

One Island, Two Culture, One Heartbeat



In this report of my series, I want to share a beautiful phenomenon that happens in Sri Lanka. Even though we are a nation of ethnicities, at one specific moment, the entire island comes to a standstill. Whether they are Sinhalese or Tamil, millions of people look at the same clock and perform their rituals at the exact same Auspicious Time. However, while the timing is shared the Tamil community paints this festival with their own unique colours, rituals and spiritual depth, which I have detailed below for you.

Before the new year even begins, a Tamil home transforms into a gallery of art.

- Kolam

You will see women drawing intricate, colourful patterns on the floor using rice flour. I want to highlight that this is not just art, it is a spiritual gesture. By using rice flour, they are feeding tiny birds and insects, a beautiful lesson in co-existence with all living beings.

- Mangala Kumbam (The pot of blessing)

At the entrance, they place a brass pot filled with water, topped with mango leaves and a fresh coconut. To me, this represents a “Full Heart” and a home ready to receive “divine blessings”.

- Maruthu Neer (The healing Bath)

While we have an oil anointing ceremony later, the Tamil community begins their day with “Maruthu Neer”. This is a special herbal water prepared by boiling various rare herbs, flowers and leaves. They believe that bathing with this water purifies the body and soul preparing them for a fresh start. It is a ritual rooted in ancient wellness and nature.

At the exact time we head to the Buddhist Temple, our Tamil neighbors dress in their most vibrant saris and traditional veshtis to visit the Kovil. The air is filled with the scent of incense and the sound of bells. I have found that their devotion is incredibly colourful and deep, seeking blessing for world peace and communal harmony.

The most fascinating part of their ritual is the food they prepared at the auspicious time.

- The Boiling of Pongal – They cook a special rice dish called “Pongal” in a clay pot. When the milk boils over, they shout “Pongalo Pongalo” expressing their joy for a life that overflows with prosperity.
- Pechadi (The Taste of Life) – This is a dish I want you to specifically notice. It contains six different flavors- sweet, sour, bitter, salty, spicy and astringent. It is a symbolic reminder that life in the new year will bring all kinds of emotions and one must remain balanced and calm through them all.

Similar to our “Ganu Denu”, the elders in Tamil families give money to the younger ones. This act, known as “Kai-Vishesham” is a beautiful moment where the wealth of the generation is shared as a blessing for the future of the younger generation.

Through this report, I hope you feel the incredible richness of our shared heritage. Even though I am Sinhalese, I take a great pride in our country’s ability to celebrate such a beautiful festival under two different cultural lenses. It shows that while our rituals may differ, our hopes for a peaceful and prosperous future are exactly the same.



Kolam



Mangala Kumbam

- Tesheema Chammi -