

## **Elephant: A Sacred and Colorful Element in the Classical Kandyan Dance in Sri Lanka**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The elephant has been so well narrated in the *Pali* and *Sanskrit* classical literature, that even in Sinhala classical literature (*Amawathura* and *Saddharmalankaraya*) the elephant has been elegantly described in poetry. This has extended into the spheres of stylistic local traditional dance form, including the Kandyan dance tradition in Sri Lanka (Sederaman, 1960). In the Kandyan kingdom, with the amalgamation of South Indian music, a special aesthetic platform in the kingdom called *Kavikara Maduwa*, a well-made place for classical artists, has been in the traditional custodian of the Kandyan social system (Peris, 1964). In this *Kavikara Maduma*, there were many poetic creations referring to birds, animals and some of the sacred tools and places including the sacred tooth relic temple in Kandy. In this, there were fascinating types of poems called *Wannam* (Warnam). There are eighteen *Wannam*, which later on were used for dance and performance in the Kandyan classical dance tradition. The elephant has been colorfully narrated in one of the *Wannams* which is called *Gajaga Wannama*. However, in the second decade of early 20<sup>th</sup> century *Gajaga Wannama* was elaborated on by different schools of traditional dance and aesthetics. A variety of musical and dance performances with mellifluous singing and soothing complex forms of dance and choreographies are evident in the *Gajaga Wannama* which are explored in this textual analysis. The primary objective of this study is to reveal the musicology and aesthetic beauty of the *Gajaga Wannama* from a communicative perspective.

**Keywords:** *Gajaha Wannama, Musicology, Kandyan Kingdom, Communicative Perspective*

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