

ORIGIN OF THE NEW YEAR FESTIVAL IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka gets a multitude of names such as Bakmaha Uḷela (Festival of the month April), Bakmaha Mangula (Ceremony of the month April), Bakmaha Alut Avurudu Maṅgallaya (New Year Ceremony of the month April), Bak Maṅgala (Ceremony of April), Bak Maha Sāṅakeḷiya (Carnival of the month April), Alut Avurudda (The New Year), Avurudu (The Year), Avurudu Uḷela (Festival of the Year), Avurudu mangallaya (Ceremony of the year), Avurudu Utsavaya (Festicval of the Year), Kōṇa gediya, Kōṇa Pidīma, Kōṇa Maṅgallaya, Kōṇa Kāma, Sūrya mangallaya (Festival of the Sun), Heḷayē Bak Mahā Jātika Uḷela (Sri Lanka's National Festival of the month April), and Heḷayē Alut Avurudu Jātika Uḷela (Sri Lanka's National New Year Festival etc. Contemporary New Year Festival falls on 13th and 14th of the month April and have been declared as public holidays. The New Year Festival of Sri Lanka is a folk festival. It belongs to seasonal festivals. In this research paper questions such as when and how the New Year festival in Sri Lanka came to being are discussed. No definite opinion could be gathered out of literary sources as to when and how the New Year festival was originated. Various views on the topic have been put forward by numerous authorities engaged in different fields of studies based on their respective subjects. None of them come to a definite conclusion as to the date of origin of the New Year. It is the library method which is employed as the methodology of this research. Reference to ancient festivals in Sri Lanka, different opinions expressed on the birth of the New Year festival, and foreign reports of the New Year festival of Sri Lanka are being used in this study. The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka has been developed neither as a festival of the Sinhalese nor as that of the Hindus but by an admixture of features of Sinhalese festivals and that of the Hindu New Year Festival. It can be proved by means of accepted factors that the New Year Festival in Sri Lanka has been originated out of the Hindu New Year Festival of Sītāvaka Period (1521-1592).

Key words: New Year Festival, folk festival, national festival, seasonal festivals, Sinhalese

1. INTRODUCTION

The New Year Festival of Sri Lanka is a folk festival. It belongs to seasonal festivals. "Given the universality of festivals, it would seem that people need periodic times of escape from work, times in which they can be joyous together (Smith, 1972; 161). Contemporary New Year Festival falls on 13th and 14th of the month April and has been declared as public holidays. These are the days of rest for Sri Lankans. The contemporary Sri Lankan society deviating from the old tradition of holding folk festivals seems to be making merriment in the course of the period meant for the holiday.

The Indian tradition is blessed with many social and religious festivals and occasions and participation in them is a form of leisure. In fact the timings of the festivals and occasions tell us about the rhythm of agriculture activities that used to prevail. The festivals and occasions to a large extent coincided with post-harvest or provided relief from the monotony of the lean seasons. Economy and time are so closely linked with leisure in most societies, and this is also, borne out by history which tells us that the same relationship is extended in the case of hunter-gatherer communities (Bhattacharya,2006;84).

The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka gets a multitude of names such as Bakmaha Uḷela (Festival of the month April), Bakmaha Mangula (Ceremony of the month April), Bakmaha Alut Avurudu Maṅgallaya (New Year Ceremony of the month April), Bak Maṅgala (Ceremony of April), Bak Maha Sāṅakeḷiya (Carnival of the month April), Alut Avurudda (The New Year), Avurudu (The Year), Avurudu Uḷela (Festival of the Year), Avurudu mangallaya (Ceremony of the year), Avurudu Utsavaya (Festicval of the Year), Kōṇa gediya, Kōṇa Pidīma, Kōṇa Maṅgallaya, Kōṇa Kāma, Sūrya mangallaya (Festival of the Sun), Heḷayē Bak Mahā Jātika Uḷela (Sri Lanka's National Festival of the month April), and Heḷayē Alut Avurudu

Jātika Uḷela (Sri Lanka's National New Year Festival etc. In all these names three chief terms keep on occurring. Avurudda (year), Kōṇama and Bakmaha (the month April) the three terms need further study. An investigation into the evolution of the Sinhala language points out that it is an accepted opinion that the term "Avurudda" is derived from Tamil, Sanskrit and Pali, Sanvacchara>havajara>havuruju> avurudu>avurudda. "Even today we have in folk usage "dolos māsekāṭa yana davasa" (the day of transit to twelve months). Even this reference confirms that the term "avurudu" denotes "vesesi davasa" (special day)" (Ahubudu, 2008: 26).

The term "Avurudda" is solely native to Sinhala. Some scholars think that we may have got it as a result of our ancestors who had relations with Babylonians some hundreds and hundreds of years ago. "Avur" was how the Babylonians used to call the sun. It has been pointed out by scholars that by adding to the Babylonian root "avur" the Sinhala "idda" means "standing upright" or "fixing upright" "Avur+idda= avurudda we get the word. In Sri Lanka the sun is indeed overhead concurrent with the occurrence of the New Year and as such there seems to be some justification in the above assertion (Pieris, 2008: 81).

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary- defines New Year; as "the beginning of the year, New Year's Day January" (Oxford advanced learner's Dictionary, 2010:1029).

The term "Kōṇa" also has been identified as synonymous with the Sinhala "avurudda". "Kōṇa means the avurudda (the year). "The avurudda" is also known as "the Kōṇa pidīma" (offering of Kōṇa), "the Kōṇa maṅgallaya" (Kōṇa ceremony) and "the Kōṇa Kāma" (mastication of Kōṇa) (*Rajapaksha*, 2013: 52).

According to the Sinhala system of months of the year "Bak" is the month April according to that of the Europeans. The New Year falls in the month April. It can be safely concluded that it is known as "the Bak Maha Uḷela" to indicate that the festival in question is held in the month Bak (April). Commemoration of the New Year is performed on 13th and 14th of April. These two days are public holidays. Arious customs and formalities native to specific localities associated with the New Year are in use. Majority of people however, celebrate the festival according to the list of auspicious hours or the New Year Calendar prepared and recommended by the authoritative astrologers. According to the Avurudu Sīttuwa (New Year Calendar) (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) the structural plan of the New Year customs based on the auspicious hours is as follows:-

01. Observation of the new moon
02. Taking the bath for the old year
03. Commencement of the New Year
04. Performance of religious activities
05. Cooking the New Year meal
06. Commencement of work
07. Taking the New Year meal
08. New Year transactions
09. Application of oil on head
10. Reporting to work after New Year

The list of auspicious hours (or the New Year Calendar) recommends a definite time for the performance of all these activities which includes even the appropriate colour of the New Year dress to be worn and the direction at which the performer should look at before departure. The extent to which the performance of these activities vary from place to place according to the acceptance of the particular locality.

In this research paper questions such as when and how the New Year festival in Sri Lanka came to being are discussed. No definite opinion could be gathered out of literary sources as to when and how the New Year festival was originated. Various views on the topic have been put forward by numerous authorities

engaged in different fields of studies based on their respective subjects. None of them come to a definite conclusion as to the date of origin of the New Year.

Even the usage “Bak Maha Ulela” does not go back to a distant past in the history of Sri Lanka. No authoritative information about holding of New Year Festivals in periods such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa is available. No history pertaining to such issue can be uncovered even out of ancient Sinhala prose and poetry. No news about such a festival come even from Kotte Period which is treated as the golden era of the message poems (Dhammaloka, 2008: 49).

Very many researchers present their opinions on the topic; it was with the use of the “Sūrya Māsa kramaya” the system of months based on the sun that the birth of the New Year festival occurred in Sri Lanka (Seneviratne, 1990), commencement of the New Year Festival has its origin in consequence of the chronology of the pāraṇi vasanta utsava (the Ancient summer festivals, the nākāt keli (Festivals based on auspicious times) and the sūrya utsava (the solar festivals) (Vitharaṇa, 2011, Kumara, 2006), Alavattage, 2010), the New Year Festival sprang up as a result of the commemoration of the fertility of the harvest of paddy (Gamlath, 2006), Seneviratne, 1990), Vitharaṇa, 1984).

The Sinhalese have been celebrating the Nākāt Keli (Festivals based on auspicious times) from time immemorial. It was on a day of the Nākāt keli that king Devānampiyatissa encountered the Great Thera Mahinda. Similarly summer festivals also have been celebrated. Again it was while he was celebrating the summer festival that king Sirimevan got the news about the advent of the Tooth relic. The Sinhalese taking the first day of the year based on the Shaka calendar from India and connecting it with the summer festival they have already been celebrating fashioned it into a Nākāt keli. It is for this reason that the Sinhalese New Year can be treated as a festival of their own. At present nowhere else in India the very first day of the Saka year is celebrated like it is being done in Sri Lanka by the Sinhalese. In India during the period in question no New Year festival is held. Tamils in Sri Lanka do not commemorate New Year during this period. Even if some of them perform customs and formalities of any kind it is in consequence of what they got from the Sinhalese rather than due to an influence of Tamilnadu (de silva, 2008; 39).

It can be conjectured that Saka varsha kramaya (Saka calendar) based on the Sūrya varsha Kramaya (solar calendar) might have become popular during the Kotte Period. What we call the Sinhalese – Hindu New Year today (1990) has been devised on the basis of the Sūrya Māsa Kramaya (system of the solar month). As it is also a system that had been in use in South India, a part of Hindu tradition also has been added to the Sinhalese tradition. It should be, ipso facto, named as the Sinhalese Dravidian year. It is for this reason that I say that the Sinhalese New Year does not go back to more than five hundred years (Seneviratne 1990; 8).

No opinion containing any definite date of the origin of the New Year festival can be found out. If the birth of the New Year festival can be found out it will be of immense cultural value because it is one of the most leading folk festivals in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the chief aim of this study is to find out the origin and its date of the New Year festival by means of an analysis of all the available opinions on it.

It is the library method which is employed as the methodology of this research. Reference to ancient festivals in Sri Lanka, different opinions expressed on the birth of the New Year festival, and foreign reports of the New Year festival of Sri Lanka are being used in this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Reckoning of Time in ancient Sri Lanka and the Origin of the New Year Festival

The Sinhalese New Year Festival is not a festivity with a history as of great antiquity as that of the Sinhalese race. In accordance with information furnished by our chronicles no festival that can be identified as the Sinhalese New Year existed in the ancient Sri Lanka. As seen in our ancient works, the festivals held in the national form in the distant past included, in particular, “the Jeṭṭhamūla Nākāt keliya” (The Jetthamula

Festival of auspicious Time), “the Girigga Samajjaya”, “The Vesak utsavaya” (The Vesak Festival) and “the Āsala utsavaya” (The Āsala Festival). All the festivals referred to above were celebrated in accordance with the system based on the Lunar month of the Sinhalese calendar. What is evident from the above is that the method of reckoning time adopted by the ancient Sinhalese was based on the natural phenomena called the moonrise and the moonset. Our ancient Sinhalese system of months was reckoned in that manner (Seneviratne, 1990, 06).

There are two major currents that emerge out of the above reference with regard to the birth of the New Year. Accordingly it will be important to discuss the two issues, i.e. the use of the lunar calendar in Sri Lanka and the fundamental features of the New Year Festival found in the ancient literature.

In many a country in the world time was reckoned in keeping with the movement of the sun. It had been already calculated that the earth took 365 days to revolve around the sun. To put the same case in a different way the New Year in the opinion of the Easterner was the day when the sun leaving the sign-house-(constellation) Pisces after taking of course 365 days and passing 12 signs finally enters the sign-house-(Constellation) Aries. Those who measured the time on the basis of the Sinhalese calendar of which months are calculated according to the movement of the moon found out that it was only 354 days. To complete a lunar month it is necessary for the moon to pass 27 “Nakshatra yogas” (sidereal practices) –yokings of stars-. That was why the ancients treated the sun and the moon as the gods because it was they who helped man reckon time (Seneviratne, 2003: 471).

Since the distant past the movement of the sun and the moon has been used to reckon time. An investigation into the birth of the New Year needs to be carried out paying attention to the Sri Lankan’s way of measuring time.

Years in the ancient inscriptions of Sri Lanka have been indicated by calculating ensuing number of years from the date of coronation of the king. The very first inscription which contains the date of the Buddhist era comes from the reign of king Upatissa, the son of king Buddhadasa. This inscription belongs to the 4th Century AD. We come across an inscription giving the date according to the lunar calendar in the reign of Sāhasmalla in the 12th Century AD. The Sinhalese got the practice of calculating date according to lunar month from North India. The system of saka varsha (Saka year) came to being in 78 AD. The inscription of Gadaladeniya, however, induces us to think that the above system came to be used in Sri Lanka somewhere in the 14th Century. It can be conjectured that Saka varsha kramaya (Saka calendar) based on the Sūrya varsha Kramaya (solar calendar) might have become popular during the Kotte Period. What we call the Sinhalese – Hindu New Year today (1990) has been devised on the basis of the Sūrya Māsa Kramaya (system of the solar month). As it is also a system that had been in use in South India, a part of Hindu tradition also has been added to the Sinhalese tradition. It should be, ipso facto, named as the Sinhalese Dravidian year. It is for this reason that I say that the Sinhalese New Year does not go back to more than five hundred years (Seneviratne 1990; 8).

Through an examination of varied festivals based on historical factors an approach to the origin of the New Year Festival in Sri Lanka can be taken.

2.2 Community Festivals in ancient Sri Lanka and the birth of the New Year

There are two kinds of festivals, i.e. religious and national. Out of these two kinds the Sinhalese New Year Festival belongs to the national category. It can be assumed that this festival, had as its basis the so called ancient “Surya vandanā kramaya” (the practice of sun worship)” (Wijesooriya, 1995; 99). “The New Year Festival celebrated focusing on its commencement according sola calendar can be treated as a development of the summer festival of the ancient India” (Moratuwagama, 2006; 311, 312). “Sinhalese New Year is a summer festival and on the same footing summer festivals are solar festivities. As it has been a fact

understood and unanimously accepted by people of all the cultures since distant past that it was the sun which makes the world full of flowers, fruits and colourful and as such the sun, the star was treated as a god and thus was worshipped by means of festivals. (Vitharana,1998; 426)

Among the Sīgiri graffiti there occurs a verse suggestive of a summer festival.

*Aṅganini at salav megī pohonnek nāti da navabaglasanda duṭ minisakhu
novajannei (64)*

(Women clap (your) hands. Though no one who appreciates this verse of mine is present (here), do not rebuff me who has come (here) having seen the moon of the month April)

Vini Vitharana who expresses his view concerning this verse referring of Prof. Paranavithana's opinion that is suggestive of the observation of the New Year moon says thus:-

Prof. Paranavithana suggests that in the 9th Century when the verse was written there prevailed an opinion to the effect that a youngster who had seen the new moon of the month "Bak" (April), i.e. the New Year moon was especially fit to be in the company of women and as such he says that the particular reference (of Sīgiri graffiti) is of significance where Kāmotsava is concerned....We still accept that the watching of the new moon in the month April is an important event connected with the Sinhalese New Year celebrations. We are also in the habit, even today of relishing a sweet while looking at a pretty face of a blonde no sooner we see the "nava bak lasanda" (New moon of the month April)...It is not out of place to take that this verse is suggestive of an important clue to an affair of the heart pertaining to a festival held in summer (including the month April) which was held some eleven centuries ago by our forebears (Vitharana,1998 ;424, 425).

Even the contemporary New Year Festival is held in the month Bak (April). Then observation of the new moon is also a characteristic feature of the contemporary New Year celebrations. It will be appropriate, therefore, to examine whether the event called "the new moon" referred to in the Sīgiri graffiti has subsequently been adopted out of some other festival and added as one of the customs or otherwise the then already existing summer festival of which observation of the new moon also formed one of the customs was converted into the New Year Festival.

It is in the Mahāvamsa that the first reference is found to the history of sun festivals held in Sri Lanka based on the topic for discussion that Sinhalese New Year is a summer festival and every summer festival is also a sun festival.

It is in the Mahāvamsa that the first historical evidence is found to the effect that a summer festival bearing that very designation was held in Sri Lanka. (64-17) Kīrti Sri Mēgha, the Uparaju (vice king) who arrived in the village Badalattalī (12th Century) celebrated that festival (Vasantakīla or Vasanta samayussava)"(Vitharana, 425). "It is the Mahāvamsa which contains a somewhat doubtful clue to the effect that in the distant past a summer festival was held in Sri Lanka. (x. 87-88) It is mentioned (in the chronicle) that King Paṇḍukābhaya who reigned in circa 400 BC "On the Nākāt keḷi" day auspicious day celebrated... assigning a seat of equal standing for the Yaḅkha chief Cittarāja or Citrarāja and getting "dev minis" (gods and men) to dance and indulging in sexual intercourse enjoyed..."(The description then ends) But it contains important details. The Nākāt, Nāṭum, Rati krīdā... and Citrarāja. Citrakāra is one of the 108 names (designations) by which the sun god was known. On Indian soil in different times in various regions the sun was known by different names (Vitharana,1998, 427).

The statements referred to above stimulates one to inquire further whether the sun worship has anything to do with the origin of the New Year.

According to another opinion the birth of the New Year Festival has its basis in "sun worship". The influence the civilization of India had on Sri Lanka is exceedingly profound. Accordingly the New Year Festival sprang up as a result of Sri Lankan's tendency to follow the religious practice of Hindus called "sun

worship”(Kumara 2006: 59). “It is in the month April that the sun is closest to the earth. When the earth is far away from the sun the environment of the former is usually sombre. The conventional man took the phenomenon as “the death of the sun”. The “dead sun”, however, is reborn in the month “bak” (April) and the world once again is in blossom. This miraculous occasion was named “Alut Avurudu Udāwa” the beginning of the New Year or “Wasanta Udānaya” “Beginning of the summer”. Even the early references such as the arrival of the (“Avurudu Kumārayā) “Prince of the New Year” suggest that the festivity is a commemoration of the sun which is related to nature and prosperity (Kumara, 2006, 60).

The New year is also known as a harvest festival. Sun worship is a characteristic feature of festivals of prosperity. Varied opinions have been put forward concerning the sun worship, prosperity and the New Year Festival. There is a view to the effect that it might have come to being as a festival connected with prosperity.

The Sinhalese New Year is a day all Sri Lankan Buddhists celebrate with pomp and glory. It is probable that in the beginning the Sri Lankans who led an agricultural life would have set apart this day on having gathered and then stored the harvest in the house to rejoice in eating, drinking and making merriment (Weerasekara 2011: 104).

The origin of the Buddhist and Hindu New Year also occurred at a time when agriculture was the chief livelihood of people. The ancient who knew no secret of nature and thus depended on it as the blind celebrated the New Year Festival not only to rejoice crop cutting but also to worship nature inclusive of the sun (Gamlath, 2006: 16).

This period known as the Sinhalese and Hindu New Year occurred following the crop cutting and storing the grain in the barn. Unlike the present then this festival would have been more meaningful as the community was agricultural (Seneviratne, 1990; 8).

Out of all the Sinhalese folk festivals celebrated in the name of prosperity it is only Sinhalese New Year which is distinguished by its plenitude. Now it is a well-known fact that the customs of the festival are entwined about various symbols associated with the sun (Vitharana, 1984).

Relations between the sun and festivals based on prosperity had had an influence on the Birth of the New Year. Worship of the sun and the moon and celebrations of prosperity festivals by attributing divinity to natural objects form a feature found in agricultural civilizations. Sri Lankan’s eulogy (description) of prosperity extends to various currents in history.

2.3 Eulogy of crop (cereals)

Agriculture, i.e. chena or wet cultivation had been the main industry or livelihood of the Helayan (the Sinhalese). By commencement of the month bak (April) when the sun begins a new turn after completing its (one year) circuit crop cutting pertaining to chena and wet cultivation is over. The Sinhalese farmer who had been cutting crop virtually the whole of Navam (February) and even till end of Mādin (March) takes steps to perform eulogy of crop. When the sun god begins a new turn of its travel the Sinhalese farmer who planted crop in chena and wet land also sets the stage for a new pattern of cultivation. Otherwise the chena and wet land go barren. The Sinhalese farmer who took refuge in this eternal natural phenomenon set apart a day to honour it. It is the day the sun god inaugurates his new circuit. The Sinhalese farmer set apart that day to worship the sun god... The Pidilla (offering) of Maha Kohombā (big margosa), Paraṇa Kohombā (old margosa) and Alut Kohombā (new margosa) has become the Sasya Vāṇuma (Eulogy of crop) or the Sinhala Avurudda (the Sinhalese New Year)(1) (Ranganath, 1997)

As this is a festivity celebrated conforming to the circuit of the sun or in keeping with the shifting of it from the sign-house-constellation Aries to that of Pisces it (the festival) is also known as the “Sūrya Mangala Utsavaya”(ceremonial solar festival)”(Somananda, 2008; 19). There is an opinion different from the above

on the origin of the New Year Festival. “Yet there is another opinion on the New Year Festival to the effect that it is held in order to commemorate the great coronation of the “King Manu” who belongs to the ancestry of king “Mahā Sammata”, the so called first sovereign of the world. King Manu was crowned in the month bak” (April) as far back as 25200 years (Kumara, 2006; 60).

Some students specify the New Year Festival as a developed stage of the “Nākat Keliya” (sport festival held on auspicious day) which was one of the ancient festivals. A study of this opinion will show that the Nākat keliya paved the way for birth of the New Year Festival.

The present day New Year Festival is also based on auspicious hours, or else it is the modern mode of the ancient Nākat keliya. Like the ancient Nākat keliya present New Year Festival also goes on for a week. Not only open-air as well as indoor games but also old year bathing and new year bathing or “Diya keliya” (water sports) are also necessary items of the present New Year (Alawathage, 2008; 47).

2.4 Astrology and the origin of the New Year Festival

It is out of astrology which deals with the movements of the planets and that of the sun and the moon and on the one hand and changes pertaining to time such as auspicious hours, houses, lunar days etc. on the other that the year sprang up, i.e. out of four auspicious hours. It(astrology) is linked up with the lives of races such as North Indian, the Sinhalese, Italians, Germans etc. of Indo-Aryans and Indo- European (Arya) peoples and that of nations such as the Tibetans, Burmese, Tamils etc who subsequently embraced that culture (Wijesooriya, 199).

Astrology has an inseparable link with the New Year. Astrology analyses New Year Festival in a different way.

In accordance with astrology the area of sky through which circuits of the planets of the solar system occur is divided into twelve parts. Then each of them having treated as signs or houses (constellations) is named as Aries, Taurus, Gemini etc. Then the role of astrology is to deal with the influence of each of the twelve houses on people when the planets travel through them, i.e. disclosure of good and bad effects those influences have on the surroundings and man. Accordingly having made a transit of the circuit of houses or constellations throughout a year the sun passing the constellation Pisces enters that of Aries and it is this event we see as astrologically speaking the New Year. In other words according to the astrological principle it is the event in which the sun entering the Paḷamu Pādaya (first(foot/base/line) of Mēsha Navaṅsaka Aries) of Mēsha Rāsi (house Aries)] from the last pāda (foot/base/line) of rēvatī nākata (auspicious hour Rēvatī) of Mīna Navaṅsaka (Pisces) of the Mīna Rāsi (house Aries) (Bandu Janyatilleka 2008; 75).

The area of sky surrounding the earth according to astrology is divided into twelve Rāsīs (houses). Various changes take place when each of these houses emits rays of the planets. It takes one year to receive rays of the sun from the Mēsha Rāsi (house Aries) once again. Man receives the most favourable rays as Ravi (the sun) is over the Mēsha Rāsi (house Aries). Astrology is extremely helpful to predict what kind of changes both good and bad countries, towns, and each and every individual will have with the receipt of the ray of the sun from the moment what the rays of sun commence according to the position of other planets until next year. A year can be mainly divided into three parts. i.e. old year, nonagataya or punya kālaya (no auspicious time) and new year. When the earth after completing one circuit around the sun and arrives at the Mīna rāsi (house Pisces) then the rays from the sun is about to end when our day-to-day work comes to an end (Pannatissa, 1992, 107).

There is an atmosphere around the earth. Further the space stretching from the earth to the never-ending universe, by considering its qualities and fixing the earth at its centre, is divided into twelve parts. This makes us reminds of a wheel of a cart or a Dharma cakra (wheel of the Doctrine). These parts of the space are rāsīs (houses) or constellations. They are known as Mēsha (Aries), Vrishbha (Taurus), Mithuna

(Gemini), Kataka(Cancer), Siṅha (Leo), Kanyā (Virgo), Tulā (Libra), Vriscika (Scorpio), Dhanu (Sagittarius), Makara (Capricorn), Kumbha (Aquarius and Mīna (Pisces). As the globe is divided into 360 degrees each of these houses has 30 degrees. According to ancient astrology the first Rāsi (house) is Eḷa or Heḷa Rāsi (house). This is also known as Eḷu or Heḷu. Subsequently Sanskrit sages applied a figure of a goat to it and named it Mēsha (Aries) – means the Goat. The last or the twelfth house in this cycle is Mīna (Pisces) – means the fish or the fishes. The travel of the sun from the house Pisces to the house Aries means in other words the completion of a year and the beginning of a new year. According to zooliac does the sun completing its travel come from the house Pisces to the house Aries only once a year? Yes, one month per house for 12 months (12x30= 360) (Iduruwa,1990).

2.5 Origin of the New Year and the Āyurveda (science of Health or Medicine)

A discussion on astrology and the New Year links up with even the Āyurveda (science of Health or Medicine). Alliance between Āyurveda and astrology and also the nature of the same alliance that can be seen in the New Year are as follows:-

The susruta saṅhitāva (very famous collection of texts) makes a distinctive reference to the excellent role of the sun. It is a Sanskrit verse which combines Āyurveda and astrology.

“Visargādāna vikshēpaiḥ
Sōma sūryā nilā yathā
Dhārayanti jagaddēham
Katha pittā nilāmstathā”

It the sun moon and air which holds the world. Their action is three-fold, namely spreading, attraction, and motion. Likewise even the body is held by thridōsha (disorder of the 3 humours of the body). Even the Yogāsana vidhi (precepts pertaining to the mode of sitting suited to profound meditation) are formulated so as to show gratitude to the sun... It will be worthwhile to evaluate even the eminence of the punya kāla (auspicious time). Punya kāla means “no auspicious time”. When every action is performed according to a given auspicious hour (time) on the other hand for what kind of activity will the time which is not auspicious be suitable? The ancient Sinhalese before commencing whatever promising activity performed religious rites. Among such rites upavāsaya (state of abstaining from food) is essential. Therefore during the Puṇya kāla (auspicious time) not only mental but also physical health will be developed... The stanza “Riṇam kritvāpi ritam pibēt” tells, us to consume ghee even on credit. Getting into debt is bad. But it is not bad to buy ghee on credit. The reason is that ghee is one of the excellent items of food. Ghee mollifies tundos disorder of the 3 humours of the body. Destroys toxicity. Increases hunger. Due to pasting during the Puṇya Kāla (auspicious period) and taking milk rice and ghee appetite increases and as a result consumption of a great deal of sweets during the festival avoids indigestion...

According to the opinion of Caraka Ācārya “If one on and often applies oil on head he won’t suffer from headache, baldness, premature grey hair. Bones in head develop properly. The foot of hair becomes solid. Hair becomes black. Sense organs become bright. Complexion turns bright. The best message which the act of application of oil in the New Year imparts is that the most essential thing is to apply oil almost daily on head (Ponnamperuma, 2008, 67 - 70).

Thus the New Year includes in it a background of Āyurveda too. Astrology and Āyurvēda also on their part have added various values to different aspects of the New Year Festival.

6. Discussion & conclusions

Facts already shown above can be studied under several main sections.

- ❖ The New Year Festival sprang up with the commencement of it based on Solar Calendar.
- ❖ The New Year Festival came to being in Sri Lanka as an extension of summer Festivals.
- ❖ The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka originated as an extension of Nākāt keliya

- ❖ The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka came to being as an extension of sun festivals.
- ❖ The New Year Festival originated in Sri Lanka as an extension of Crop Festivals.
- ❖ The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka came to being on the basis of astrology and Āyurvēda.
- ❖ The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka originated as a Folk festival of the Sinhalese.
- ❖ The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka was originated as a folk festival of Indians who came to Sri Lanka.
- ❖ New Year Festival sprang up through an admixture of various parts of the festivals of the Sinhalese and Tamils.

It is in 70 AD that evidence occurs to the effect that saka year was originated on the basis of Solar calendar of India. As Anuradha Seneviratne says (1990) according to Gadalā deniya inscription it was in 14th Century that Saka year came to be used in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese got Lunar calendar from North India (in 12th century). According to him solar year system which came from South India became popular in Kotte Period (1415 - 1521). According his opinion New Year Festival due to the influence of South India would have originated in Sri Lanka after 14th century. Neither in Dambadeniya period (1232-1270) nor in Kotte Period no reference to celebration of New Year Festival emerges.

The first reference to New Year Festival come to us from the work, “An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylone” by Robert Knox. This work contains his twenty years experience (from 1660 to 1679) he had in Sri Lanka. While Knox describes the New Year celebrations of the king in detail that of the people is given in brief.

[The first is accompanied with a great Festival.] To speak a little of first time, Viz. at the beginning of the New year, when the King's Duties are brought him. Their New year is always either the 27th, or the 28th, or the 29th of March: At this time upon a special and good day (for which the Astrologers are consulted) the King washes his head, which is a very great Solemnity among them (Knox, 1681, 5).

What Knox reports is the society that prevailed in Kandy Period (1592-1815). Although prior to Robert Knox many others such as Sindbad, Fa-Hian, Cosmas, Ptolemy, Hiuen Tsiang, Marco Polo, Vasco da Gama, Sir John Mandeville, Ibn Batuta, lorenzo de almeida (Lourenço de Almeida) dom jeronimo de azevedo (Jerónimo de Azevedo) had already reported about Sri Lanka no reference to New Year Festival had been made by them. In descriptions of their travels although conduct of the king is described no account of celebration of New Year Festival is given. Even the accounts of the Portuguese and the Dutch do not mention about a New Year Festival in Sri Lanka. Knox lived in Sri Lanka for a long time and the observations he made are detailed and thus they are influential.

As the Sinhalese king embraced Hinduism during the Sītavaka Period (1521-1592) a number of Hindu festivals were give state patronage. But no information about a New Year Festival held in Sītāvaka Period has been reported. But on the basis of the opinion of Anuradha Seneviratne (1990) who presents details to the effect that during the Kotte Period solar calendar was popular in Sri Lanka and as such it would have been more popular during Sītavaka Period. There is an opinion to the effect that the Wesak Festival might have been the reason for the absence of the New Year Festival.

No clarification of whatever kind can be found with regard to the fact that there was a practice of holding a New Year Festival set apart for April 13th and 14th in the annals of Sri Lanka. The kind of absence referred

to above may be attributable to the fact that the two months April and May in which respectively the New year and Wesak festivals are held are adjacent to each other so that instead of having two festivals one following the other the people in the past may have celebrated only the Wesak. They may have treated Wesak also as the New Year. There are annals referring to the fact that King Dutugāmunu had celebrated 24 such Wesak festivals. The ancient Sinhalese must have treated Wesak festival as the New Year Festival too. It may be correct to conclude that the New Year Festival as it is held at present according to the movement of the sun may have its origin in the Kandy Period (Somananda, 2008; 19).

It is probable that with the rise of Hinduism in Sītāvaka Period New Year celebrations also would have commenced. According to descriptions of Knox even the state patronage was given to it then.

S. J. Gunasagaram in his paper titled “The Hindu New Year” (1955) gives a long description using even archaeological factors of the history of Hindu New Year. He analyses in it an inscription of Mohenjodaro, solar month system and historical factors pertaining to Hindu New Year.

The Sumerians would appear to have taken over the eight constellations of the early Mohenjo-Darians and added on four new constellations which together with the original eight constellations form the twelve signs of the zodiac found in the modern calendar. It should be a matter of pride to the Ceylonese, be they Muslim, Sinhalese, or Tamil that the New Year the Hindus and Buddhists alike celebrate in India and Ceylon today is the self- same New Year established by the ancient Mohenjo-Darians who spoke a language so much akin to Tamil and not altogether unrelated to old Sinhalese. The New Year which was brought forth by the Dravidians, and recognized as such in India and Ceylon through several millenniums, is quite appropriately termed the Hindu New Year. It has remained as a permanent sign-post of the essential unity of Indo- Ceylon culture. It deserves to be allowed to continue to be so without being twisted to give it a racial significance (Gunasagaram; 1955; 25).

The New Year Festival would have emerged with the political backing Hinduism had during the Sītāvaka Period. Though Hinduism was not able to develop and spread it to a considerable extent owing to the shortness of Sītāvaka Period yet the New Year as a folk festival would have combined with the festivals of the Sinhalese and in consequence it would have developed. Factors confirming the existence of Hinduism even in periods such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa are available.

Celebration of Hindu New Year Festival would have been having with the Hindus. It was the English who recognized the New Year Festival as both a national and religious festivity which caused a problem of identity with regard to the event which has been celebrated by the Sinhalese and the Tamils. “Bak Maha Hela Jātika Ulela” (Sinhalese New Year Festival of the Month April) which from time immemorial marked off the appearance of the New Year for no justifiable reason by designating as the Sinhalese and the Hindu New Year in the latter decade of the nineteenth century its national value was destroyed (Adagama, 2008; 28).

When Ceylon was a European colony the New Year celebrated by the Hindus as well as the Buddhists in Ceylon was known as the “Hindu New Year”. Under independent Ceylon today, the New Year has come to be called “The Sinhalese and Tamil New Year” while in our little Island the New Year has assumed a racial significance in India the New Year continues to be termed and celebrated as the “Hindu New Year (Gunasagaram, 1955; 22).

Knox identifies the New Year Festival as a holiday at which occasion the ordinary man takes rest and makes merriment. Reference to New Year Festival have been made even by Englishmen such as David, Doyly subsequent to Knox:-

“On the one hand the Sinhalese New year is a summer festival and on the other hand every summer festival is a solar festival” (Vitharana;426). Before the system of solar calendar which came to be used in Sri Lanka circa 14th century it was the lunar calendar which had been in use. The use of celebrating New Year

comes to being under the system of solar calendar. At the time (Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa) when references were made in historical documents to summer festivals and solar festivals the system of months in use was based on lunar months. Those days summer festivals, solar festivals etc. would not have been celebrated on account of a transit. Worship of the sun and the moon was an exorcism man practiced since the distant past and one of its forms may have been represented by it.

No annalistic evidence to prove that a Nākāt keli (Festivals based on auspicious hours) existed prior to the advent of Mahinda survives. Following the advent of Mahinda state patronage was chiefly given to religious festivals. It was the lunar month which was used even for these festivals. As the priority was given to religious festivals it seems that non-religious festivals gradually disappeared. Among various religious groups religious festivals would have been in use. Hindu New Year is a religious festival. Even the contemporary New Year Festival is being celebrated in keeping with Nākāt cāritra (customs based on auspicious time). But no evidence in support of the fact that the New Year Festival got the Nākāt cāritra as a result of the gradual evolution of the Nākāt keli (sports based on auspicious hours) has been found.

Although preference was given to Buddhism and Buddhist festivals after the advent of Mahinda, characteristics found in summer festivals, solar festivals and Nākāt festivals are to be found in crop (sashay) festivals which existed among the masses. The chief festivities among them were worship of the sun and the moon. Crop festivals celebrated after the crop cutting. The free time (leisure) following the harvest of the Maha season occurs either in Mādin (March) or Bak (April). Evidence already found confirms that even the New Year was held in March (according to Knox on 27th March) – April. Owing to simultaneity of crop festivals and New Year festivals and also owing to admixture of the characteristic features of those festivities it can be conjectured that the New Year Festival would have developed in a novel form. Nākāt sāstra (learning pertaining to auspicious hours) of solar calendar which belongs to astrology through Nākāt utsava (festivals based on auspicious hours) would have combined with the new year. The New Year Festival in Sri Lanka has been developed neither as a festival of the Sinhalese nor as that of the Hindus but by an admixture of features of Sinhalese festivals and that of the Hindu New Year Festival. It can be proved by means of accepted factors that the New Year Festival in Sri Lanka has been originated out of the Hindu New Year Festival of Sītāvaka Period.

7. NOTES:

- [1] 01. The traditional Sinhalese farmer started offering (1) “Maha Kohombā (big margosa), (2) Paraṇa Kohombā (old margosa) and (3) Alut Kohombā (new margosa) in the process of “Sasya Varuṇa” (eulogy of crop). The term Kohombā (margosa) stands for paddy.
1. Maha Kohombā means Māvī (paddy called Māvī)
 2. “Paraṇa Kohombā” means “Swayañjāta Āl vī” (the kind of paddy known as Swayañjāta Āl vi.)
 3. “Alut Kohombā” means “Hīnāṭi (kind of paddy called Hīnāṭi)

The Sinhalese farmer believed that he got Mahā Kohombā or Māvī (paddy called māvī) through the divine power of Mihi kata the Earth Goddess. In consequence the earth was treated as a god. They offered the Māvī to the god. Next as the Paraṇa Kohombā or Swayañjāta Āl is grown in particular in the hills the ancient Sinhalese farmer dedicated it (Paraṇa Kohombā) to the moon god. Alut Kohombā vī or Hīnāṭi vī as it is grown in wet and sandy land it was dedicated to the rays of the sun.

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