

Amalgamation of Authentic Sri Lankan Culture and Cultural Heritage Tourism (A Case study of Kataragama Cultural Heritage Destination)

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Abstract: Kataragama which can be identified as one the remarkable cultural destination from ancient periods in Sri Lanka. It is also known as “*Kācharagāma*”, “*Kadiragāmam*”, and “*Kajjaragāma*”. The ancient city of Kataragama enriched with numerous cultural, heritage and religious attractions. In each year the devotees in all the Hindu and Sinhalese also the Muslims gather to the festival which happens during the lunar month, July-August. The god Kataragama is known as “*Murukan*” is one of the main figures worshipping by both Sinhalese Buddhism and Tamil Hinduism. This is cogitation which refers to the contributive role of Sri Lankan Culture and Cultural heritage tourism. The cultural identity of this specific destination is very unique and it caused to enrich the emerging cultural heritage tourism. The paper discusses acculturation, cultural adoption and cultural commoditization in relation to the cultural heritage tourism perspective. Further, it reveals sufficient detail about the authenticity of tourism experience-oriented to Kataragama area and finally provide the recommendations in general and specifically with the considerations of key issues.

Key Words: Kataragama, Heritage, Culture, Tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION TO KATARAGAMA ESALA PERAHARA

Kataragama was one of the sixteen Holy shrines in Sri Lanka. Kataragama as it is usually called possessed considerable historical interest, apart from its being the annually recurring scene of a motley assembly of pilgrims at the shrine of the dread God *Kandaswamy*. The pilgrimage was regulated by the Ordinance No.14 of 1873 and according to the Colonial reports a Police Magistrate was sent to Kataragama by the government, to maintain the law and order and also to look into the health requirements of the pilgrims during the festival season. In 1889 it is recorded that the Kataragama festival was honored with the presence of then Governor Sir Arthur Gordon. Even from the early British period, when the festival was of much larger proportions, the Assistant Agent of Badulla was always present in person.

Kataragama is situated in the far end of the Uva Province (Figure 1), and the great temple of Kataragama is dedicated to God “*Skanda*” or “*Kanda Kumara*” believed to be a very powerful god among the other gods, and also venerated mainly by Sinhala Buddhist and Hindus, but also visited by Muslims and Christians. The main festival is in July/August. The grand perahera will be held during this time with all the traditional dances belonging into the schools of low country

and Kandyan styles. In the perahera the dancers, drummers, elephants and tusked elephants take part with their high performance, along with the *Basnayaka Nilame* of the Kataragama Dewalaya. In addition, some other chieftains of the other chieftains of the other Devalayas and the “*Alaththi Ammavaru*” (Lady attendance) will also proceed with the perahera.

II. CULTURAL IDENTITY

One of the most significant items of the Kataragama Perahera is the participation of the “*Veddas*” from Dambana (Figure 2). A group of Veddas, join the perahera at the main entrance of the Maha Dewalaya, by way of performing their bows and arrows towards the insignia, which is placed on the back of the tusked elephant, and walked backward in the same manner, until the perahera is concluded.

The tradition of taking part in the procession by the Veddas is not to be found even in the Kandy Esala Perahera which is held in Kandy in July, August. The festival culminates with an event of a fire-walking (Figure 3), which will be held on the last day, (also a full-moon day) of the perahera, after expiration of 14 days and followed by a water-cutting ceremony held in the dawn on the following day at the Manik River of Gems. The daily pooja or religious services will be held regularly in the morning and evening.

The Buddhist shrine-The Kiri Vehera of the Milk Dagaba is located next to the dewala complex, believed to be built during the pre-Christian period. Following are the references to Kataragama in the 19th chapter of the Great Chronicle-Mahavamsa, read thus, *In the reign of king Devanampiyatissa the Princess of Kataragama had assisted at the ceremony of planting the Sacred Branch, an off shoot of the Bo-tree was planted at Kataragama* (Costa, 2014).

III. EMERGENCE OF TOURISM CULTURE

This place is situated bordering the Monaragala and Hambantota District of Uva province of close by Menik river. Kataragama temple is not only for Hindus, Buddhist and Islamic but also devoted by many religious devotees. The perahera (Figure 4) conducted in July, August season is highly popular main festival of here. It is beautified with up country and low country cultural events. Every one who visit Kataragama never miss the chance to visit Sella Kataragama

for their offering and rituals. This place is included with "Gange Devalaya" devoted to Lord Ganeshan and some other Devalas and the devotees of Kataragama use this place as a resting place.

Activities are undertaken by UNWTO within the field of culture and tourism stemming from the very definition of cultural tourism, which is defined as: "A sort of tourism activity during which the visitor's essential motivation is to find out, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products during a tourism destination. These attractions/products associated with a group of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, and therefore the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs, and traditions" (UNWTO, 2020).

However, in this regard Kataragama has emerge as a cultural tourism aspect in Sri Lanka. This event enriches with tangible and intangible culture. As the tangible cultural tourism aspect, the tourist who wish to enjoy this event can be visited the cultural destination in Kataragama devala complex can be identified as the *Maha Devale*, *Kiri Vehera*, *Sivam Kovil*, *Masjad ul-Khizr mosque*, *Kataragama archaeological museum* and other minor temples which are located along the entire premises.

When considering the perahera it is enriched with Sri Lankan culture. Especially this event famous among domestic travelers. When considering tourism industry, the travelers can enjoy the mix culture of Buddhist and Hindu in Sri Lanka during this event. This cultural event is an iconic symbol for the religious tourism in Sri Lanka. The Esala Perahera (pageant) that is conducted by the Kataragama Devalaya is about 2,500 years old and is in fact older than its more commercial counterpart, the Kataragama Perahera (Wijesinghe, 2020).

IV. ACCULTURATION OF KATARAGAMA PERAHERA

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of people having different cultures inherit continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes within the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Lakey, 2003). In the context of Kataragama perahera it is a specific iconic acculturation symbol in Sri Lanka.

The two-week-long rituals begin at an auspicious time in July, with the flag hoisting ceremony. Then fire-walking, perhaps the foremost mystical and awe-inspiring of Kataragama rituals, is a way of paying penance by the devotees. A bed of tamarind firewood is lit and because the embers glow red and gold within the dark of the night, the devotees tread the hearth. It is said that those of the purest faith never get burned.

On the day of the most pageant, color, light, and sound engulf the streets. Beautifully caparisoned elephants enchant the spectators and a Tusker bears the revered 'Yantra.' Alatti

Amma - women who perform the daily pooja of lamps before God Skanda, enter front of the tusker, clad in their traditional attire. Amidst the chants of 'Haro Hara' from the spectators, traditional dancers' breakthrough to the beat of the drums, their anklets clinking and costumes glinting. Dances inspired by the vibrancy of the peacock take center stage, because the vehicle of God Skanda may be a peacock. Fumes of camphor fragrances the night air, and therein trance-like atmosphere, devotees themselves join the pageant, chanting fervently. A month before the Perahera, pilgrims travel on foot on a devotional journey - Pada Yatra - from Jaffna to Kataragama, braving harsh weather and unfavorable conditions (Figure 5). They walk the route taken by God Skanda, as penance and in prayer. because the pilgrims travel South, more join the walk of devotion, amounting to quite 30,000 on the ultimate days as they reach Kataragama in time for the Maha Perahera.

The water cutting ceremony (Figure 6) marks the top of the two-week celebration of God Skanda's prowess and blessing. The casket bearing holy Yantra is taken to the Menik River and immersed in water, because the high priest strikes the river with a sword. Chanting prayers, devotees submerge within the holy waters during a cleansing ritual. The exquisite celebration of religion, culture and tradition involves a conclusion, only to be repeated year after a year.

V. CULTURAL ADOPTION

Kataragama perahera is an event which adopted to especially the Hindu and Buddhist culture. The event consists of cultural rituals and ceremonies from the beginning to end of the event entirely. The festival draws thousands of devotees from various faiths and ethnicities who unite in worship as they pay reverence to the god Kataragama, the deity with six faces and twelve hands, mounted upon a peacock. One of the most importance aspects of the Kataragama festival is the Pada Yatra. It is a walk of faith by devotees who travel from Jaffna to the island's Southern coast in time for the Kataragama Perahera. The Kataragama Pada Yatra is a journey of faith and of rediscovering the meaning of life through self-denial.

Firewalking is an overwhelming act of penance, where devotees immerse themselves in prayer and meditation, and walk on a bed of red-hot embers. Another important form of worship to the deity is Kavadi, the burden dance or an offering of sacrifice, done in gratitude for fulfilled vows or as a form of veneration. Those who perform Kavadi do so after an extensive period of preparation, which includes prayer and fasting. There are many types of this ritual, including bearing on their shoulder's structures decorated with peacock feathers and flowers.

Thooku Kavadi is performed by devotees who are fulfilling vows to the god. They are suspended from iron hooks in various forms and the ritual depicts the great faith placed on the divine. The climax of the Kataragama Esala Perahera is the 'Maha Perahera'. The Relic or Yantra of God Kataragama is placed on a majestically caparisoned tusker. Drummers set

the beat and various dances add vibrance to the procession. The sacred grounds of Kataragama and surrounding streets sparkle beneath a canopy of colorful lights. The festival ends with 'Diya Kepime Mangallaya' – the cutting of water, on the day after the Maha Perahera. A ceremonial sword is used to part the waters of the Menik River, and pots are filled with the water from the point of parting.

However, this sort of tourism also raises some ethical, socioeconomic, and human rights-related concerns that require to be addressed by all relevant stakeholders. Throughout the centuries, cultural tourism events have faced different sorts of discrimination, displacement from their cultural assimilation, and more recently a severe depletion of the cultural resources it is depend upon. It's become evident that the event of cultural tourism can't be undertaken without sound partnerships among local communities, governments, tourism destinations, the private sector, and civil society. Moreover, academic institutions got partnership with these stakeholders so as to be ready to produce solid research and data to be utilized in the course of cultural tourism development. Only multi-stakeholder partnerships can really assure that cultural tourism can reap direct benefits from tourism and keep their core values intact.

VI. CULTURAL COMMODITIZATION

Commodification is to form something into an object for commercial use. In terms of tourism, commodification refers to employing a place's culture and therefore the cultural artifacts to form an outsized enough profit to support a part of the area's economy (S.M.Abrar, 2018). In the view of cultural commoditization of Kataragama perahera the charges for facilities, goods and services, accommodation, food and beverages will be high as a result of seasonality. During this season of Kataragama perahera the souvenirs sell in a large scale and it may cause to introduce false culture into the indigenous one.

In the Kataragama complex, cultural commoditization is happening in two ways direct and indirect. Objects of culture like paintings, souvenirs, sculptures, jewelries and traditional artifacts are being sold to tourists, produced mainly for the shops and even imported. There are shops (Figure 7) selling especially the pooja trays, fruits, flowers for offering to the premises and other ornaments. There are number of shops selling sweets and other food items to tourist at very high prices. Indirectly, this culture is often commoditized through the lives of host communities and through creation of the tourist experience. In the context of the event of Kataragama, it's counting on domestic travelers on an outsized scale. Kataragama festival draws thousands of devotees, who make the pilgrimage over a two-week period (SLTDA, 2020). It is always viewed as more a threat to the locals than the opposite.

Table 1: Visit of Kataragama by the Pilgrims

Time Duration	Visit of Kataragama by Pilgrims
Week Days	2 500 - 4 000
Week-Ends	10 000 - 15 000
Longer Week-Ends	30 000 - 45 000
During the Esala Perahera Season	500 000 >

Source: Office of the Kataragama Basnayaka Nilame - Ruhunumaha Kataragama Dewalaya, 2017 (UDA, 2019)

Cultural commodification results in future, gradual change in society's values, beliefs, and cultural practices. This type of cultural change is really caused by tourists' demand, as an example, host society depends on tourist consumption and there'll come a situation where the host society becomes culturally hooked in to the tourists generating country.

During the festival pilgrims who offer money in a large amount given priority and the other pilgrims often do not have any significance. The premises' cultures are changing with the attitude of monks.

VII. AUTHENTICITY OF TOURISM EXPERIENCE

The Kataragama Esala Perahera differs to its Kandyan equivalent in many ways; one being that it pays homage to Lord Kataragama and the celebration of his marriage to Walliamma, which sets the festival apart due to its use of color, music, and dancing, making it more of a celebration. The festival sees many Hindus from around the world participating as there are a vast number of Lord Murugan (Lord Kataragama) devotees.

The major reason for Kataragama declared as a tourist attraction is the authentic experience during the perahera season. In addition, the sacred area is consisting with tourist attraction such as Sella Kataragama, Gana Devalaya, Valliguhawa, Wedasiti Kanda, Galge, Sithulpawwa and Yala sanctuary which are potential to attract pilgrims and tourist.

The premises of Kataragama is attracted by multi religious and multi cultures. There is a strong belief among devotees that Lord Buddha visited this sacred land and the Kirivehera Stupa was built as a commemoration of that. The Ashtphala Bo Tree in the sacred area, which is thought to be an offshoot of Sri Maha Bodhi is being respected by Buddhists at their highest esteem and the Kataragama Devalaya (Temple) attracts devotees of multi-religious and cultures from many parts of the Country (UDA, 2019).

When considering the cultural events that unique to the Kataragama Perahera it is one of the colourful events being held devoted to god Kataragama. The event gathering of devotees from many parts of the country as well as from overseas. The event consisting with numerous cultural events, drummers, fire workers, dancers and so on. Preparation of Athu Pandalama, water cutting ceremony and Pada Yathra are another authentic event in this special occasion. This is a special event which participating indigenous Veddas in

Dambana with special cultural performance rather than Esala Perahera at Kandy.

In the other hand tourist and also the domestic visitors can get an authentic experience on street shopping. The market survey carried out indicated that the sale of flowers during the weak days in Katarama reaches 1500 to 3000 flowers per day and this number reaches as much as 15000 flowers during the weekends and the festive seasons. These sales record shows the magnitude of demand for the flowers. As far as the fruits are concerned, all the fruit varieties are not offered to the God, only a limited number of varieties are offered to the God, such as watermelon, banana, mangoes and wood apple (UDA, 2019).

VIII. CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

As the OECD report on The Impact of Culture on Tourism noted: "Culture and tourism are linked due to their obvious synergies and their growth potential. Cultural tourism is one among the most important and fastest-growing global tourism markets and therefore the cultural and artistic industries are increasingly getting used to market destinations. The increasing use of culture and creativity to plug destinations is additionally adding to the pressure of differentiating regional identities and pictures, and a growing range of cultural elements are being employed to brand and market regions." Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009) Culture, therefore, provides content for tourism, allowing countries and regions to differentiate themselves in an increasingly crowded marketplace, and tourism provides culture with new outlets for cultural institutions, products, and content (UNWTO, Tourism and Culture Synergies, 2018).

As one of the foremost thriving economic activities of the 21st century, tourism is well placed to contribute to cultural events in improving their livelihoods. If managed responsibly and sustainably, this cultural tourism event like Kataragama Perahera spurs cultural interaction and revival, bolsters employment, alleviates poverty, curbs rural flight migration, empowers local communities, especially women and youth, encourages tourism product diversification, allows people to retain their relationship with the land and nurtures a way of pride.

The report provides recommendations to beat the problems within the event of Kataragama and to enhance this event globally. The Recommendations are divided into two sections; the primary one summarizing general consideration on key aspects in cultural tourism that concern all stakeholders (governments, local communities, destinations management organizations, tourism companies, civil society, etc.). the opposite one is two main groups of stakeholders directly involved in tourism operations on the bottom, namely: area people and tourist (UNWTO, Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism, World Committee on Tourism Ethics, 2020).

8.1. General Considerations on key issues in Kataragama Perahera

The Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Kataragama Perahera events are referring first and foremost to tourism development within the local communities that wish to open up to tourism or to enhance the management of the prevailing cultural tourism products and experiences within the event.

In this endeavor, the local people need the support of governments, which should create an enabling environment for sustainable development of tourism, alongside that of other economic sectors. consistent with the Kataragama Development Plan 2019-2030 by Urban Development Authority, Uva Provincial Office, Badulla representing local people and the peripheral event of Kataragama, the role of the States is crucial in adopting the relevant legislation and regulation, and in fixing place concrete instruments to make sure non-discrimination, the protection of cultural aspects in Kataragama, territories, and resources, and therefore the socio-economic inclusion and political participation of individuals .

In order for cultural tourism to develop and prosper Kataragama Perahera during a respectful and equitable manner, all stakeholders got to take into consideration the subsequent key socioeconomic and human rights aspects directly associated with the community:

1. Respect

Respect cultural values and therefore the cultural capital of local people, their physical, spiritual and cultural relationship with their traditional lands and customary laws, so as to be ready to understand their expected benefits from tourism and therefore the role they want to play in it. Respect the management models that the local communities wish to use in tourism development in Kataragama.

2. Consultation

Engage during a thorough, transparent, and permanent consultation process on the event, and management of tourism projects, products, and services in Kataragama premises. This process includes a dialogue between local people and stakeholders (governments, destinations, tourism companies, and others), also as among area people members whose consent to any tourism development is completely necessary.

3. Empowerment

Help facilitate skills development and empowerment of those communities through organizational structures and governance models, including self-governance, that enable efficient decision-making with regards to cultural tourism.

4. Equitable Partnership

Support equitable cultural enterprises and sustainable business practices which not only ensure an enhanced economic benefit but also contribute to protecting cultural and natural resources,

property, fostering community development, and improving individual livelihoods.

5. Protection

Ensure that outcomes of tourism development are positive which adverse impacts on natural resources, cultural heritage, and therefore the way of lifetime of the communities are timely identified and prevented or eliminated. Participate within the protection of natural and cultural assets of those communities, also as of their traditional lands.

8.2. Specific Recommendations

1. Recommendations for area people

Kataragama Perahera is especially supported the area people and especially a domestic cultural event in Sri Lanka. The area people will be the beneficiaries of tourism development which concerns their cultures and therefore the territories they inhabit. therein capacity, they need the leading role within the consultation process for fixing cultural tourism operations which, at times, may even end in refraining from tourism development. So as to form tourism partnerships as equitable and sustainable as possible, they ought to take under consideration the subsequent recommendations:

Provide representative organizational structures suitable for effective engagement with tourism partners, also as community self-management mechanisms seeking to form the distribution of advantages more equitable and fairer. Discuss and agree on consultation and grievance remedial processes with tourism partners. make sure that tourism partners know what cultural information are often shared with visitors. Provide tourism partners with information on the cultural specificities of the perahera event once they engage and work with the cultural event, communities, and businesses.

Provide cultural awareness training for tour guides. Assist with the preparation of clear guidelines or codes of conduct to help visitors to respect community traditions and protocols. Provide information for tourists on acceptable behavior and etiquette while at a community facility or site. Ensure privacy, safety, security, and luxury of tourists while respecting the privacy of area people members in tourism development. Ensure cultural sites that are “off-limits” to visitors are clearly described/delimited. Provide information for visitors on what they will expect from their cultural experience. Provide a respectful opportunity for visitors to interact with people during the cultural tourism experience.

In addition, the area people can also consider assessing to which extent the natural environment is suitable for tourism development by taking into consideration water consumption needs, waste management and wishes to guard species and ecosystems. Assess and avoid any potential threat. Engage children from the community in guided tours so as to enable their own cultural learning, motivate them to become tour guides themselves, and facilitate mentoring of future entrepreneurs. Support and encourage the creation and development of community-based tourism enterprises related

to the territorial organization. Supervise the influx of tourists, which may quickly exceed manageable numbers and put high on local infrastructure, community members, and their resources. Preserve local culture without adopting practices or models of other groups simply because they're fashionable visitors and “sell” well. Observe sound environmental practices while providing services to tourists, particularly in terms of sustainability of resources, garbage, water consumption, and waste management.

2. Recommendations for Tourists

Tourists visiting Kataragama are getting increasingly sensitized about the cultural traditions of Kataragama Perahera with the various cultural events and therefore the got to behave responsibly when traveling. However, soaring tourist numbers may convert visits to some local peoples into a trendy trend, which can raise the problems of carrying capacity, cultural misunderstandings, or expectations which will not be met. Besides the duty of tourism companies and guides to brief their clients on cultural tourism experiences, tourists should take under consideration the subsequent recommendations:

2.1. Before the visit

Research and gather information about the indigenous community before the visit. Understanding the history, culture, codes of conduct, and linkages with the character of the indigenous groups also will help in appreciating their customs. Choose tourism operators that are managed by indigenous entrepreneurs or have direct business relations with local indigenous providers. within the case of the latter, consider giving preference to shared or partial ownership models benefiting the area people.

2.2. During the visit

Leave a minimum footprint. Conserve water, fauna, and flora, and ask your guide for dos and don'ts. Reduce waste disposal the maximum amount as possible. study handicrafts and art. Buy only those made by local artisans as many cultural groups don't have their property registered. Also, as cultural events like dancing, traditional instrument playing, etc. Refrain from buying handicrafts made from endangered plants or animals. Irresponsible purchasing can boost a requirement which will bring some species to extinction. don't remove any objects from Kataragama sites as this might suppose irreversible damage to cultural heritage assets related to local communities and their beliefs. Access only the places hospitable tourists in areas managed by the communities. Some locations or rituals have spiritual significance and are therefore considered sacred, or may simply be off-limits or unsafe for tourists. Avoid giving money and gifts to children. this may not improve their future because it will make them more hooked in to tourists' charity. If you would like to point out solidarity, ask your guide, or some community leader on the way to contribute.

2.3. After a visit

Support environmental, healthcare, or education projects of local folks that improve their wellbeing and enable them to remain in their territories. confirm your hosts actually wish to draw in more tourists before your positive experiences and pictures reach thousands of individuals through social media and digital platforms. Send pictures back home but take care of how you employ them albeit you've got permission. Third parties may find yourself commercializing photos of your travel experience with none benefits to the event or their previous consent.

In this context, it is often identified that Kataragama Perahera may be a valuable cultural aspect in Sri Lanka. within the context of development and conservation of this cultural event it should remember of furthermore infrastructure facilities development, sanitary facilities development, implementing economic development plan, environment sustainable strategies, landscape management plan, public open space plan, cultural and heritage development plan and so on.

APPENDIX

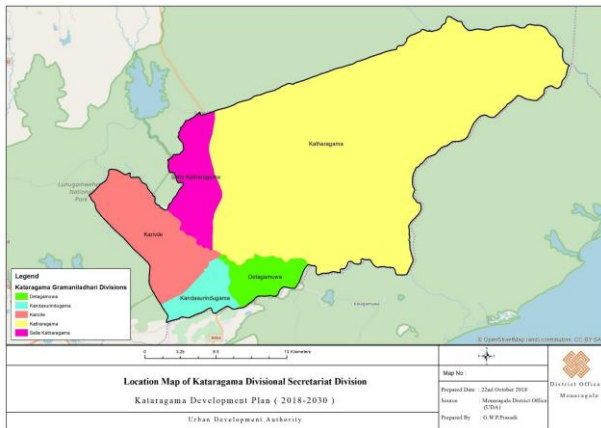


Figure 1: Location of Kataragama Secretariat Division



Figure 2: Fire walking on last day



Figure 3:Kataragama Perahera



Figure 4:Pada Yatra by Devotees



Figure 1: Participation of Veddhas



Figure 5:Annual Water Cutting Ceremony



Figure 6: Sales of fruits and flowers in Kataragama

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CURRICULUM

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