

Sinhala and Tamil New Year Celebration in Sri Lanka

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The New Year celebration falls in April every year. Though it is celebrated in Sri Lanka, some Sri Lankans who reside in other countries participate in it on the same day at the same time as well. That's the important thing in this New Year celebration. What's the reason for that? The reason is that the New Year celebration depends on the sun's movement according to the lunar calendar. As this month is April, it is called 'Bak' in Sinhala. Therefore it is famous from ancient times as 'Bak Maha Ulela' or April New Year Celebration. Bak is derived from the Sanskrit word Bhaṅgya, which means fortune.

On the other hand, it signifies the reaping of the First Harvest in the year by the farming communities in villages. According to astrology, these customs and rituals portray the beliefs and thoughts of the village people, which depend on the auspicious times. Its unique thing is that they inaugurate it with their family, relatives, and neighbors and fulfill religious rituals.

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When the New Year season is reaching, we can see many signs like fresh leaves growing in trees and flowers blooming on trees, especially 'Erabadu Mal', a specialized flower for this season, and plenty of fruits: mangoes, rambutans (a tropical fruits) avocados, and jack fruits. Besides that, they believe that a particular bird is singing on trees, named 'Kowula', giving the sign of the New Year. Unlike in the town area, village folks prepare special food and clothes for the New Year. They ripe plantains and make sweet- meats like Kevum, Kokis, Athirasa, Aggala, Aasmi, and Aluwa. They make or buy unique clothes suitable for the ceremony, according to astrology auspicious times. For this purpose, they repair, clean, and decorate houses to give them a new look. But the town folks, unlike the villages, have

everything in markets. But what they cannot buy, like village people, is the nature of the mental and physical feelings when the New Year dawns because most people have left for their own villages.

Before the New Year dawns, they have to view the moon for the old year and the new moon the next day for the New Year. According to the astrology guidance, they schedule them at an auspicious time on the day of the festival by applying specified herbs.

These rituals are being fulfilled during 'Nonagathaya' or the neutral period, which astrologers could not calculate. It means they prevent all types of work and dealings and engage in religious activities during this period.

According to the astrologers, the New Year dawns on the 14th of April every year, and they prepare the traditional meal named 'Kiribath' or milk rice. On this occasion also, there is an auspicious time to light the hearth, facing a specified direction. Before that, they boil milk in a new earthen pot, which overflows on auspicious times, symbolizing prosperity. After that, they must engage in limited work and dealings and consume milk rice with sweetmeats.

Another prominent feature is respecting the elders by offering a sheaf of betel and receiving blessings from their parents. In addition, they exchange presents and greetings with relations and friends to renew the relationship and forget mistakes among them and keep up calm and well-being in society. On the other hand, New Year means fulfilling customs, rituals, and time for entertainment.

Traditionally, they organize many games at the beginning of the New Year, like Olinda keliya, Raban gasima, bicycle races, and marathons. They also plant trees as a hobby, which is essential for the country and globally. Finally, I wish all our readers and everyone good health and a peaceful New Year without any sorrow and trouble. Subha Aluth Avuruddak Wewa!

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