

## The healing nature of the concept of ‘Twelve Gods’ in the *Telme* dance

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The present study examines the concept of ‘Twelve gods’ in the *Telme*, one of the principal dance forms popular in the ritual named ‘*Devol Madu*’ performed by the Buddhist community of southern coastal belt. The concept of ‘twelve’ is significant in traditional Sri Lankan rituals: the *birth of twelve gods, twelve demons (Giri), twelve traditional steps, twelve items of offering* etc., with the aim of healing the patient (*Aturaya*). The legend of *Telme*, according to the particular concept, is a performance acted by a group of twelve kings invoking the goddess *Pattini* with flowers and oil, expecting the recovery of the prolonged headache of the king *Seraman*. Since then, the performance of twelve kings became popular in healing diseases, and so named ‘*Telme*’ is meant to ‘offer oil to the twelve gods’ expecting mental and physical console for the patient (*aturaya*) and the audience. Apparently, the particular dance is performed in a traditional ritual ground, amidst many decorations specifically arranged for the twelve gods. The dancers perform in front of an especially dedicated deck circumambulating the ritual ground (.....) thereby creating a profound atmosphere for the patient and the audience while providing an elegant and colorful theatric experience. The particular performing nature proves that the objective of *Telme* is to empower the ordinary society with the propitiatory enactments invoking the Goddess *Pattini* with the popular ritual dance, significantly representing the twelve gods with the aim of healing the patient. Thus, it provides a better ground to examine the concept of twelve gods in *Teleme* dance which connotes to the principal idea of ‘healing’ existed in ritual practices in Sri Lanka.

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