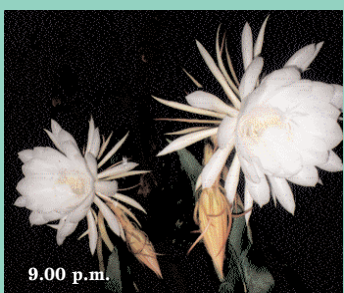


Kadupul : the midnight mira-



The miracle begins to unfold around 10.30pm. The night air fills with a soft indefinable scent, and the five leaved calyx, white with a hint of purplish green in its veins, opens out gradually so gradually that you don't see it happening and then a thin, three-inch petal of scintillating white peeps out, unfolding its beauty in the still night air. Another and another follow suit and by midnight all the petals have opened out and the stamens hold out their sacs of pollen. For a few moments this rare blossom sways softly in the night wind, like a delicate white lily. The fragrance is now intense, but all too soon the petals begin to wilt and by dawn the entire flower has withered.

This epiphytic plant grows in the forks of large trees, where the decayed particles of bark and moisture collect to give it a rich protective foothold. The plant has leathery leaves, a little thicker than that of the vanda orchid, but not as thick as that of the cactus. The leaves are long with scalloped edges. The scallops point downwards. During the Sri Pada season, November to March, a little shoot appears at the point where two scallops meet; the shoot grows to a length of about five inches before it bears a bud, which hangs down on its slender stem.

This is the *Kadupul* - the legendary flower of the Celestial Nagas. It is believed that when these flowers bloom, the Nagas come down from their celestial abodes, to offer them to the Buddha on the Holy Mountain Sri Pada. The strange fragrance, the midnight miracle, and the fact that flowers bloom in the season when people flock to Sri Pada, seem to add authenticity to this belief.

Pix: Shanthi Pelawatte

These pictures show the life of a *Kadupul* flower

