basnayake Nilame* enacted a rule prohibiting Kavadi from *Randoli Perahera*.

"About ten years ago, Kavadi dancers could wear different coloured sarongs, but after that, Kavadi dancers can only wear white mixed Blue sarongs. It was a rule introduced by the Appointed Basnayake Nilame at that time. However, that rule is still continuous by Kavadi dance groups" (Key informant, 2023).

Thus, it appears that the main dress used for Kavadi dances is the sarong; in the past, the sarongs could be worn in different colours, but now it is legal that Kavadi dancers must wear only blue mixed white sarongs. Thus, it shows that there has been a change in the costumes used for the Kavadi dance. It was revealed in the interviews that white colour shows purity and blue colour indicates the Lord Vishnu.

"The Kavadi group that I danced with, the boys working in the banks, also danced. Moreover, some people who danced were not from the Karava caste. Even people belonging to govigama or other castes were involved in Kavadi dance". (Key informant, 2023).

Thus, it appears that people related to fishing and other jobs are involved in this Kavadi dance. Lekammamage, W. (2017) revealed that most Karava caste people engaged in Kavadi Dance performances in Devinuwara. The Karava Caste dominance in the Kavadi Dance can be seen in past years. However, other castes also engaged in Devinuwara Kavadi's dance performance in recent years. It led to the decline of the dominance of the Karava caste in the Devinuwara Kavadi dance performance. This can be considered as the modern trend of Devinuwara Kavadi Dance.

Figure 8

A Kavadi Dancer coloured his hair



Note. Devinuwarasilanka, 2022, A Kavadi Dancer coloured his hair, photographs, <https://www.devinuwarasilanka.com/hayawana-peli-perahera/#>

"In the past, they did not colour their hair. Since 2017, everyone has started to colour their hair in different colours. School-age children especially colour their hair like everyone else." (Key informant, 2023).

It was revealed that in interviews in past years, there is no tendency to colour the Kavadi dancers' hair using various colours. That trend came in 2017, according to the interviews. Thus, colouring hair in different colours appears to be a new trend recently. The researcher could observe during the participant observation that many people participating in the Kavadi dance had coloured their hair (see Figure 8). The researcher observed that from a 6-year-old child to an older adult, hair is coloured in this way. It was seen that the hair was coloured in cream, orange, and pink, green, red. Children colour their hair on their parents' advice, so it can be concluded that the parents of those children have also accepted this new trend. Thus, it can be concluded that colouring hair in different colours by those involved in Kavadi dance

has become a new trend in this Kavadi culture. So, this can be considered the modern trend of Devinuwara Kavadi Dance.

"In the past, when people used to go to Kavadi, they followed in "Peveem." Then, people did not eat fish or meat for one or three months. Moreover, many people danced Kavadi to prove their "Baara." Now, all that has changed. Now there will be no "Baara." And many people dance Kavadi for fun." (Key informant, 2023).

According to this statement, it is clear that ancient traditions have changed. In the past, people used to dance Kavadi to prove "*Baara Haara*." However, nowadays, it has been concluded that most people dance Kavadi for fun and others for devotion. Thus, it appears that the reasons associated with Kavadi dance have changed nowadays.

Moreover, during the participant observation, the researcher found that the Kavadi dancers used fireworks and sprays while performing the Kavadi dance at the Perahera. This also cannot be seen in past years and can be considered a new trend.

Accordingly, the Kavadi dance in Devinuwara has several modern trends and dynamics. Such as, Kavadi dances are only limited to 6th *Peli Perahera*, Kavadi Dancers Wearing White and blue mixed sarongs, a decline of the dominance of the Karava caste in Kavadi dance, and the tendency of Mixed caste participation in the Kavadi Dance, Kavadi dancers Coloured their hair using various colours, using fireworks and sprays while engaging Kavadi Dance and, most of the participants who participate for the Kavadi Dance aiming to obtain fun. It was revealed that in the interviews, some people neglected to watch the 6th *Peli Perahera* because of the indiscipline of the Kavadi dancers, and the 6th *Peli Perahera* took too much time to end due to many Kavadi Dances. It was revealed that in the interviews those new trends, such as Kavadi dancers Coloured their hair using various colours, using fireworks and sprays while engaging in Kavadi Dance, most of the participants who participate in the Kavadi Dance aiming to obtain fun caused the decline of Devinuwara Kavadi Culture. Because of that, the newly appointed *Basnayake Nilame* introduced some rules and regulations for the Kavadi Dance event to control the impacts of new trends.

Figure 9

New Rules and Regulations Document for Kavadi Dance Participants



Note. Madhushanka, A.T., 2023, Rules and regulations for Kavadi Dance Participants, photographs, Devinuwara “Basnayaka Nilame” office.

By checking Figure 9 above, one can understand all the changes that have occurred this year regarding the Kavadi dance. No Kavadi team has had a leader and a vice-leader in any of the previous years. There was only one organiser. However, in 2023, the Team leader and Vice Leader must be in every Kavadi Group. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, children and school-age children of each Kavadi group danced. However, it has been mentioned that school-age children cannot perform the Kavadi dance this year (2023). It is a compelling dynamic. People of all ages have used to dance Kavadi since ancient times, and this was the first time that an age limit was imposed. This is a significant amendment to the Kavadi culture.

According to the interviews, approximately two hundred people danced in one Kavadi group in Previous years. Earlier, there was no limit on the number of people who could dance in a Kavadi troupe. However, this year, the maximum number of people who can dance in one Kavadi group is 25. This is also a significant amendment to the previous tradition. Thus, a Kavadi group had to limit the number of people in 2023 due to an unlimited number of people joining Kavadi groups and dancing in the previous year, so it would take more than 12 hours to complete the procession on that day. This was an experience experienced by the one of researchers.

The new amendment also limits the number of musical instruments of the Kavadi team to 15. It was observed that the Kavadi group that the researcher participated in

in 2022 had 25 musical instruments. Accordingly, limiting the number of musical instruments is also a modern dynamic. Moreover, during the participant observation, the researcher found that the Kavadi dancers used fireworks and sprays while performing the Kavadi dance. However, according to the series of laws brought this year (2023), it was found that using those types of fireworks and sprays is no longer possible.

According to the interviews, the people outside the Devinuwara appeared engaged in the Kavadi dance in previous years. There was no hindrance to participating in Kavadi dance in previous years. However, this year (2023), it has been stated that only ten selected *Grama Niladhari* divisions will be allowed to practice Kavadi dance, which has never happened before. Those are, Devinuwara 433C, Devinuwara North 432, Devinuwara South 433, Devinuwara Central 432A, Devinuwara West 433A, Devinuwara East 433B, Nugegoda 433D, Sinhasana Place 433F, Velegoda 433G, Lighthouse Place 433H.

Moreover, in the past, the participants filled out no application form for the Kavadi dance. However, this year (2023), the Kavadi dancers must fill out and submit an application form (see Figure 10). One of the scholars encountered the Devinuwara Divisional Secretary in order to acquire authorization for involvement in the Kavadi Dance 2023. Nevertheless, the Devinuwara Divisional Secretary dismissed the application of the approved scholar and expressed pessimistic remarks regarding Kavadi performers. It revealed that some people have a negative perspective on the Kavadi Dancers.

Figure 10

Application form for Kavadi Dance Participators.

The image shows a Sinhala application form for Kavadi Dance participants. The form is titled 'අයදුම් පත්‍රය' (Application Form) and is addressed to the 'බස්නායක නිලධාරී' (Basnayaka Nilame). It contains several numbered sections for personal details, address, and contact information. There is a circular official stamp on the right side of the form.

Note. Madhushanka, A.T., 2023, Application form for Kavadi Dance Participants, photographs, Devinuwara “*Basnayaka Nilame*” office.

According to the interviews, it was revealed that due to the new trends possessed in Kavadi Culture, undisciplined manners of the Kavadi dancers and the time duration of the 6th *Peli perahera*, which the Kavadi dances were performed, newly appointed *Basnayake Nilame* was motivated to enact new rules and regulations for the Kavadi dance.

5. Conclusion

Sri Lanka is a multi-religious, multicultural, and multinational country. The religion of the majority of people living in Sri Lanka is Buddhism. Many religious festivals related to Buddhism take place throughout the year. In July and August, Esala festivals are held in Buddhist places all over Sri Lanka. Devinuwara is a coastal village located in the southern province. Devinuwara village is famous among Sri Lankans because of Sri Vishnu Maha Devalaya.

Along with other Esala festivals in Sri Lanka, the Esala festival is held annually at the Devinuwara shrine. Gods' Perahera can be mentioned as a prominent part of the Esala festival. This procession will travel the streets for seven days. This procession also consists of standard features that can be seen in other processions and dances belonging to the traditions of the lowlands. However, the most unique aspect of this procession is the Kavadi dance performance. Devinuwara Kavadi dance is performed to show respect for Lord Vishnu. Kavadi dance can be pointed out as a beautiful form of worship used to show religious devotion. The Kavadi dance performed in the Devinuwara area is different from the Kavadi dances performed in other areas and consists of characteristics unique to the Devinuwara area itself. Devinuwara Kavadi dance differs from Katharagama Traditional Kavadi Dance due to the Structure and Materials of Kavadi *Koodu*, Costumes, Arts, tattoos, and customs. Therefore, calling this Kavadi dance a cultural element of Devinuwara is correct. Culture undergoes various dynamics from time to time. From time to time, new trends join the culture. In this way, Kavadi dance continues to undergo various dynamics with time. As a result, the Kavadi dance in Devinuwara has several modern trends and dynamics. Such as, Kavadi dances are only limited to 6th Peli Perahera, Kavadi Dancers Wearing White and blue mixed sarongs, a decline of the dominance of the Karava caste in Kavadi dance, and the tendency of Mixed caste participation in the Kavadi Dance, Kavadi dancers Coloured their hair using various colours, using fireworks and sprays while engaging Kavadi Dance and, most of the participants who participate for the Kavadi Dance aiming to obtain fun. Those new trends, such as Kavadi dancers Coloured their hair using various colours, using fireworks and sprays while engaging in Kavadi Dance and most of the participants who participated in the Kavadi Dance aiming to obtain fun contributed to the decline of Devinuwara Kavadi Culture. However, the Authority of the Devinuwara

Devalaya instituted some rules and regulations for the Kavadi Dance event to mitigate the effects of new trends and protect the traditional Kavadi culture.

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