

# A Methodology for The Collection of The Sinhala Ritual

By

S. G. SAMARASINGHE

Ratnapura, Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the folk play with its attendant exorcistic ritual and a variety of fertility cultic practices, more than any other dramatic expression, shows some of the most indigenous cultural traits of the country. These plays are unknown even in India and they are according to tradition handed down from pre-Buddhistic times (4th C.B.C.). Some of the dancing forms and the structures associated with these folk plays and the ritualistic cults are now being adapted to the modern stage. Yet, though the folk play thus has a cultural and social relevance almost unique, no full scale, methodical collection has been made so far, excepting for two pioneer works that are analytical and ethnological in their treatments. I refer to the two most important publications on the subject, namely, Paul Wirz's *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon* (1941) published in Germany and E. R. Saratchandra's *The Folk Play in Ceylon* (1962) published in Sri Lanka. Neither of these works contains a "methodical collection of texts and other materials envisaged as necessary by folklore scholars for modern folkloristic scholarship".

Now, we are confronted with this operational definition namely "a methodical and full scale collection of texts and other materials as envisaged as necessary by folklore scholars for modern folkloristic scholarship". The folklorists have often been charged that they merely collect the material and engage in a kind of work that a librarian or an archivist does in preserving the material. Gershon Legman for example says that "it is not enough . . . to publish raw collections of folk tales and folk materials. . . . What is necessary now, and long overdue, is to base publication deeply upon some meaningful and mature interpretation—socio-analytic, or psycho-analytic, or any other kind of ana-

lytic so long as it is analyzed—of what the material means, and meant to the people who have transmitted it”.<sup>1</sup> I would further add that the material should be analyzed as to how far it is relevant to the cultural continuity of the given group, and the continuity of the particular genre. It is firstly in this context that I treat the word ‘collecting’ namely that the field work material should be meaningful to a mature interpretation—folkloristic, social, anthropological, psychological, cultural, historical, linguistic etc. This does not mean that any data specifically outside the purview of the collector’s field should be ignored. He is always welcome to record and collect other data for the sake of general scholarship, for others to unravel problems of modern folklore concepts and theories. Thus one would see that although field workers like Herbert Halpert<sup>2</sup>, Alan Lomax<sup>3</sup>, MacEdward Leach<sup>4</sup>, Richard Dorson<sup>5</sup> etc. had their main interest in anthropology, functionalism, literary approach or history, their collections provide a wealth of material for other researchers in folklore.

Secondly, collecting techniques as enunciated by ethnographers and folklorists have been taken into consideration in formulating a methodology for collecting data in the Sinhala ritual.

I therefore propose to discuss in this paper the field work in the Sinhala ritual that I engaged in the light of the most modern folkloristic field work techniques. In the final analysis one form of the ritual, namely the Raṭa Yakuma (to be described later) is taken as an example for field work to show how, though the ceremony has undergone many changes in the several provinces in the island, some of the important functional elements have remained constant throughout the country. Of these functional elements I propose to limit myself to the magical power of words and sound in the ritual. The proposed methodology of field work will be geared towards collecting the significant texts and the different types of drumming and the peeling of the bells etc. which are used to symbolise and heighten the powers of striving towards contact with ‘super human powers’. Thus specific attention

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1. Gershon Legman, *The Horn Book* (New Hyde Park, N.Y. 1964), p. 204.

2. Herbert Halpert, “Some Undeveloped areas in Folklore” *JAF* (1957), p. 299.

3. Alan Lomax “The Functional Aspects of Folklore” *JAF* 59 (1946), p. 510.

4. MacEdward Leach, “Problems in Collecting Folklore” *PMLA* 77 (1962), p. 335.

5. Richard M. Dorson, “Standards for Collecting and Publishing American Folktales” in “The Folktale” A Symposium, *JAF* 70 (1957), p. 54.

will be made on such verbal forms as prayers, songs, addresses etc. This verbal artistic communication is accompanied or supplemented by music in the form of drumming and the entire ritual is given a rhythmical simulation, Raṭa Yakuma. will therefore be subjected to a methodology of fieldwork in order to arrive at an understanding and an analysis of the magical power of the words and the sound (music) in the ritual.

In Sri Lanka hardly any folkloristic research has been undertaken in the light of the most up-to-date methods enunciated by authorities in the field. I shall be more than satisfied if the comments which follow will receive the attention of the scholars concerned towards working out a program of collecting folklore material. It would not be inappropriate to state that we in Sri Lanka have come to a stage in the words of Richard M. Dorson "to assert (our) cultural independence by reviving (our) original tongues and assiduously collecting the folk epics and sagas, verses and legends transmitted by (our) people in those tongues".<sup>6</sup>

## II

I proceed to analyse how certain collections in the Sinhala ritual were done by me. Secondly, the results of my efforts will be described and thirdly, I wish to comment on my own methodology. These comments are actually the results of my understanding more fully the methods and techniques of collecting folklore data as enunciated by modern folklore scholarship.

### *The Sinhala Ritual*

For the purpose of propitiation the supernatural beings are divided into two large categories—the demons and the gods. The rituals are performed in order to obtain general immunity from evil influence and to heal specific ailments. These rituals contain a considerable amount of mimetic, impersonation and dramatic interludes. I am not entering into a discussion on the ritual here; but mention should be made of three important ones which are referred to subsequently in this paper. They are:

- (1) *Raṭa Yakuma* (Litt. Ceremony of the Country Demons) which is performed "For the purpose of ensuring safe delivery to pregnant women and for protecting the child in the womb,

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6. Richard M. Dorson 'Current Folklore Theories' *Current Anthropology*, Vol. IV. 1963.

or for securing health to the infant already born, or in order to make a barren woman conceive.<sup>7</sup>

- (2) *Gam Maḍuva* (Ceremony of the Village Hall) is a ritual performed as “a manifestation of gratitude towards the deity and expresses the people’s happiness that the danger, has, at last, happily passed away. The performance of this ceremony may, upon occasion, be extended up to seven days and seven nights, and so actually becomes a village feast”.<sup>8</sup> It is also very often performed to bring good luck and prosperity to the entire community in the village.
- (3) *Hūniyam Kāpīma* (Cutting the Hūniyam Charm) is a magical rite intended to remove the influence of the Demon called Hūniyam who is supposed to be inflicting people with grievous diseases.

Neither Sarachchandra nor Paul Wirz in the above mentioned works has given the full texts of the rituals they had observed. I proceeded to record some of them when they were performed *in situ*. The ceremonies begin in the early hours of the evening and would go on till the following morning. On rare occasions the *gam maḍuva* ceremony would go on for a couple of days ranging from three to seven.

Collecting the Sinhala ritual material should comprehend a wider field than mere recording the texts and the dialogues. Since some scholars<sup>9</sup> have given summaries of some of the rituals the collector should proceed to record the entire ceremony from the beginning. Any of these or all of these ceremonies can be broadly divided into four parts. (1) The Preliminaries (2) Invitation (3) The Ceremony proper and (4) The finale.

Considering these four aspects of the ceremony (which will be discussed as the occasion arises) one should have a clear idea of what he is collecting and why he is collecting. It is rightly said that “without training in theory it is very unlikely that the collector will have any idea of what problems need solving”.<sup>10</sup> The collection of the texts alone does not cover the four aspects of the ceremony. The problem in the mind of the collector should be such that all the data in the four stages will

7. E. R. Sarachchandra, *The Folk Drama of Ceylon* (Department of Cultural Affairs, Ceylon, 1966), p. 38.

8. Paul Wirz, *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon* (Leiden, E. J. Brill 1954), p. 164.

9. Sarachchandra, pp. 20, 36, 37, 40.

10. Kenneth S. Goldstein, *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore* (Folklore Associates, Inc. Hatboro, Pennsylvania, 1964), p. 17.

be covered in full. A brief analysis of the four stages clearly shows how unscientific it is to limit the collection only to the ritual texts.

(1) *Preliminaries:*

Hitherto no one has taken pains to observe carefully and study seriously how the preliminary work is being attended to in the ritual. The exorcist constructs various miniature tables, chair stages, altars etc., using banana stems and young coconut leaves. These constructions are meant for the reception of the offerings, flowers, scents and medicinal herbs. The structures are adorned with flower motifs neatly made out of young coconut leaves.<sup>11</sup> This is a very elaborate process and only those who are really specialized in the work undertake to do it. The whole scene is given an artistic finish to the deep appreciation of the audience—especially the children. Though the preliminary work is elaborate and highly specialized it is purely a routine matter for the folk-priest who, while attending to this work is always available for a hearty discussion. At this juncture the collector does not have any problems as those envisaged—say in the words of Sidney O. Addy who says that the collector's "Conversation must lead up to the subject on which he desires information, and he should not begin by asking direct questions. You can begin by talking about the weather, and make the conversation lead up to anything you like".<sup>12</sup> The exorcist is really at ease and what is more, he invites any person in the vicinity just to talk to him. Very few ethnographers, if any at all, have made use of this opportunity to elicit information—say on the significance of the various flower and sacrificial stands that he is constructing. This is a situation where the collector does not have to resort to 'perseverance and setting up people at ease'.<sup>13</sup> It is not only the exorcists who show a liking to talk at this time, the village elders too who are now gathering round the place automatically get drifted towards the exorcists and one can observe the exchange of ideas, references to tales and anecdotes among one another. This is really an ideal situation is context referred to by Goldstein as—'a theory of folklore which treats the materials as oral art forms will result in the statement of problems leading to the collection of the materials in their fullest social and physical context'.<sup>14</sup>

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11. See plate one and two.

12. Sidney O. Addy, "The Collection of Folklore" *Folklore*, Vol. 13 (1902), p. 297-299.

13. Sidney O. Addy, p. 297.

14. Goldstein, p. 18.

(2) *Invitation:*

Once the preliminary work is over, the Chief of the family invites the folk priest to perform the ceremony. Although this was done in a formal manner in the past it is not practised now in the manner it used to be. I have not hitherto come across any folklorist in Sri Lanka referring to this aspect of the ritual. To the invitation is also included the patient's arrival to the arena. The patient is clad in a clean white cloth and sits on a stool or lies on a mat spread in front of the paraphernalia already arranged for the ceremony. As the patient sits, a pestle is kept parallel to him to divide the area of sanctity from the mundane world. These and such other details in the Invitation have not been so far carefully recorded.

(3) *The Ceremony Proper:*

Much collection has been done in the ceremony proper. There are many incidents or events which were thought to be insignificant but however they are really of much significance from the point of view of folklore.

(4) *The Finale:* is yet another important situation which has not been studied or collected seriously. The chief of the family thanks the exorcist who is subsequently given a gift. Of course the terms of the contract are either generally known or agreed upon well in advance by both parties.

The gift given is really cash but it cannot be seen as the money is covered inside betel leaves. Both the exorcist and the chief of the family appear to be very informal about it, but the exorcist knows that the correct amount is there. When the gift is given the final benediction is sung which no collector has ever bothered to record.

The elaborate details of the ritual have not been discussed here as they do not come under the purview of this paper. The four stages enumerated above clearly indicate to the collector a problem statement which could run as follows:- 'To collect all data of the ritual in their context so as to include all the stages of the ceremony in order to determine its cultural, sociological and ritualistic aspects'. Any other narrow premise is sure to limit the collector's scope and the imaginative approach, and he will collect only certain parts of the ceremony which in their own would be of less value without the connected cross relevant customs, beliefs and practices found in the ceremony taken as a whole.

If the problem is correctly set out at the beginning, however minor

a detail may be, it will be grouped in the collection. In this sense, the problem leads us to the best methods how the collecting should be done. To cite an example from my own experience, there was an occasion when a dramatic episode was recorded limiting the material to the texts alone.

This episode known as the 'Shooting of the Mango' is enacted to show the birth of Goddess Pattini. She is supposed to have been born from a mango. A large mango appears in a mango tree in the King's garden. The King is rather surprised and invites many an experienced archer to shoot the fruit. None was capable of doing it. The King of Gods Śakra—appears as an old weak man and offers to shoot the mango. He shoots the mango and as it falls, the Goddess emerges out of it. The entire episode is enacted in a highly poetic and entertaining dramatic language. The singing, drumming and the poetry is so captivating that even an experienced collector would miss such details as the situation of the mango tree (how it is planted in the arena), its ritual significance and above all how the exorcist invites the King of Gods to shoot the fruit. Since the entire episode symbolizes the fertility cult the collector should focus his attention to all the aspects of the ceremony whenever possible, especially when very minor rituals are performed. In other words the material and the data relevant to the fertility cult should not be overlooked.

Collecting ritual material very often makes one embarrassed especially when the collector has no idea of what the ritual is about. In order to be conversant with the implications of the ritual an exhaustive amount of prefield work preparation becomes necessary. The customs, the taboos of the same ceremony may differ from one area to another. As such the collector should be equipped with the social habits, traditional beliefs and any other background knowledge relevant to the people and the ceremony. If he is so equipped, the collector is to fulfill one of the requirements of Cohan—namely "In collecting folklore, one must keep the genuineness of the material uppermost in his mind. The ability to distinguish the true from the spurious is acquired with time and experience".<sup>15</sup> The collections made by me were preceeded by such material and experience except in one important aspect, and that is the available parallel collectanea. If an attempt is made to collect such collectanea it would afford the collector a good opportunity to question the exorcists during the spells of break in the night. The exorcists would engage with the collector in conversation while having tea or coffee dur-

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15. Richard Bauman, "Y. L. Cohan's Instructions on Collecting of Folklore", *New York Folklore Quarterly*, Vol. 18, 1962, p. 284.

ing the short intervals. Apart from the general questions put to them on such occasions the collector can base his questions on the same ritual material of other exorcist families.

“Once the collector reaches the region in which his field work is to be done, he must be guided by one objective: to establish rapport as quickly as possible and to maintain such rapport through the duration of his stay”.<sup>16</sup> Though primarily this statement refers to a field worker who intends to stay in a given locality for sometime, this is a key guideline which applies to any form of collecting. Establishing and maintenance of rapport with the exorcists sometimes lead one to sensitive situations. Herskovits has correctly said that “the question of rapport, in essence, goes beyond training and enters into the difficult and subtle field of the individual sensitivity of the research worker”.<sup>17</sup>

Very often the informants are over-enthusiastic and are eager to (a) hear in play back what was recorded and (b) to see that their names and the exorcistic family in particular mentioned in the tape. This can normally be done by way of an explanatory note read out to the tape. These two procedures help to establish good relations with the informants. However a serious lapse on this question of establishing good rapport can occur if the collector’s communications are mainly with the chief exorcist, or his second in command. In a substantially large ceremony like Gammaḍuva, there are a large number of folk-priests, and the collector should make every attempt to establish friendly contacts with most of them, because each one has a different role to play in the ceremony. In other words “The first requisite of a collector is that he should be in the highest degree sympathetic, and able distinctively to put himself in the right footing with his informant. Not an inferior footing; that would be to make himself despised; on the other hand, *the smallest assumption of the inferiority of his informant will lead to certain failure*”.<sup>18</sup> (emphasis mine).

Once rapport is established, it is not so difficult to maintain it as long as one keeps in communication with the folk priests. An occasional letter to them inquiring about their health, etc. is a very welcome way to show that the collector has not forgotten them. Being a member of

16. Goldstein, p. 47.

17. Melville J. Herskovits, “Some Problems of Method in Ethnography” in *Method and Perspective in Anthropology*, ed. Robert R. Spencer (Minneapolis), p. 11.

18. Walter Skeat, “The Collection of Folklore” *Folklore*, Vol. 13, p. 307–310.

the same nationality the folk priest would certainly invite the collector for a wedding of his son or daughter or that of the member of the troupe. This is the best opportunity for one not only to appreciate his services, but also to reward him either in cash or in gifts.

In maintaining good relations with the informants one observes an important, but simple factor which has not been hitherto practised by anybody in Sri Lanka. I refer to what Goldstein says in the following words:

“Informal socializing is one of the best means of rapport maintenance and will supply the collector with an opportunity to see his informant friends at ease”.<sup>19</sup> Extending invitations for afternoon tea or coffee to the folk priest in Sri Lanka would really entail a certain amount of difficulties on both sides. According to the social structure of the society the exorcists belong to a lower caste called Nekati. Presuming that they accept an invitation for tea etc., and come to the collector’s home, they will never be at ease. They will never sit with the collector in the sitting room or in the parlour. Such a situation would really create certain problems which make them embarrassed. The only alternative open therefore is to take them home uninvited or call them home on the pretext of discussing some important matter and engage in conversation without making it obvious that they had come for tea etc. On such occasions they would normally seek a low stool or chair to sit with the collector. (Practically in every Sinhala home, there are a few low stools or chairs meant to be offered to people of lower castes).

The Sinhala ritual has so far been collected purely as an observer. Of course the method of interview too can be used in eliciting any important information either not understood or needing clarification. In the ceremony in its natural context, the presence of the collector does not in anyway change the situation. As such even if a foreigner were to be present it would not lead to such a position described in the following words: “the very fact that his (collector’s) presence has been noted may change the naturalness of the situation to such a degree that an artificial situation is created”.<sup>20</sup> The ceremony is highly formal and the collector has freedom to follow up every detail minutely. The Sinhala ritual is also one of “those which the traditional performers cannot perform naturally in any context other than the real one”.<sup>21</sup>

After realizing the importance of the participant observer, it now

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19. Goldstein, p. 70.

20. Goldstein, p. 80.

21. Goldstein, p. 85.

occurs to me as to why the collector should not (especially if he is not a foreigner) take a minor role in the ceremony. It is granted that the ritual is a highly specialized undertaking; however there are a few minor roles like the ringing of the hand bells or repeating the blessings in more or less a chorus form, which can be performed by anybody. An important role which fascinated me was drumming which can be learned with some practice. Apart from being merely an observer, being a participant observer will make the collector 'one of them' with the priests. I am sure such a situation would be advantageous to the collector to gather material which are considered to be esoteric. No person in Sri Lanka has so far attempted to collect ritual material in the role of a participant observer. This a new idea which would be profitably introduced. In order to obtain the advantages of both—onlooker and participant observer—the collector can attend the same ceremony twice in the two roles.

The method of the 'induced natural context' cannot be satisfactorily brought out in the ritual. I tried this once. I did not have some significant dramatic episode in my collection. I arranged a certain exorcist to enact the episode. The first result was very unsatisfactory. He admitted that he could not get even the words properly without the real context—namely the drummers, the sacrificial altars, audience etc. I impressed on him that I cannot get the sacrificial altars etc., but I would certainly get an audience and a drummer. On the following day the services of two drummers were obtained and about fifteen to twenty friends of mine formed the audience. The results were marvelous.<sup>22</sup>

The question of what to observe in a ritual needs discussion here. This should actually be defined by the collector's problem statement. However, it is important to observe that the ritual cannot be broken down into several sections for the convenience of the collector. This was exactly the initial mistake done by many in trying to collect only the textual material. Since all the components of the ritual are inter-related to one another it is desirable to conceive the ideal situation mentioned by Goldstein—i.e. "to supply the greatest amount of reliable information to the largest number of potential users of such information".<sup>23</sup> D. Benj. Paul has mentioned that this would be impossible as the collector "cannot be everywhere at the same time and he can never be sensitive literally to everything that occurs even within his own field

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22. The tapes are in the author's library.

23. Goldstein, *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*, p. 9.

of view, much less record it all in its manifest complexity"<sup>24</sup> Paul is really speaking of a wider area of collection. This difficulty does not arise in the ritual provided of course there are at least two other competent persons to help the collector.

The rituals can be recorded on the spot and any observations necessary are in fact noted down either on the same night or subsequently after consulting the folk priests. In recording the material, the procedure hitherto followed in Sri Lanka can be summarised as follows: No preliminary stage activities were recorded. When the ceremony proper began, nothing was taped until such time the exorcist would come out with the entertaining dramatic episodes and the singing of the hymns. On certain occasions the hymns could not be heard clearly as the singing is drowned by the drumming. As such no recording was done until such time it was quite obvious that the text was clearly sung. Once the recording was completed on this basis, the collector proceeds to select the most audible texts and re-edit the material.

It is now patently clear that the procedure followed has been thoroughly unscientific as such a collection goes contrary to what has been said in the following principles. "Selection is in itself a factor of interpretation; and when one adds to this the bias which may result from the collector's temperament and outlook, among other unmeasurable factors which may crucially influence selection, one becomes aware of the immense problem in trying to distinguish between interpretation and observation".<sup>25</sup>

The equipment used in collecting the ritual is mostly a battery operated tape recorder. An extra supply of wires become very handy when the recorder has to be located substantially away from the arena of dancing. The hymns are sung normally while dancing in a circular fashion covering an area of ten to twelve feet. Very often the blessings and the benedictions too are uttered while walking up and down in dancing steps so that the microphone cannot pick up all what is uttered.

The more important method of interview collecting is very helpful in the ritual in eliciting information regarding esoteric hymns and charms. In the Hūniyan Kāpīma ceremony several hymns are sung with force of vocal manipulation that the listener is bound to get into a trance. The priests believe that the efficacy of the ceremony is mainly based on these magical hymns, which are never parted with unless to the eldest

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24. D. Benj. Paul, "Interview Techniques of Field Relationship", *Anthropology Today*, Chicago, 1953, p. 430-51.

25. Goldstein, p. 95.

son or if there is no son, to the most senior pupil. Two attempts were made to record these hymns and both ended in failure. I did not venture to explore the possibility of the interview method to procure this material. Perhaps on a future occasion, the interview might help to obtain these hymns.

It has to be admitted that exhaustive personal data required by modern folklore scholarship has not been obtained from these folk priests. Only the names of the chief exorcists in the ceremonies were noted down. Other vital data such as the traditional family background, esthetics of the informants and the exorcists' repertoires have not been collected. Especially in the event of a need to follow up a certain ceremony, the exorcists' repertoires would be extremely useful.

The exorcists do differ from one area to another in performance and even in the use of the magical hymns and as such their own observations on other traditions might not only clear certain misconceptions, but also bring more material to the collector. This would also help the collector to make a search for variants in the same ceremony, which ultimately help him to check his data. As far as the checking of data is concerned three important steps have been enunciated: They are,

- (1) "to supplement interview data with observation and vice versa, whatever the frame of reference may be",
- (2) to conduct interviews on the same subject with other informants,
- (3) to conduct several interviews on the same subject with the informants".<sup>26</sup>

Of these three important stages only the first step has been followed as far as the ritual is concerned. Needless to say that the other two methods are not only easy to be achieved in the case of the ritual, but also would be a very much welcome feature to understand the ritual more meaningfully.

Personal history documents of the exorcists is one aspect on which hitherto no work at all has been done. The kind of data which should be included in such documents should be collected as early as possible at a time when some of the star performers are living. The rapid urbanisation of the village and the free education from the kindergarten up to the University, have mainly diverted the children of the exorcists' families to seek employment which are considered socially higher than performing the rituals. As a result the question has already arisen

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26. Goldstein, p. 113.

whether in time to come the tradition of the ritual would completely disappear. It has therefore become all the more necessary to compile personal history documents pertaining to these informants. The twenty guiding lines enumerated by Goldstein<sup>27</sup> with suitable modifications would serve as a basis to work on these personal data documents.

Let us now come to the question of remuneration to the informants. As far as the ritual goes, the exorcists are normally paid by the party who solicits their services. This does not absolve the collector from being involved in this question. In normal circumstances, the folk-priest would never accept money from a collector. Of course, the Sinhala New Year week affords a very good opportunity for the collector to compensate the informants. I have a few exorcists who visit me during this period (visiting homes during the New Year Week is done as a mark of recognition and allegiance). They normally come with their wives and children so that gifts in the form of clothes, toys, etc., can be given to them.

Alcohol, certainly forms an important role in the ritual. It may be quite correct, if I were to say that no folk-priest would summon up courage and enthusiasm to perform without having alcohol. It is in a sense, a part of the ceremony! In Sri Lanka, consuming liquor is regarded as something contrary to the normal precepts. As such the exorcist would in fact refrain from taking alcohol when he is interviewed or in the company of someone not too closely associated or friendly on equal footing. It is interesting to note that even in the ritual performance liquor is served to the exorcist in a very very secret way. They would just creep into a room where the bottles would be kept. The procedure is known only to the chief of the family and to the exorcists only; but the fact that they are under liquor is known practically by everybody in the audience. If alcohol is to be served by the collector, he has to be diligent and careful.

The observations made in this paper on the theory of collecting folklore material are purely a self criticism of the writer in order to understand meaningfully the implications involved in collecting folklore. Since this self criticism is based on the actual field work done, the discussion was limited to that extent of field work—namely the collection of the Sinhala ritual. As a result important issues on field work, such as the role of a complete outsider working in an alien community has been overlooked. However, it has to be admitted that the exercise of

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27. *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*, p. 126.

applying the theory of collecting to the exact experiences encountered by the writer and the attempt to evaluate the work done so far have been very fruitful and meaningful in understanding the modern methodology of folklore collection.

Consequent to the self criticism of the collecting projects undertaken by me I now proceed to demonstrate a methodology of collecting data from the ceremony known as Raṭa Yakuma with the specific object of examining the magical powers of the words and the sound (music) in this ritual.

The problems posed here are as follows:

- (1) To what extent does the Raṭa Yakuma exploit the auditory communications such as songs, blessings, prayers, charms, addresses and explanations in order to produce a ritual-drama as Vera Laski says 'the essential aspect of which is coming into contact with the supernatural through the arrival of the Gods'.<sup>28</sup>
- (2) How does the folk priest arrange his ritual in a given sequence so as to produce a heightened effect at the close of the various scenes of the ritual.<sup>29</sup>
- (3) How important is the relative efficacy of
  - (a) sacred/esoteric language and
  - (b) mundane language used in the ritual.
- (4) How far the emotive use of the language especially in a given situation is intensified by the use of drums and other instrumental accompaniments and how independent to recitation, these drummings, ringing of bells and the playing of the flute are well patterned to achieve the desired effect—of the ritual—namely a mode of communication with the other world and obtain blessings.

In order to discuss the procedure of collecting data to unravel the problems stated above, I shall be using four sources of the ritual ranging from the oldest extant material up to a collection done in December 1968.

The four sources are:

- (1) Callaway, John (Tr.) *Yakun Naṭanavā*, London, Printed for the Oriental Translation Fund, sold by J. Murray 1829.
- (2) Paul Wirz, *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1954.

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28. *Seeking Life* (memoirs of American Folklore Society, Vol. 50, Philadelphia, 1959), p. 89.

29. See Plates Three and Four.

- (3) E. R. Sarachchandra, *The Folk Play of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1962.
- (4) The Writer's Field Work (on tape).

Based on these four sources the structure of the ritual and the importance of each step in relation to the problem statement is examined in the following analysis. For purposes of clarity I do not venture to comment on other aspects of the ritual which were generally discussed in the second part of this paper. I therefore propose to construct a hypothetical field methodology which would specifically answer my problem statement.

The Raṭa Yakuma ceremony is essentially a ceremony "performed for the purpose of ensuring safe delivery to pregnant women and for protecting the child in the womb or for securing health to the infant already born, or in order to make a barren woman conceive.<sup>30</sup> Along with this ceremony it is often the practice to make an effigy of the demon Kalu Kumāra and make an offering to him, because this demon is said to be closely associated with the group of demons known as Raṭa Yakku".<sup>31</sup>

The legend on which the ceremony is based should be briefly stated in order to understand the various stages of the ritual. Black Prince (Kalu Kumāra) is a demon dreaded by women and girls as he can inflict pain and illness and make them barren. He has seven barren queens as his assistants. These are the daughters of Queen Riddi, and they have the power to make women barren. When the Raṭa Yakuma ceremony is performed and the seven queens along with the 'Black Prince' are propitiated the patient (a barren woman) may conceive.

In order to examine the issues involved in the problem statement one to four the collector should proceed to look for all such auditory—communicative data from the summoning up of the demons up to their propitiation and obtaining the desired results. In this particular exorcism ceremony the folk priest uses a series of verbal forms which accompany other acts such as dancing, miming, etc. These verbal forms have to be collected and in order of sequence they can be divided into three major divisions. They are Mantra (spells) Kannalavva (appeals) and Kaviya (verses). Paul Wirz says that "the ceremony is opened by the Hāndā Pidīma (evening offering) which is the first thing that has to be presented to all the Yakku collectively".<sup>32</sup> Wirz goes on to say that the

30. See Plate Five.

31. Sarachchandra, p. 38.

32. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, p. 67.

“ceremony is accompanied by Mantra and recitations, the offerings are presented while the Ādurā dances to and fro with a torch and a fan in his hand. He wears ribbons decorated with bells around his calves and his dance is accompanied by the music of the drums”.<sup>33</sup> Sarachchandra gives a fuller description of the beginnings of the ceremony. According to him the ‘Evening offering consists of invocatory stanzas to all the demons . . . accompanied by drumming, dancing and notes produced on a reed flute’.<sup>34</sup> John Callaway does not describe the beginnings of the ceremony but only gives a translation of some of the spells and we are unaware as to how the ceremony was conducted in the first decade of the 19th century. The ritual witnessed by the writer recently more or less conforms to the Sarachchandra description.

The Second stage of the ceremony is a conversation which ensues between the chief exorcist or the drummer or two or three folk priests who represent Queen Riddi. Here a conversation occurs as to the purpose of the ceremony. A long discussion centers round the patient.

Thirdly the exorcists begin to narrate at length in chanted verses the legend of Queen Riddi and her seven barren daughters.<sup>35</sup> The legend is very often acted in mimic and gesticulation. Paul Wirz describes this situation in the following words “Quicker and quicker the rolling of the drums sound, announcing the beginning of the dance, while the Edura incessantly blows his whistle”.<sup>36</sup> This is a scene enacted with much vigour consisting of wild leaps, turns and fast whirling spinning himself like a top. When one dancer is exhausted, another takes his place. This lasts two to three hours.

Lastly the seven barren queens appear and begin to perform what is called a twelve-fold ritual. The important aspect in the twelve-fold ritual is that all the miming acts are supplemented by a deep and rhythmic beat of the drum. The seven barren queens show that they weave a cloth to Dipankara Buddha and as a result of that merit they are conceived. Once the whole procedure is enacted the chief exorcist comes to the arena with an infant (doll), he sits on a stool, washes the baby and sings a lullaby. Paul Wirz says that the Black Prince is finally given an offering<sup>37</sup> which enables the patient to obtain the blessings. The ceremony witnessed by the writer had the exorcist carrying the baby

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33. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, p. 67.

34. *The Folk Drama of Ceylon*, p. 38.

35. See Plate Four.

36. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, p. 68.

37. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, p. 69.

and giving it over to the patient thus symbolically indicating to her that she will be conceived.

The description of the ritual was thus arbitrarily divided into four sections in order to focus the area of data which should be collected in keeping with the problem statement.

- (1) It should now be clear that the spells, Mantra, should be collected in full—especially in the commencement of the ceremony. The spells, appeals to gods and the descriptive verses, all must be recorded. The spell is merely muttered by the exorcist and it is very often unheard, by the audience. These constitute secret knowledge and it is left to the persevering collector to explore the possibility of collecting same. The invocatory chantings should show how the exorcist employs the language to persuade and entreat the demons to come to the arena to accept the offerings. These invocations are rich with allusions to myth and legends and the heroic deeds of the demons thus creating an atmosphere most suited to the occasion. It is very likely that the spells and the appeals in the commencing section of the ceremony had not undergone many changes. Collections from the various provinces should show how far (if any) the changes have occurred.

In order to assess as to how the folk priest exploits the verbal forms to perform his function effectively the collector should then proceed to collect the verses which run through the entire ceremony. He will observe that the verses are composed in a highly lyrical and literary style which appeal to the audience, and thus play an important role in creating the desired atmosphere for the ceremony. As in many folk oral literatures<sup>38</sup> repetition is a very common and welcome feature in these verses. The rhythm is often lengthy and it is quite obvious that the redundancy and the lengthy recital serve a functional purpose—namely easier understanding and an indirect entertainment. All these aspects have to be understood well by the collector before he proceeds to collect the data.

- (2) The sequence of progression as described earlier is quite clear in this ritual. The collector should find no difficulty in following the pattern if he has the necessary background in relation to the legends etc. on which the ceremony is based. He should be aware of every minor detail so that he will not miss any important aspect which links one episode with another. The collector should be

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38. Levi-Strauss, Claude. 'The Structural Study of the *Myth*' in *Myth: A Symposium*. Ed. Thomas A. Sebok, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1958, p. 65.

very vigilant in the third stage of the ceremony when the legends of Queen Riddi and her seven daughters are narrated in verses. The collector's data should be able to focuss how the folkpriest follows a certain sequence in the four stages mentioned above; culminating in the symbolic birth of a child. Every item in the Twelve Ritual Forms which lead to the desired result should be collected.

- (3) The third aspect of the problem statement is the most important one. The spells in the ritual are considered unintelligible (and certainly they are in some parts) and this language is rightly called the Yakṣa Bhāṣā—the language of the demons. The collector should be able to find out how the spells are worded and pronounced. Whenever Hindu Gods are mentioned, highly Sanskritized words and phrases are used and when Buddha or the Buddhist doctrine is mentioned the Pali expressions are common. The most interesting feature is the phrases and sections of the spells devoted to the demons themselves. Apparently as no one knows what language the demons use, the exocist quite correctly uses a mixture of Sanskrit, Sinhalese, Telligu, Malayalam etc. which ultimately result in unintelligible expressions.

It may be that the spells look non-sensical but as far as the audience and the patients are concerned this is the language by which any sort of communication can be arrived at with the demons. This sacred or esoteric language gives the priest the power of interaction with the demons.<sup>39</sup> This brings us to the wider question of the relative efficacy of the sacred, esoteric and the mundane/profane language. Although any comment on this aspect is outside the scope of this paper, it should be mentioned that the collector should realize the importance of the sacred and the profane language and collect data pertaining to both.<sup>40</sup>

- (4) An anthropologist R. Needham<sup>41</sup> has raised the question 'why is noise that is produced by striking or striking so widely used in order to communicate with the other world?' It is a common notion that the folk priest's communication with the spirits is partially achieved by drumming. In the commencing section of Rata

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39. Compare for example a statement regarding the RG VEDIC hymns. "One of the poets even claims the power, enabling him to kill the great (demons) through the hymns. . . . This power came to him through ancestral tradition. Potdas, K. R. *Sacrific in the RG VEDA*, Bombay, 1953, p. 25.

40. See Malinowski, *Magic Science and Religion and other Essays*, 1948, p. 53.

41. 'Percussion and Transition', *Man*, Vol. 2, pp. 606-14.

Yakuma, the exorcist actually calls the demons by way of communicating with them through the drums, the peeling of the bells, playing the rattle flute, etc. "All over the world it is found that percussion, by any means whatever that will produce it permits or accompanies communication with the other world".<sup>42</sup> In the Raṭa Yakuma the 'percussion' can be broadly divided into two sections.

- (1) The musical or rhythmical drumming to intensify the effect of chanting and recitation.
- (2) Percussion per se which is strictly addressed to the demons. In this the exorcist uses a drum called the 'Yak Beraya' (Demon Drum).

In the first category, the collector should be sensitive enough to discern as to how the exorcist makes himself more expressive through the melody engendered by the rhythmic music of the drums. An understanding of the normal rhythm of chanting and recitation is a prerequisite for the collection if he is not to bypass any important aspect. It would also help him to observe the general reaction of the audience generated by musical effects and the recitation.

The second aspect of communicating with the outside world is not only an interesting phenomena but also a difficult task for the collector. It is interesting because not much of research has been done on this esoteric communication media and it is difficult to collect because at least as far as the Raṭa Yakuma is concerned no standard musicological category could explain the frantic noise making indulged in by the priest. It is therefore extremely necessary for the collector to collect this 'percussion' from as many variants of this ritual as possible in order to arrive at a fruitful conclusion of the general musicological standards involved in it. What is quite apparent in the whole process is that the drummers drumming at this point of contact with the demons is brought to such an intensity that the aurally generated emotions tend to transform some members of the audience into a trance. Very often the patient herself falls into to a trance and this moment is traditionally explained as the arrival of the demons to the arena. Needham tries to explain this phenomena when he says that 'there is no doubt that the sound waves have heard and organic effects on human beings, irrespective of the cultural formation of the latter. The reverberations produced by musical instruments thus have not only aesthetic but bodily

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42. Needham, p. 607.

effects'.<sup>43</sup> But he does leave the question of 'communicating with the other world' open excepting his suggestion that there are 'rites de passage' as evident in 'percussion' in other areas such as marriage, accession to office, inauguration of an important event etc. I believe that the collector who is aware of problems of this magnitude would be our ideal field worker.

The field worker should now be in a position to confront the audience as to how they reacted to the chanting, the percussion etc. and elicit more information to work on his problem. He is also in a position to examine the folk priests themselves as to how and why they employ such various devices to achieve the desired results. As his field work proceeds in the various areas of the country the collector will have sufficient data to examine and analyze whether the primary functional elements of the magical power of words and percussion had undergone any substantial change.

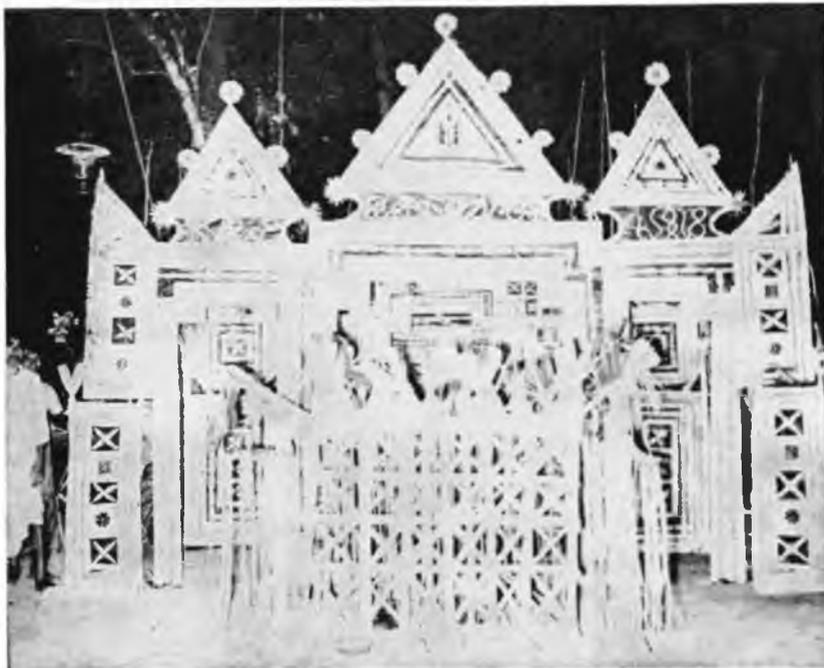
A collection of data in Raṭa Yakuma in all its kinesic, verbal and musical aspects by means of extensive recordings and photographic documents with special reference to the above proposed approach would certainly result in a wealth of folkloristic material in the form of tapes, photographs and texts.

This data would not only meet the requirements of the problems presented earlier but also would be made available for other scholars to check against intensive depth interviewing of both participants and audiences of these rituals to arrive at an overt expressive understanding of ethno terminology and emic value judgements concerning the performance and the belief systems involved.

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43. Needham, p. 610.



Plates One and Two—The ritual altars are adorned with flower motifs neatly made out of young coconut leaves.



Plate Three—The folk priest with his mask has climbed to the top of the altar.



Plate Four—Chanting verses and mimicry produces heightened effect at the close of the various scenes of the ritual.



Plate Five—The Raça Yakuma is here performed to make a barren woman conceive.

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- S. G. Samarasinghe, B. A. (Hons.) Ceylon 1952, M.A. (University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.), 1969.
- Residency, Ratnapura, Sri Lanka, Telephone Ratnapura 315.
1. Member of the Ceylon Administrative Service 1953.
  2. Assistant Rubber Controller, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1954-1966.
  3. Leader of Ceylon Delegation to the Asian Writers' Conference held in Bangkok 1962 (sponsored by the Poets, Essayists, and Novelists.)
  4. Winner of the Ceylon Literary Award for the best translation, 1962.
  5. Assistant Director of Cultural Affairs, 1966.
  6. Secretary, UNESCO National Book Trust of Ceylon, 1967.
  7. Secretary, National Theatre Trust of Ceylon, 1967.
  8. Secretary, Prime Minister's Cultural Awards Council of Ceylon, 1968.
  9. Visiting Lecturer in Sinhala Literature, Vidyodaya University of Ceylon, 1964-1968.
  10. Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, since 1968.
  11. Co-Editor, Samskṛti (Culture) The only Sinhala Cultural Quarterly which has survived for sixteen years of continuous publication. It is dedicated to create a climate of free thought, induce new writing and subject traditional and contemporary thought to constant re-valuation.
  12. Presently Government Agent, Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka.

*The Author.*

Mr. S. G. Samarasinghe, B. A. (Hons.) (Ceylon), M. A. (University of Pennsylvania) joined the Sri Lanka Administrative Service in 1953. Since then he has served the Sri Lanka Government as Assistant Rubber Controller in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1954-1966; Assistant Director of Cultural Affairs, 1966; Secretary, UNESCO National Book Trust of Ceylon,

1967; Secretary, National Theatre Trust of Ceylon, 1967; Secretary, Prime Minister's Cultural Awards Council of Ceylon, 1968; and Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1969. He is presently the Government Agent, Ratnapura District.

In 1962 Mr. Samrasinghe led the Ceylon Delegation to the Asian Writers' Conference sponsored by the P. E. N. (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) held in Bangkok. In the same year he won the Ceylon Literary Award for the best translation of the year awarded by the Sri Lanka Sahitya Mandalaya. From 1964 to 1968 he lectured in Sinhala Literature at the Vidyodaya University of Ceylon. Since 1953 he is serving as Co-Editor of *Samskr̥ti* (Culture) the only Sinhala Cultural Quarterly which has survived so long of continuous publication. It is dedicated to create a climate of free thought, induce new writing and subject traditional and contemporary thought to constant re-valuation. In 1977 Mr. Samrasinghe scripted, composed the lyrics and directed a full length Sinhala Film *ASA* (desire) based on the theme that man's desire has no limits.—Editor, *AFSt*.

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