

Lime for Aswaha Katawaha

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Believers place great faith in these strings of lime and chilli

To the world, lime may have a thousand uses. To the Sri Lankan, it has a thousand and one. Cut into two, it will bring blessing and slay the evil eye of envy.

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A string of lime and chillies is hung at entrances for protection from the evil eye

For centuries the Sri Lankan mind has been scared of envy's evil eye casting doom on prosperity. Those who are visited by good fortune take good care to conceal it from the

public gaze lest their prosperity attracts the envious eye or the tongue of praise that may turn new found riches to ruin.

Unlike the westerners who say 'touch wood, touch gold' and leave it at that when praise is received, many Sri Lankans go the extra mile and delve into the mystic arts of an unforgotten past to find protection.

Age old belief holds that cutting 21 limes in half will eliminate evil's negative forces and adorn one in invisible armour of divine, positive forces. But it's not as simple as taking a knife and halving 21 lime fruits. There's an elaborate and sacred ceremony, performed by Buddhist monks. First an auspicious date and time are chosen for the ritual. On that day, the person must be a vegetarian and should be dressed in white. A coconut oil lamp will be lit along with joss sticks while a dun kabala (incense burner) with burning coconut shells will also be placed. Amidst chanting, limes are cut in half over the believer's head, stomach and foot with the giraya (areca nut cutter). The two halves will be thrown into a bowl of water and if the open face contains any dark blotches, it is said that the force of the evil eye is strong. Once the ritual is complete, believers are filled with a feeling that all will be well. At least for sometime, they feel protected by a shield of lime.

A pooja with lime is performed by the Iyer or Poosari of Amman Kovils to dispel undesirable energy affecting an individual. Focusing on the lime's disinfectant properties, it is offered to all forms of Goddess Durga seeking negative vibes to be dispelled. Devotees, mostly women, garland the goddess with a wreath of lime, convert lime peels to lamps beseeching protection for themselves and loved ones or offer limes to be placed by the priest on a Trisulam to seek blessings.

Lime is used to bless households and places of business. In many homes and shops, it's common to see a string of lime hung at the entrances as a protective charm. The lime is first blessed by the clergy and then interned at the four corners of the residence to protect the household from the evil eye of the envious. This is usually changed every Friday and the old lime, said to have absorbed the negative energy, is burnt.



Lamps made of lime skin are lit with ghee at Amman Kovils, especially during Rahu time on Tuesdays

When a new vehicle is purchased, it is almost a tradition in Sinhalese and Tamil cultures for the owner to take it to the kovil or devalaya of his faith and worship. They make offerings of fruits to the deity, topped up with four limes. The priest will place it before the statue and chant blessing and prayers requesting that no accident will befall the vehicle. At the Buddhist temples too, after tying a pirith noola on the vehicle, monks bless the fruit and hang it on the front-most part of the vehicle. Four blessed limes will be placed against each tyre and the vehicle will drive over it, squashing the lime and crushing any misfortune with it.

Though small in size, the lime is associated with mighty powers. Beliefs held dear by the islanders, who place their hopes for protection on this petite green fruit.

