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A comparative analysis of Bharatamuni's Natyashastra on Sri Lankan– Sabaragamuwa Pahan Madu ritual

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Abstract: The rituals used in Sinhalese culture namely *bali*, *thovil*, and *madu* can be characterized by three Sri Lankan regional dance traditions, Upcountry, Low country, and Sabaragamuwa. The aim of this research is to explore and comparatively analyze the influence of the Indian classic Natyashastra of Bharatmuni on the *Pahan Madu* ritual practiced in the cities of Kalawana, Ratnapura, Balangoda, and Badulla of Sri Lanka. Ethnographic research using pictures, audio-video recordings, interviews, observations, and field notes for collecting data has been used. Elements of a comparative case study were used for data analysis. This study identified that the Sri Lankan Sabaragamu *Pahan Madu* curative ritual has several similar characteristics to Nruththa, Nruthya, and Naatya of Natyashastra written by the Indian theatrologist and musicologist Bharatamuni during the first century. The preparations of *Pahan Madu* performance arena apply similar prerequisites to the theatre mentioned by Bharatamuni in the Natyashastra. The four main parts of abhinaya presented in Natyashastra are also depicted by the actors performing in the *Pahan Madu* ritual. Even though the *Pahan Madu* ritual demonstrates the influences of Bharatamuni's Natyashastra, some of its characteristics have been replaced because of the influence of the Buddhist culture.

Keywords: Bharatamuni, Rituals, *Sabaragamu Pahan Madu*, Sri Lanka

Introduction

In Sri Lankan society, some people tend to believe that certain illnesses cannot be healed through either western medicine or indigenous medicine but only could be healed through appropriate ritualistic treatment. These are called curative or therapeutic rituals. These rituals are performed in order to restore the psychological and physical equilibrium of an individual who is believed to be under the influence of a supernatural being. A ritual, according to Penner (2016), is the performance of ceremonial actions prescribed by tradition or by priestly edict. Every known society practices ritual, which can be described as a distinct and observable behavior. As a result, rituals can be used to define or categorize individuals. A ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to a set sequence (Bell, 1990; 2009). Rituals are consisting of dramatic elements, drumming, emotional expressions, and singing (Kottegoda, 2018).

When a ritual is performed, it can affect the ill persons mentally (Schumaker, 1992). As a result, the illness will be healed. This kind of treatment comes with a mental effect (Jacobs, 1992). Therefore, the rituals can be defined as a mental treatment system. Even though rituals emanated from ancient times, the Sri Lankan (Ceylonese) rituals were written in an orderly manner during the 15th-century Sinhalese kingdom of *Kotte*. During this time, the educated Buddhist monks such as venerable Weedagama Maithree thero and venerable Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula thero have documented the rituals for blessing the ill people as a mental treatment system that is performed within one whole night.

The rituals which are being used in Sinhalese cultures such as *Bali*, *Thovil*, and *Madu* can be characterized by three Sri Lankan regional dance traditions, Upcountry (Kandyan Dance Tradition), Low country (*Pahatharata*), and Sabaragamuwa. These dance traditions or genres carry the same names of places where they originated from. Kandyan dance, also known as "Upcountry dance," is a Sri Lankan dance tradition, popular in the upcountry areas of Sri Lanka, in districts and towns called, Mahanuwara, Udunuwara, Yatinuwara, Sat Korale, Satara Korale, Dumbara, and Harispattuwa (Dissanayake, 1994). Kandyan dance is one of

the most well-known Sinhala dance forms. The "Low Country" dance, which is considered to be another main tradition of Sri Lanka's classical dance forms (Dissanayake, 1994), is prevalent in Sri Lanka's southern and western provinces (Dissanayake, 1994). Kottegoda recognizes three sub-traditions of this dance, which he categorizes as "Raigam korala," "Bentara," and "Matara" (Kottegoda, 2009) but Dissanayake categorises these traditions as "Bentara," "Matara," and "Colombo" (Dissanayake, 1994). The Sabaragamu dance tradition is the next major dance tradition in Sri Lanka. It is widespread in the "Sabaragamu" region and is particularly prevalent in Ratnapura, Pelmadulla, Balangoda, Kalawana, and Godakawela areas (Maddumage, 2021).

In Sri Lanka, *Madu* Shanthikarma (a ritual) is performed in order to propitiate Gods, while *Bali* Shanthikarma (a ritual) is conducted to avoid bad times and misfortune caused by the effect of the nine planets and obtain blessings from Planetary Deities (Kottegoda, 2018). *Thovil* (a ritual) is performed to prevent harmful and evil acts by demons, invoke the blessings of the deities, and ward off the adverse effect of the nine planets. Although the practices differ from region to region, and community to community, the outcome is considered the same.

The literature emphasizes that these types of rituals are performed not only in Sri Lanka but also in various parts of the world. An Artistic, Historical, and Philosophical Inquiry conducted by Welsh-Asante stated that in African countries also curative rituals are performed to diagnose and as a treatment for the physically and mentally ill (Welsh-Asante, 1997). In Malawi, Tumbuka people perform Vimbuza healing rituals to cure people with spirit-induced illnesses (Gilman, 2015). According to William Sax, ritual healing is very widespread in the Indian states also (Sax, 2014).

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of the Indian classic Natyashastra (of Bharatmuni) on the performance of the *Pahan Madu* ritual in Sri Lanka. *Pahan Madu* (hut of oil lamps in English)¹ *Shanthikarmaya* is the main *Shanthikarmaya* or curative ritual of the Sabaragamuwa dance tradition in Sri Lanka (Maddumage, 2017). It is a dramatic presentation that includes dancing, drumming, chanting, and conversation. In focus group discussions, participants described that Goddess Pattini and Gods Vishnu, Saman, Kataragama, Natha, Dadimunda, Wahala, and Dewol are the major deities propitiated in *Pahan maduwa*. Panthis Kolmuraya (Obeyesekere, 1984), or 35 songbooks (in English), consists of thirty-five stories related to *Pattini Dewiya* (goddess Pattini) and is based on a south Indian cult. Each describes one story and these are performed in *Pahan maduwa*. In all Sri Lankan rituals prior to the main festivity, the ritual priests/shamans gather to worship Lord Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha first. Secondly, the ritual service to the Gods are performed. This includes the sequence of activities involving gestures, invocations, chants, and various kinds of dancing routines. The main ritual performance starts at 6.00 p.m. and continues until midnight. On a day of a ritual performance so-called 'period of time' starts from 6 p.m. to midnight.

Sabaragamuwa tradition comprises of other four sub traditions namely, Ratnapura, Kalawana, Balangoda and Badulla. Temples dedicated to the Goddess Pattini are situated within these sub-traditions and schools of priests who conduct services in honor of the Goddess are also to be seen. All of them annually perform the *pahan madu* ritual according to their tradition and during these performances, one can identify the differences between these sub-traditions (Maddumage, 2017).

The theatrical art form of Bharatamuni Natyashastra

The great book *Natyashastra* (1951) written by great theatrologist and musicologist Bharatamuni includes details of the drama, dancing, music, and poesy practices. These performing arts are used and dedicated for the worship of gods and ritualistic blessing of ill persons. Bharatamuni described performing arts using the terms *Nruththa*, *Nruthya*, and *Naatya* in his book *Natyashastra*. In this context, the sequence of activities is designed to line with the characteristics of dramatic performance. These items create sentiments as well. Different sentiments are depicted in performances of different activities. Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* reveals eight sentiments namely: Erotic sentiment, Comic sentiment, odious sentiment, Furious sentiment, Heroic sentiment, Terrible sentiment, Pathetic sentiment, and Marvelous sentiment.

Bharatamuni describes three types of theatres namely, rectangular, square, and triangular shapes. He explains that the medium size rectangular theatre is more suitable for dramatic performance. Such theater settings are considered good from an audio and visual point of view.

Bharatamuni categorized performing activities into two sections, namely pre-performing and post-performing. According to Bharatamuni these items perform pertain to the revealing of birth of drama, lighting of lamps, chanting of pros and reciting of poems for healing of illnesses, and worship of Gods are falling under the category of pre-performing. Dramatic characteristics of such items can describe using the terms *Nruththa* and *Nruthya*. *Nruththa* means that the performing items do not reveal any meaning, just dance with no meaning implied. Artists perform such items rhythmically to the sounds of drums. *Nruthya* means that the performing items reveal some meaning through gesture. In post-performing time, the dramatic items which are designed to express some stories are performed. These items are dramatically presented through four *abhinayas*. Such performing items can be described using the term, *Naatya*.

Methods:

The research method employed in this study to explore the question what are the influences of Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* on *Sabaragamu Pahan Madu*? is qualitative and ethnographic (Reeves et al., 2013; Maloney Leaf & Ngo, 2020; Bonner, 2021). Visual ethnography (Pink, 2007) is also used as a framework within this ethnographic research. Data

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fe27PIWap-Q>

were gathered using pictures, audio-video recordings, interviews, observations, and field notes by the first author. Interviews were conducted and live performance was observed to gather primary data. Necessary pictures and videos were taken while observing the live performances. Permission has been obtained from the respective places and the research participants. Ola (palm) leaf manuscripts relating to the subject and books were used as secondary evidence. Ola-leaf manuscripts can be found in Sinhala, Pali, and Sanskrit languages in Sri Lanka. These traditional manuscripts were prepared on the specially treated and trimmed leaves of the Talipot palm by scholars (mainly monks) in the past. This study was undertaken in cities of Kalawana, Ratnapura, Balangoda and Badulla in Sri Lanka. The research participants comprised performing artists – namely, dancers, drummers, musicians, theatre practitioners, and village peoples. Many things were learned during the ritual and live performances by listening, smelling, touching, and tasting. It is important to integrate all sensory information available since the world is consist of objects that stimulate multiple senses (Rao, 2018).

At the start of the *Pahan Maduwa*, over eighty people participated in performances and other duties, from them twenty-five were selected for the research interviews. In addition to that, interviews were held with twenty-five ritual exorcists who were reputed in the area. With the fifty participants selected in total, solo interviews were conducted and focus groups were also held. The comparative case studies method was used as a data analysis method. In a comparative case study, an approach used to generate explanations is used to explore and analyze differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal (Goodrick, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Development of theatre

According to Bharatamuni's *Natyashastra*, theatres are built under 3 categories: Triangular, Rectangular, and Square shape. *Pahan Madu* Shanthikarma is performed in rectangular theatres and Bharatamuni's classifications include rectangular theatres. The hut (performance arena) is constructed according to the measurements of length - 60 cubits' height 5 cubits and breadth – 30 cubits (M. K. Punchibandara, personal communication, December 30, 2014). A traditional poem that explains these figures was mentioned in the interview (Maddumage, 2017). The theatre (performance arena) is prepared in a brand-new hut of the above-described shape. A dedicated *Pahan Maduwa* for the event is built each year afresh.

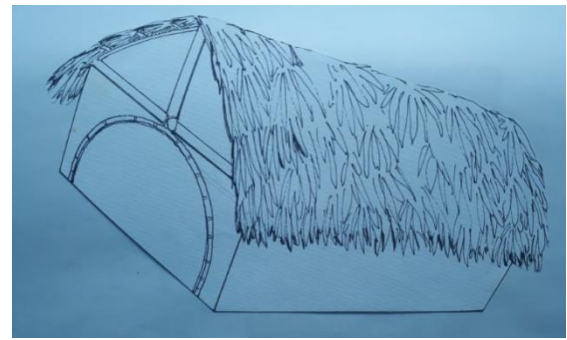


Figure 2. Present appearance of a *Pahan Maduwa*. (Maddumage, 2017)



Figure 3. Appearance of an ancient *Pahan Maduwa*. (Maddumage, 2017)

Protecting the theatre area and artists

According to *Natyashastra*'s principles, maintaining the safety of the theatre is of utmost importance. The theatre is for the Gods. Therefore, the purity should be maintained always. There should be the belief that there are Gods in the theatre. Days prior to the event, the artists get ready for the ritual of being vegetarians without consuming any alcohol.

Worshipping Ranga dewatha

Bharatamuni's *Natyashastra* says that the *Ranga dewatha* (gods) should be worshipped firstly. In Sri Lanka, the artists worship Lord Buddha as the starting point of all the rituals. Secondly, Ritual Priests of a high caste do the praying for *Ista dewatha* (gods of wishes in English). A series of activities are executed in pre-performing period in order to worship the gods and offer blessings to the *athuraya* (sick person in English) including the audience.

Table 1: Series of events displayed by sub traditions in Sabaragamu

Kalawana	Ratnapura	Balangoda	Badulla
Pre-Performing Time			
Cutting the milla tree.	Cutting the milla tree.	Bringing the <i>pol mala</i> to the theatre hall.	<i>Milla pe kireema</i> and cutting the <i>milla</i> tree.
<i>Telme</i> dance.	<i>Telme</i> dance.	Playing evening drums to respect the god.	Bringing <i>dewabharana</i> to the <i>pandal</i> .
<i>Thotameta yama</i> .	<i>Thotameta yama</i> .	Bringing <i>dewabharana</i> to the <i>pandal</i> .	Lighting the lamps.
Bringing <i>dewabharana</i> to the <i>pandal</i> .	Bringing <i>dewabharana</i> to the <i>pandal</i> .	Lighting the lamps. Offering of betle leaves.	<i>Muruthan baama</i> . (Cooking the food to offer the god.) Preperation of <i>kawum</i> (a kind of sweet).
Lighting the lamps.	Lighting the lamps.	Playing of <i>magul bera</i> .	Offering the <i>muruthan</i> to the god.
Playing of <i>magul bera</i> .	Offering of betel leaves.	Blessing by reciting poems and dancing <i>kirigotuwe pali</i> .	Offering the betel leaves.
Offering of betel leaves.	Playing of <i>magul bera</i> .	Reciting the poems to respect the god.	Inviting the gods.
Inviting gods and <i>pandal</i> blessing.	Dance of <i>mal yahan</i> .	Dancing the <i>mudun thaala</i> .	Playing of the <i>magul</i> drums.
Reciting of <i>Kolmura</i> poems.	Dance of <i>madu puraya</i>	Dancing the <i>doliyath padaya</i> .	Inviting the <i>ginijal kumari</i> .
Dance of <i>dewakolpaduwa</i> .	<i>Pandal</i> blessing.	<i>Yahan dakma</i> .	Bringing the <i>milla</i> wood by a parade to the place (theatre).
Dance of <i>Mudunthalaya</i> .	Dance of <i>thoran yakkama</i> .	Nine <i>pali</i> dance.	Dance of <i>kol paduwa</i> .
<i>Yahan dakma</i> .	<i>Biso kappa situweema</i> .	Reciting the poems to respect the <i>udakki</i> drum.	Dance of <i>mal yahan</i> .
Nine <i>pali</i> dance.	Dance of <i>dewa kolpaduwa</i> .	Reciting <i>male kavi</i> .	Reciting the <i>kiriammalage yathikawa</i> .
<i>Pothkadeyakkama pelapaliya</i> .	Dance of <i>mudunthalaya</i> .	Dance of <i>pavade</i> .	Seven <i>pali</i> dance.
<i>Halan pada natima</i> .	<i>Yahan dakma</i> .	Parade of <i>dewabarana</i> through the audience within the theatre hall.	
	Seven <i>pali</i> dance.	Offering <i>panduru</i> (coins and notes).	

Post-Performing Time			
Reciting of <i>sirasa paada</i> poems. Playing <i>udakki</i> and dancing of <i>haatha madupuraya</i> .	<i>Pothkadeyakkama pelapaliya</i> .	Act of the <i>hatha</i> .	<i>Kadawatha tharanaya kireema</i>
Offering of <i>kurumbarathatuwa</i> .	Planting the torch of time (tree) in honor of	Dance of the <i>thotame</i> .	<i>Ath</i> (elephant) <i>Bandanaya</i>
<i>Pandam pali</i> .	<i>Vishnu</i> and <i>Waahala</i> deities.	Reciting the poems regarding the construction of <i>pandals</i> .	<i>Mee</i> (buffalo) <i>Bandanaya</i>
<i>Dewol godabaseema</i> .	Dance of <i>malmadu puraya</i> and <i>mal wadam ganeema</i> .	Reciting the poems regarding the eight directions	<i>Penakeema</i> (Predicting the future)
Killing of Rama.	<i>Halan paawadeema</i> .	Dance of the <i>mal pada</i> .	Dance of the <i>kiri koraha</i>
Fire trampling.	<i>Amba vidamana</i> .	Wearing the <i>kagul</i> (Mask and ornaments).	Fire trampling
Dance of <i>mal pada</i> .	Offering of <i>kurumbarathatuwa</i> .	Dance of <i>pandam</i> (torch) <i>pali</i> .	Blessing by reciting poems and <i>pin deema</i>
<i>Amba vidamana</i> .	<i>Dewol godabaseema</i> .	Dance of <i>dummala pali</i> and reciting the poems in respect of the <i>Dewol</i> god.	
Blessing by reciting <i>maha sirasa paada</i> poems and <i>pin deema</i> .	Dance of <i>pandam pada</i> .	Playing morning drums to respect the god.	
	<i>Asuea yakkama</i> .	Act of the <i>dewol godabaseema</i> .	
	Killing Rama and performing the reincarnation.	Act of the killing of Rama.	
	Fire trampling. Blessing by reciting poems and closing the ritual.	Removing the <i>kagul</i> . <i>Amba vidamana</i> .	
		<i>Thoran apahareema</i> .	
		Bringing the <i>dewabarana</i> back to the <i>dewala</i> .	
		<i>Muruthan baama</i> . (Cooking the food to offer the god) Reciting the poems to bless the persons who organized the ritual and the audience.	

Characteristics of dramatic performance

The *Sabaragamuwa Pahan Madu* performance arena preparations follow the same prerequisites for the theatre mentioned by Bharatamuni in the *Natyashastra*. The four main parts of *abhinaya* presented in *Natyashastra* are also depicted by the actors performing in the *Pahan Madu* ritual. The items included in the *Pahan Maduwa* are akin to the two main categories of activities depicted in the Bharatamuni's *Natyasasthra* namely pre-performing time and post-performing time.

The sequence of activities is designed according to the characteristics of dramatic performance, *Nruththa*, *Nruthya* and *Naatya*: the rules met in *Natyashastra*. Performance of these activities creates sentiments. Different sentiments are depicted in performances of different tasks and activities.

Dramatic characteristics of Pre-performing activities of *Pahan Maduwa*

Nruththa - In the Kalawana sub-tradition, the dancing items from *telme nateema* to *mudun thalaya* are displayed as *Nruththa*. These dancing items do not reveal any meaning and are based on just dancing. But those items are performed to respect the gods and offer a blessing to ill people through various gestures. In the other sub-traditions also, these characteristics can be identified.

Performing of *Yahan dakma* and *Pali* dance can be seen in *Nruthya* – of the Kalawana sub tradition and in the related sub traditions. Artist perform *Yahan dakma* to worship the Gods. The performing style of this item reveals that the artist worship and respect the gods through gesture. *Nruthya* means that the dancing reveals some sort of meaningful gesture to the patient and the audience. Performing the *Pali* dance, the artist recite/chant the poems and blessing to the *arthura* (sick person/s) and the rest of the audience through gesture. Sentiments - Reciting the poems in the items cause creation of various sentiments like erotic sentiment to the audience. Reciting of prose poems creates marvelous sentiment.

Dramatic characteristic of Post-performing activities of *Pahan Maduwa*

Natya - The post-performances such as *Thorana yakkama*, *Pothkade yakkama*, *Amba widamana*, *Dewol goda basma*, *Asura yakkama* and killing of Rama can be identified as dramatic items. These items are performed to include the

four *abhinayas* the arts of expressions in aesthetics. The items to be included in the rituals are lining to the two main categories depicted in the Bharatamuni's *Natyasasthra* namely pre-performing time and post-performing time. When further explored (for the purpose of categorizing), the ritual items fall under *Nruththa*, *Nruthya* and *Naatya*. *Nruththa* which means just a dance performance with no meaning implied. Bharatamuni explained *abhinaya* as four main parts. Conveying ideas through *Aangika abhinaya* (with the use of mudras including body movements), *Vaachika abhinaya* (with the use of words), *Aahavya abhinaya* (with the use of costumes and make-up) and *Saathwika abhinaya* (the highest mode achieved by means of exemplifying internal emotions through subtle movements of lips, eyebrows, ears etc). *Naatya* means that the drama consists of four *abhinayas*: *angrika abhinaya*, *vaachika abhinaya*, *aahavya abhinaya* and *saathwika abhinaya*. The methods of blessing are developed to treat the ill personal mentally. The ritual literature (kannalaw, yaadini, gaatha, sloka and reciting virtuous poems) is being developed for such purposes using the terms and meanings extracted from Buddhism which Sri Lankans believe as the most valuable and eminent philosophy. It is possible to identify this identity as related to *Vachchika abhinaya*. The materials to be used for blessing the patient are culturally valued items such as medicinal plants, seeds, fruits, nuts and some goods which are essential for livelihood. During post-performing time, a sequence of drama items is performed through made-up stories. The four main parts of *abhinaya* are to be presented in these drama items. Normally, these items are presented from midnight to dawn of the following day. However, in *bali yaga* and *deva yaga*, some drama items and blessings will be performed in the following day in the morning continuously. *Bali thovil* are called *Navagraha Shanthi*. These *thovil performances* are displayed to treat the people who fell ill due to *graha dosa*, believed to be affected by planetary deities. *Deva thovil* are displayed to overcome drought and some diseases of people and animals as well. Some people believe that certain illnesses are occurred due to subtle effects. In Sinhala, these are called demon's effects (*Yaksha dosa*). To overcome this type of illness, *yakaduro* performs *yak thovil* to offer mental and psychological treatment to the patient. Without a doubt, the above examples of the comparative exploration show that the *Sabaragamuwa Pahan Madu* ritual embodies many of the dramatic theories presented by *Bharatahmuni*.

Conclusion

As explained *Pahan Madu Shanthikrmaya* is the main curative ritual of the Sabaragamuwa Dance tradition. It is a dramatic presentation that is performed based on the stories written in the form of poems. Sri Lankan culture has been influenced by the heritage of Buddhism. Firstly, the Sinhala Buddhists worship Lord Buddha, and secondly, they pray to all gods during the pre-performing time. *Natyashastra* is a well-known book written by Bharatamuni, the father of Indian theatrical art forms. Bharatamuni, has explained that the sequence of activities in *Nruththa*, *Nruthya*, and *Naatya* are designed according to the characteristics of dramatic

performance. The four main parts of abhinaya presented in Natyashastra are also depicted by the actors performing in the *Pahan Madu* ritual. The preparations of the *Pahan Madu* performance arena apply similar prerequisites to the theatre mentioned by Bharatamuni in the Natyashastra. As *Pahan Madu Shanthikarmaya* also follows dramatic presentations, it can be declared that the influences of Bharatamuni's *Natyashastra* are evident in *Pahan Madu Shanthikarmaya* of Sri Lanka.

Even though the *Pahan Madu* ritual demonstrates the influences of Bharatamuni's *Natyashastra*, some of its characteristics have been replaced due to the effects of Buddhist culture in the Sri Lankan context. The Sri Lankan rituals developed in the 15th century are performed continuedly as a method of mental treatment for patients. The main reason for sustaining such practices is that the people believe that the illness which cannot be healed through either western medicine or indigenous medicines could be treated by conducting rituals.

The healer provides the sufferer with imaginative, emotional, sensory, moral, and aesthetic input derived from the symbols and procedures of the ritual process, thereby transforming the sufferer's idiosyncratic narrative into a universal cultural mythos. Healing rituals entail a drama of evocation, enactment, embodiment, and evaluation during a charged atmosphere of hope and uncertainty (Kaptchuk, 2011). Most respondents of this study believed that the *Pahan Madu* ritual has the capacity to clear day-to-day afflictions faced by them. Participants of this research also believed that the negative effects of planetary changes evil effects of deities, and other spirits can be warded off through rituals. They also believed that prosperity would sustain or reach their village by preventing diseases, droughts, and the destruction of harvest as a result of performing this ritual. The villages also believed that this ritual has the capacity to 'protect the child in the womb and help to bring the baby safely into the world' (including the process of giving birth) (Maddumage, 2021). These facts that emerged from this research also highlighted the importance of continuing traditional ritualistic practices and their curative powers as benefits (to contemporary societies) beyond the focus of the study. Therefore, the authors of this paper recommend conducting further comparative studies to identify similarities of cultural practices and research that investigates therapeutic aspects of such traditional ritualistic practices in countries all over the world.

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