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**RITUALS, ETHICS & SOCIETAL STABILITY
IN THE SAARC REGION**

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SAARC Cultural Centre
Colombo

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Inaugural Issue:

**Rituals, Ethics and Societal Stability in the
SAARC Region**

**SAARC Cultural Centre
Colombo**

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From the Editor's Desk

Culture embraces practically all aspects of our daily life – our food, dress, language, social customs, religious practices, entertainments – the list goes on. Each society and civilisation has its own distinctive cultural traits. It is not only necessary to preserve our culture and cultural values, but it is equally important to strengthen them through our sustained and coordinated efforts. The role played by culture in bringing people closer is well-recognised, and therefore, when the SAARC Cultural Centre was established in Colombo in 2009 as a regional centre for the South Asian region, it had a well-defined road-map - to ‘play a major role in further promoting relations and understanding among South Asian countries.’

As a part of our academic endeavour in fulfilling our goals, I am extremely pleased to place in your hands the Inaugural Issue of our annual research journal – the *SAARC Culture*.

This Issue of the *SAARC Culture* presents fourteen papers by professionals from the SAARC region, that were presented at a three day Seminar on ‘Rituals, Ethics and Societal Stability’ that was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 23 to 25 September 2010, which also marked the first academic event organized by the SAARC Cultural Centre.

These papers focus on many aspects of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the countries of this region and highlight many of the positive effects of ethics and rituals, which are still a major part of the lives of the

people of South Asia, and the role played by these rituals, in the present day context.

SAARC member states share common cultural affinities and respect each other's distinct religious and cultural identities. The region has a rich diversity in age-old traditions, indigenous knowledge, which has been passed down from generation to generation bringing people together to live in peace and harmony. By celebrating the diversity in the region we hope to bring people together, strengthen social bonds and build understanding and harmony. The papers included in this issue underline the imperative need to find a strategic approach to preserve ethics and rituals from the negative economic and social forces as we pay attention to the important aspects of ethics and rituals in its contribution to societal stability which will lead to the socio-economic development of SAARC member states.

We hope that this journal would be welcomed by the academia and, with the cooperation of all stakeholders, it will succeed in carving out a niche for itself as a veritable reference tool for cultural studies on the South Asian region. I sincerely appeal to the all concerned that they may send us their contributions for inclusion in this journal as well as favour us with their valuable comments to improve it further.

G.L.W. Samarasinghe

General Editor, *SAARC Culture &*
Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo.

New Approach to Ethics and Rituals for Societal Stability

Tissa Kariyawasm

Abstract

A discussion based on the ethics and rituals for societal stability on par with the global perspective is very opportune. After suffering the calamities of a terrorist war the Sri Lankan government is now concentrating on a development programme. At this juncture can one assess the validity of the ethics in the field of rituals? Sri Lanka is experiencing the forceful wave of globalisation on one hand and the survival struggle of the traditional culture on the other. All religious rituals as well as social rituals need to follow certain ethics without which their efficacy might be lost. Therefore, the policymakers and the ritual experts need to understand the symbolic meaning of the rituals in order to fix them into the texture of the society.

A new approach to ethics and rituals for societal stability involve several factors in the present context. In Sri Lanka, for example, after a protracted conflict spanning over three decades, the focus is now on economic development.

The absence of a revivalist movement in the fields of culture, however, causes problems in adopting a new approach to ethics and rituals. Revitalisation of culture can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt at constructing

a more dynamic culture by some members of a society. It is only through the acceptance of a new approach that we can achieve this objective.

Culture constitutes the religions, social structures and the intellectual and artistic manifestations that characterise a society. Therefore, in the modern context, Sri Lankan government and policy-makers have to prepare the groundwork for rapid modernisation on par with the present global trends. Due to the open economic policies and the humane approach to the economy by various political leaders and their advisors, globalisation has been misinterpreted not only by scholars but also by the common man. This in turn, resulted in the creation of a myth that globalisation would bring about a homogenous culture. Is it wishful thinking or a gross misunderstanding of the world at large?

As William A. Haviland (1989: 587) puts it, “the peoples of the world are wearing the same kinds of clothes, eating the same kinds of food, reading the same kind of literature, watching the same kinds of TV programmes, and listening to the same kind of music.” To a great extent, this is valid for Sri Lanka too.

Though external trade contributes to the economy, it is the migratory labour force that earns much of its foreign exchange. Seventy percent of the Sri Lankan population uses mobile phones for communication. This is a new development in an emerging culture. Multinational corporations surpass national boundaries. All these factors contribute to the creation of a common culture and values.

In the process of globalisation and the rapid transformation that it brings about, the traditional and

non-industrial societies in South Asia, including Sri Lanka, attempt to acquire the elements of the advanced societies.

Through the ages Sri Lankan culture has undergone diverse transformations in many areas assimilating features from other cultures. In this process, India has greatly influenced in shaping the contours of Sri Lankan culture. This is obvious in many aspects of traditional culture of the country; sculpture, architecture, woodwork, crafts as well as dance traditions and folk music.

The remnants of the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa kingdoms and the paintings of Sigiriya bear ample testimony to the Indian influence. According to the Kandyan ritualists, three Mala kings were invited to the country in order to cure the illness caused by the *DiviDosa* on King Vijaya, the first Aryan ruler of the country during the fifth century BC.

Most of the Buddhist religious and the folk rituals are in many ways akin to the cultures of other South Asian and South East Asian countries.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese controlled the maritime provinces of the country and introduced a new religion - Christianity, a new lifestyle and a host of other cultural aspects to Sri Lanka. The Dutch and the British followed the same path. In 1815, the entire country was conquered by the British and from then up to 1948, the English culture and the English language dominated the higher stratum of the society.

Local Administrators adopted the British culture and Christianity was spread through education. In the fields of rituals and ethics, these colonial influences manifested in diverse forms and manners. Thus rituals are associated with Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam and the ethics prevalent in different rituals differ from each other. The ethics is the moral philosophy adhered to in their rituals.

If rituals are defined as a set of actions in religious and social activities in the community life in Sri Lanka, in the same way countries in South Asia are endowed with a magnitude of rituals. In the religious context, rituals are considered as particular observations.

In Sri Lanka, these institutionalised religious rituals are performed in order to maintain social stability. To think these religious rituals as self-centred, is a misconception. On full moon days in Buddhist temples one can observe the community rituals at work. In the church or at the mosque or at the shrine or at a *Kovil* (Hindu temple) we can observe group benedictions being conducted. Buddhists observe ritualistic cleansing before commencing their rituals. Before entering any religious shrine the devotees perform ablutions; washing their body, or at least the face and the feet.

Not only the devotees but also the priests have to undergo cleansing. In folk rituals, this act is known as *Peveema* or the period of preparation/ cleansing.

Exorcists, dancers, drummers, *kapuralas* (priests who officiate at the shrine), and the attendants all cleanse themselves with water and rose water.

*Is soda nala – sandun kiri pan isala
Mal yahan tanala- emal asnak oppu deela*

Translation:

Cleansing the head and the body with water, sprinkling sandalwood, milk and water on the arena, erecting flower-altars, and after dedicating the altar to the deities, we commence the ritual

The priests have to wear only white dresses during the rituals. There is no distinguishable line of demarcation between the religious and folk rituals. Whether it is associated with religion or with folk religion, the priests drape themselves in special paraphernalia, different from their devotees.

The process of purification is not confined to the personnel but extends to the place of worship and the offerings. In folk rituals, the performers who conduct the rituals to officiate the goddess of chastity or Pattini do not partake of meat, fish or even Maldivian fish. They abstain from sex, and dedicate themselves to the goddess seven days prior to the ritual.

A priest-to-be also takes as much time. A Buddhist priest has to reach the age of 21 to receive higher ordination.

Folk priests (exorcists, performers and drummers) also spend more than ten to fifteen years in apprenticeship learning the arts. A priest-to-be has to perform all the household chores while learning. He has to study the books, chants and verses and the methods of presentation, carving masks, dancing, drumming, and recitations. When the priests visit the places of performance they behave in an exemplary manner. They

do not take liquor, and use honorific terms for each other. This is quite contrary to the life of a villager in his ordinary daily life.

In the moral philosophic sphere, the qualities of a priest are also discussed. In the planetary rituals the priests are considered as Brahmins of Indian origin and they are dressed in the Indian costume, such as the *Dhoti*, the sacred thread, the headdress and necklaces and anklets. The priests (exorcists and other ritual experts) are respected in the society for their righteous way of living. Therefore he is endowed with the quality of associating with the deities or the demons, which others cannot do. The priests who perform demon rituals will employ a replica of the trident of Shiva to protect the invalid during the evening watch of the performance. The exorcists believe that the replica can be used to protect the patient. Hence during the ritual the head of the invalid is touched with the replica to invoke protective blessings.

The ethics concerning these rituals are the normative ethics which determine the moral course of action. The priests are always engaged in moral activities and they are the mediators who assist the invalid and his family or the whole community during their performance. The exorcists believe that performing a ritual accrue them with merit (*punya karma*). The Buddhists offer the merit accrued at a ritual to those who assist in bringing a successful completion of the ritual, and the verses sung at that occasion are known as *pin dena kavi*, and the drumming is called *pin bera*. That may be one reason as to why they offer merit (verses offering merits, and the meritorious drumming) to the parents, teachers and the deities at the end of the ritual.

Ethically the ritual performers whether they perform in the temple or at a village house anticipate merit and perform the ritual as a *Pinkama* or a meritorious act.

Those who perform public duties have to keep in mind that they are performing a meritorious act. Sri Lankan society has suffered from terrorism and conflicts for some years. Whoever may have been responsible for creating differences between the Sinhala and the Tamil communities, we see their commonalities exhibited in the performances of their folk rituals.

During the *Sangam* period of the Tamil literary history, *Ilango Adigal* composed one of the great classics, namely *Silappadikaram*, or the Music of the Anklet. This story of *Kannagi* and *Kovalan* is re-enacted by the priests at various community rituals in Sri Lanka.

In the *Silappadikaram* the co-existence of *Kannagi* and *Kovalan* was disturbed by the appearance of *Vayanti*. The latter begot a daughter named *Manimekhalai* and there is also a Tamil poem of the same name. The *Kannagi Kovalan*, *Vayanti* and *Manimekhalai* episodes though composed in Tamil by the South Indian writers, are enacted in Sri Lanka as rituals to propitiate the respective deities by the Sinhalese.

A corpus of writings is prevalent among the *kapuralas* throughout Sri Lanka which is recited at the rituals. There are 35 *Kolmura* verse collections or *Pantis Kolmura*, in benediction to the deities. *Pahan Maduwa* in the Sabaragamuwa Province, *Gammaduwa* and the *Devol Maduwa* in the Low country and the hill country are exemplary evidence of the existence of a national harmony and national unity in the country.

In Sri Lanka, majority of the Buddhists perform the rituals in the name of the goddess of chastity or Pattini of South Indian origin. The seven *Devol* gods, who arrive at Seenigama in the coastal village between Ambalangoda and Hikkadua, are propitiated by the Sinhala Buddhists. In the *Kohomba Yak Kankariya*, of the Hill country, while performing the *Guruge Malava*, the priests employ the Tamil Guru as an accomplice of the ritual. The Seven *Devol* gods and the *Kuda* and *Maha* Guru speak in stammering Sinhala diction. Thus during this ritual the Sinhala Buddhists unite with the South Indian Tamils without any hindrance.

Countries in South Asia including Sri Lanka are struggling to reach economic and moral upliftment. It is high time for us to learn the lessons inculcated in the folk rituals and religious rituals of Sri Lanka.

Rituals are beneficial to the society and ethics also compliment the rituals. The religious idea of a *Pinkama* or a meritorious act is performed in the religious rituals and the folk rituals by the monks, by the *pujari* (Hindu priest), by the *Maulavis*, exorcists, dancers, musicians, and charmers.

Rituals are the symbolic interpretations of the society, national harmony and collectiveness in the society. In a hedonistic world a new approach can be culled through rituals and ethics, for national development which can pave the way for societal stability.

The economic development of a country has to go hand in hand with its cultural development. In the process of globalisation some people might prefer to have a developed stage of the economy but not of the

culture. This concept has to be eliminated by the policy makers and leaders of the country.

In the old days, folk rituals and religious rituals satisfied the needs of the society. Every aspect of the ritual had significance and a symbolic meaning for the society. For example, at the water cutting ceremony of the *Maha Saman devalaya* at Ratnapura and at the administration of the *Nila Pangu* system of the Sabaragamuwa province, the emphasis is on self-sufficiency (in agrarian produce) with the religion and the village community.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Mr. G.L.W. Samarasinghe (Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo) and Ms. Soundarie David Rodrigo (Deputy Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo). My thanks also go to Messrs. Ranga Chandraratne and Indeevara Tilekaratne for the suggestions made by them.

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Figure 1: Propitiating the Goddess of the Earth



Figure 2: Savul Paliya Offering of the Ritual Rooster

Photographs courtesy: Sriyani Rajapakse

Asian Concepts and Practices of Mental Culture as an Approach to Global Recovery through Mental Well-Being

Sumanapala Galmangoda

Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to explain how the Asian concepts and practices of mental culture can be successfully adapted to promote mental well-being in a global context. In this regard attention is paid to define the Asian concepts of mental well-being under four aspects of human behaviour: Physical well-being, mental well-being, social well-being and spiritual well-being. Further the predominance of mentality in human personality is emphasised. In order to promote mental well-being in a global context attention should be paid to various cultural and ritualistic performances practiced in various countries over many years in the past. The elements of counselling are already included in such practices and performances. Therefore, instead of merely applying the modern theories of mental well-being we can successfully adapt the traditional ritualistic performances in order to promote mental well-being in various countries. Meditation, astrology, Ayurveda, music, recitation, pilgrimage, observances, etc. practiced in different traditions can be successfully adapted for this purpose. This paper includes an analysis of such practices, their psychological basis and the methods that can be followed in this regard.

The concepts and practices of mental well-being in Asian countries are closely related to the religious and philosophical traditions. It should be stated at the very outset that those concepts and practices of mental well-being are necessarily connected with other aspects such as physical well-being, environmental factors and cultural features. So we cannot speak about mere mental well-being irrespective of such other factors. To prove this fact I will quote two stanzas one from the Dhammapada, a famous text of the Buddhist canon and the other from the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, a well-known primary source of *Ayurveda*.

Buddhist Definition of Well-Being

- Ārogyaparamālabhā** : Health is the highest gain
- physical well-being
- Santuṭṭhiparamaṃ dhanam** : Contentment is the
greatest wealth - mental
well-being
- Vissāsaparamāñāti** : The trusty are the best
kinsmen - social well-being
- Nibbāṇaparamaṃ sukham** : Nibbāṇa is the highest bliss
- spiritual well-being

(Dhammapada, see Narada 1993: 177).

Samadoṣasamāgnisca
samadhātumalakriyāh

prasannātmendriyamanāh

svastha ityabhidhīyate (*Svasthavṛttasamuccaya*
see Sastri 1976: 2).

If someone possesses balanced humours (air, bile and phlegm), normal digestive power, perfect tissues, timely excretion of faeces, urine and sweat, and joyful soul, sense-faculties and mind, he is called a healthy person.

Definitions of Mind

In most of the Asian traditions mind is given a prominent place in the analysis of human personality. Some general definitions and interpretations of mind are given below:

Mind is one of the six sense-faculties of a human being (*Samyuttanikāya*, see Feer 1884-1904: 2-3).

Mind is the forerunner of all states.

Mind is chief; mind-made are they.

People act guided by mind (*Dhammapada*, see Narada 1993: 1).

Mind is an aggregate and it is a process but not an eternal or permanent entity. (*Samyuttanikāya*, iii, see Feer 1884-1904: 25).

Citta, *mano* and *vññāṇa* are synonyms but refer to the common nature of mind, a sense-faculty and resultant consciousness respectively.

Mind never arises independently. It is always connected with other sense-faculties (Nanamoli 1956: 479-546).

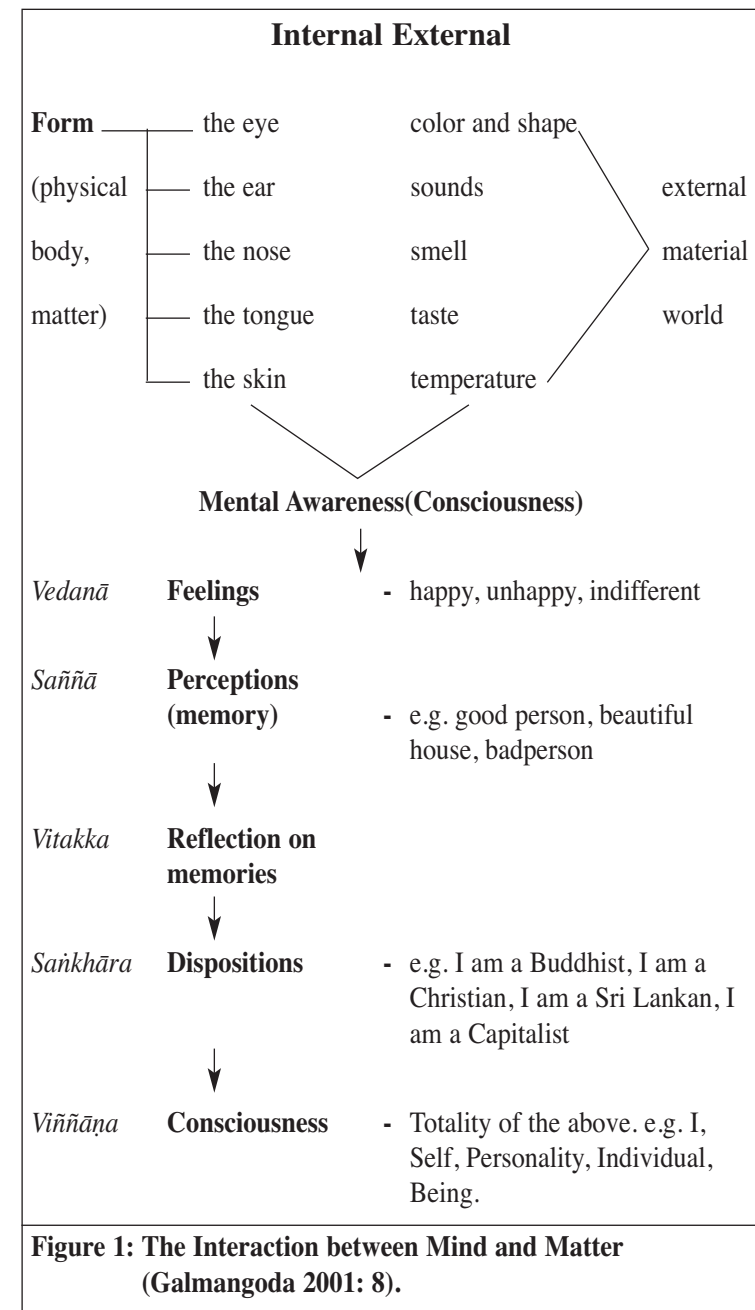
The Interaction between Mind and Matter

Although the mind is considered as a major limb of human personality it functions as a process depending on sense-data. The senses or sense-faculties receive data from the external material world around us. Depending on sense-data the mind builds up the human personality, soul, self or I-ness through the mental functions that can be identified as feelings, perceptions, reflections and dispositions or conceptualisation. This interaction between senses and sense-data and the related mental process is described in Figure 1.

1. *Matter* = six senses = the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the skin – internal.

The Six sense-objects = the visible, sounds, smell, taste, temperature = the world of experience – external.

2. *The sensations or feelings* arise as a result of the contact between the senses and sense-objects. In the process of creating sensations, the consciousness is also essentially involved. The awareness of the senses regarding their respective objects in contact is called consciousness and it is one aspect of the fifth group in the analysis of five aggregates.
3. The sensations play an important role as a mental food which is required every moment of life for its survival. Edible food, sensations, volitional formations and consciousness strengthened by volitional formations (surviving consciousness = rebirth = linking consciousness = *gandhabba*) are the essential foods for the survival of beings. Three



kinds of food out of the above four are mental or spiritual. So, the sensations that arise in connection with the sense-objects should be continued all the time. Due to the impermanent nature of the things (objects) the sense-objects cannot generate desired sensations all the time. Therefore, human beings are given an ability to keep those objects as memories or *perceptions*. Perceptions form the third aggregate. The perceptions stored up in the memory become the objects of consciousness time to time and as a result of reflection over them the sensations are created continuously.

4. The perceptions confirmed in the memory as a result of constant reflection over them become volitional formations (dispositions = karmic forces) which provide a good foundation for the survival of consciousness. These dispositions or karmic forces can be introduced as concepts. The concepts play a very important role in determining the type of human behavior. Although we are the builders of concepts, once they are built, we are always guided by those concepts in regard to the visible; sound, smell, taste and temperature. The human behaviour is determined by the concepts which are built by themselves. In that sense, human beings are not independent but slaves of the concepts. The concepts are not real and they are constructed depending on the sense-data. The ability of perceiving things of the senses is extremely limited and therefore the sensations, memories and dispositions created on sense-data are always partial and biased. So, the human behaviour unlike that of the animals is always artificial but not natural.

The final result of the interaction between mind and matter is the origination of various concepts regarding the world of experience. One's personality constitutes of the totality of such concepts. So the human beings behave in the society guided by those concepts.

The desire of a person means the attachment to concepts.

Saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo
(*Saṃyuttanikāya*, see Feer 1884-1904: 22).

Saññañca diṭṭhiñca
Ye aggahesuṃ
Te ghaṭṭayantā
Vicaranti loke
(*Suttanipāta*, 1913:268).

Those who have grasped perceptions (memories) and views (concepts) live with conflicts in the world.

Further, it should be emphasised here that the concepts while playing a major role in human personality, they also become an essential food for the survival of beings. There are four kinds of nutriment for the nourishment of personality. Out of the four three are mental foods.

It becomes more meaningful when paying attention to the analysis of human personality into five aggregates. Out of the five aggregates four factors refer to mentality and only one factor is related to the physical body.

This analysis of human personality clearly indicates the importance of mental health for the well-being of people.

The concepts are grasped by people through desire and hate. Likes and dislikes are basic mental features of human beings which are useful for their survival. They are developed up to the level of greed and hate unknowingly as they have no limits. Further the achievements by desire create conceit and failure to achieve creates mental distortion. Thus there are four main aspects of mental imbalance (*Udānapāli*, *Meghiyasutta*, see Somalokatissa 1966: 45-9)

- i. greed (*lobha*)
- ii. hate (*dosa*)
- iii. conceit (*māna*) and
- iv. mental distortion (*moha*)

Concepts whether good or bad are very useful instruments to guide the behavior of people. At the initial stage we have to agree with their concepts and should change, replace or eliminate them gradually. Mental well-being and imbalance of people mostly depends on the agreement or disagreement among the concepts. Concepts manifest in human activities - verbal, physical and mental. And they are mostly reflected in rites, rituals and ceremonies related to cultural and religious traditions.

The gradual path to change, replace or eliminate concepts is threefold (*Dīghanikāya* see Carpenter 1910: 219).

- i. *Sīla* - morality - behavioral
- ii. *Samādhi* - concentration - psychological
- iii. *Paññā* - wisdom - cognitive

And these three stages are recommended for achieving the expected results in three levels (*Visuddhimagga*, see Rhys Davids 1920-21: 110).

- i. *tadaṅga* - temporarily
- ii. *vikkhambhana* - periodically
- iii. *samuccheda* - completely

Unless the first two stages are completed the final result cannot be achieved.

Concepts can be changed to maintain mental well-being by following various methods. Methods should be planned and determined with reference to various cultural, religious and environmental factors of different countries.

One of the most successful methods of establishing the mental well-being of people is the theory of assimilation. According to the theory we can utilise various religious and cultural beliefs, rites, ceremonies and practices on a psychological basis such as:

Meditation	Pilgrimage
<i>Āyurveda</i>	Recitation
Astrology	Memorisation
Palmistry	Postures
Devil dancing	Worshipping
Music	Fasting
Monastic functions	Chanting
Observances	
Story-telling	
Singing	

Some examples are given below:

i. Mental Well-Being - Methods of Meditation

Buddhist meditation is constituted with three steps called behavioural training, mental training and developing the cognitive faculty. These three steps should be followed concurrently in order to succeed in Buddhist meditation because they are mutually inter-dependent factors. In order to balance the four main imbalances of human personality mentioned in the diagram above, together with the first two steps, the following four methods can be followed (*Udānapāli*, see Somalokatissa 1966: 45-9).

Mental Imbalances	Methods of Meditation
Greed (<i>lobha</i>)	Concentration of foulness of physical body. Thirty-two parts of the body are recommended for this method.
Hate (<i>dosa</i>)	Compassion meditation. Development of friendly attitude to all, treating those who are suffering, blessing those who are fortunate and the development of indifferent attitude of mind.
Conceit (<i>māna</i>)	Concentrating on the impermanent nature of all mental and physical things.
Mental distortion (<i>moha</i>)	Concentration on in-and-out breathing with clear attention.

By following these methods mental well-being of people can be confirmed.

ii. Physical Well-Being

According to *Āyurveda* all physical problems arise due to the imbalance of the three humours: *vāta* (air), *pitta* (bile) and *semha* (phlegm).

These three humours are related to the three main mental disorders of human personality (Nanamoli 1956:104).

greed	-	phlegm
hate	-	bile
delusion	-	air

So, the methods of meditation recommended for reducing greed, hate and delusion namely concentrating on foulness of body, developing friendly attitude towards others and concentrating on in-and-out breathing can be applied to promote physical well-being.

iii. Social Well-Being

Chanting, Pilgrimage, Worshipping, Devil dancing, Monastic functions, story-telling and singing.

All these traditional functions related to almost all religions in the world involve harmonious gathering of people which essentially leads to social well-being in any given country.

iv. Spiritual Well-Being

All human beings suffer when faced with one reality called impermanence (*Visuddhimagga*, see Rhys Davids 1920-21: 649). This universal truth brings the effects birth, decay, illness and death. Throughout the human history people have tried in various ways to find solutions to these inevitable problems. Among those attempts, the satisfactory solutions will promote the spiritual well-being of people. Buddhism recommends that we should understand the reality of the world: impermanence, un-satisfactoriness and essence-lessness by developing insight through the methods of insight meditation which mainly includes the following:

- a. Insight into the analysis of the world of experience. E.g. five aggregates mentioned earlier. By this insight one can eliminate eternalist views of existence.
- b. Insight into the dependent nature of the world or the synthetic aspect of the existence: e.g. cause and effect theory
By this insight one can eliminate nihilistic views of the existence.
- c. By eliminating eternalist and nihilistic views (greed and hate) one's mind becomes calm and quiet and he will be able to understand the reality of birth, decay, illness and death and be indifferent to such challenges. This is the best way for promoting spiritual well-being among the people.

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Parallels between the *Solah Shringara* in India and the *Nanumuraya* in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to consider the similarities and differences between the highly esteemed classical dance form, Kathak, in India and the Sri Lankan traditional Pahatharata (Low-country) dances. Here, special attention will be given to the Solah Shringara which is connected to the bhava abhinaya, and the sixteen pelapali (dance sequences) called the Nanumuraya which is a dance act in the Sri Lankan Low-country curative ritual called the Ratayakuma (Kottagoda, 1995:33).

In most countries across the world dance, music and drama originated from a religious background. Even in India, this situation is the same since Indian performing arts originated and evolved mostly in the religious context of Hinduism. The people in India have, from ancient times, been concerned with human and parahuman phenomena and the interrelation between the two. Ritualistic dances and *pujas* emerged as a way of trying to find a solution to the queries that emerged as a result of these philosophical ponderings (Pertold 1930).

In such a context, in ancient India, certain communities took to recounting tales of religious epics such as the *Ramayanaya* and the *Mahabharata* in comprehensible, simplified format. This became an

income generating source for them. Since the ordinary folk could not understand what was written in these texts, as they were written in Sanskrit, they began telling these stories in their mother tongue with the intention of increasing religious reverence thereby enhancing the sense of gratitude, love and respect Hindus have for their Gods.

After a while, these story-tellers began to tell these stories while including a few dance items so as to prevent boredom that may arise as a result of the monotony of merely listening to the tales. This helped increase the interest amongst the audiences while also entertaining them after a tiring day at work. Gradually, the story-tellers started to act out certain parts of the stories while also singing certain sections of the *sloka*. Hence, the word '*Kathaka*' meaning "story-teller" evolved into *Kathak*: a classical dance form which subsequently became popular throughout India.

Just as other Indian dance styles, *Kathak* dance too has been divided into two main parts; *nritya* and *abhinaya* (Vatsyayan 1974: 52). Drawing upon North Indian Hindustani music, this dance form places a lot of emphasis on different techniques and body movements based on *tala* and *laya* which ultimately captures the essence of *nritya*. *Abhinaya*, is also divided into *gath bhava* and *geet abhinaya*. *Gath bhava* is when a dance is performed without song by presenting the story to a rhythmic musical pattern (*nagma*). *Geet abhinaya*, on the other hand, is when meaning is conveyed through the mode of song (Vatsyayan 1974: 55).

Gath bhava, for instance, is used to depict certain *abhinayas* in the dramatic sections of the *Ramayana* and

Mahabharata. One of its distinguishing features is that all the characters are portrayed by a single actor. This is known as ‘*ekapathraharya lasyanga*’ in some texts (Vatsyayan 1974: 15).

Geet abhinaya, on the other hand, depicts *abhinaya* in accordance with such songs as Thumri, Ghazal, and Bhajan. It deals with the *Nayika bedha* which portrays various types of heroines with respect to their mental setup and apparent behaviour. According to the *Natya Shastra*, there are eight types of *Nayika bedha* that denote such female traits. They are as follows;

1. *Wasaka sajja*
2. *Weerahothkanditha*
3. *Swadeenabarthrika*
4. *Kalahantharitha*
5. *Kanditha*
6. *Vipralabdha*
7. *Proseethabarthrika*
8. *Abhisarika*. (Ghosh 1950: 467).

When representing the *ashta nayika* through the medium of dance, there are sixteen procedures that are included in the *bhava abhinaya*. This is called the *Solah Shringar* or in other words, *Shodash Shringara*. *Shringar* is when a female adorns herself in many ways in order to make herself desirable for her partner. The following is a list of the sixteen *shringara*;

1. Bathing (*snan*)
2. Putting on elegant garments (*vastra dharan*)
3. Putting oil on hair (*snehanulepan*)
4. Combing the hair (*kesha-pashadan*)

5. Putting a mark (bindi) on the forehead (*thilak dharan*)
6. Putting kohl on the edges of the eye lids (*anjan dharan*)
7. Creating marks on the cheeks (*thilnirman*)
8. Painting the feet with lac-dye (*alaktak dharan*)
9. Wearing different types of jewellery (*alankar prasadhan*)
10. Eating betel leaves (*thambool charvan*)
11. Applying fragrances (*sugandhi lepan*)
12. Walking in a feminine manner (*vilas gathi*)
13. Looking from the corner of the eyes (*speet drishti*)
14. Smiling (*smeeth*)
15. Displaying love (*prem*)
16. Depicting fidelity (*seel*)

From ancient times, it has been a cultural feature of Indian women to appear perfectly well adorned and beautiful by engaging in the activities mentioned above. Details of this can be found in the literary text belonging to the sixteenth century titled the *Ain-i Akbari*. Here it is stated that in the *Solaha Shringara* in the ninth item *alankar prasadan*, the female must adorn herself by wearing 36 types of jewellery *chaththis abhushan* (Abu-'l Fadl, 1978: 342). These are used to adorn the head, forehead, ears, neck, hands, wrists, waist, feet and fingers. These ornaments have been divided into four categories as is explained in the ancient Indian treatise on performing arts; the *Natya Shastra*. They are;

1. *Avedhya* (piercing the limbs) e.g. earrings, nose rings and *kundala*

2. *Bandhaniya* (tied up) e.g. *Shroni-sutra*, *baahu bandhi*
3. *Prakshepya* (worn) e.g. *nupura*, rings, bangles and anklets
4. *Aropya* (put around) e.g. necklaces, *hema-sutra*, *manjari*

Raja Chakradhar Singh who was the ruler of Raigarh from 1924 to 1947 has presented a different view of this description in his book titled *Narthana Sarwaswam* which provides valuable details about the *Kathak* dance. In it he says that in the *Solaha Shringara* there are only twelve types of ornaments (*dwadash abushan*) used, viz.:

1. *Jumar* - jewellery for the forehead
2. *Karn phool* - flowers stuck behind the ears
3. *Waysar* - nose ring
4. *Graiweyak* – flower garlands
5. *Har* - necklace
6. *Choodi* - bangles
7. *Kankan* - armlets
8. *Basu bhandi* - ornament tied to the upper arm
9. *Anguti*- ring
10. *Kardhan* - waistbands
11. *Pajeb* - foot-ornament
12. *Nupur* - anklets

These *Solah Shringara* can be compared with those in the *Pahatharata Shanthikarma* (curative ritual) named “*Ratayakuma*” (Kariyawasam 1975). The *Ratayakku* who causes problems to women who have trouble conceiving were born from the fire that broke

through the huge rock called *Mahameru Parvatha*. The *Ratayakuma* ritual is performed so as to ward off any harm caused by these evil devils to such females. This ritual is almost completely based on the *bhava abhinaya*.

Amongst its spectacular theatrical *pelapali*, the sixteen *pelapali* in the *Nanumuraya* are of much significance. It exemplifies how the *yakadura* (the individual who conducts the ritual) takes on the role of *Riddi Bisawa* (an infertile woman) who is in the process of beautifying herself so that she may be able to arouse her partners’ sexual desire. The *yakadura* dressed as a female applies *nanu*, takes a bath, combs his artificial hair, gets dressed, wears different types of jewellery and wears perfume.

The following are the sixteen *pelapali* in the *Nanumuraya*

1. Applying lemon on the hair (*Nanugema*)
2. Bathing (*Snanaya*)
3. Wearing clothes (*Wasthra Peladeema*)
4. Combing hair (*Hisa Peereema*)
5. Applying oil (*Thel gama*)
6. Wearing the *hawariya* (hair extension) (*Hawariya Peladeema*)
7. Sticking a hair ornament into the hair knot (*Kuru Peladeema*)
8. Applying *kohl* (*Andun gama*)
9. Applying sandalwood (*Sandun gama*)
10. Putting on earrings (*Thodu Peladeema*)
11. Wearing a necklace (*Thella Peladeema*)
12. Wearing bangles (*Walalu Peladeema*)

13. Chewing betel leaves (*Dalumura Kema*)
14. Putting onflowers behind the ears (*Pullimal Peladeema*)
15. Covering of the head with a veil (*Mottakkili Peladeema*)
16. Looking into the mirror (*Kedapatin beleema*)

The sixteen *pelapali* stated above is called the *Nanumuraya* and it is performed in Galle and Matara districts in Sri Lanka.

Classical Indian dance has been divided into three distinct categories: *nritya* (pure dance), *nritya* (dance combined with expressions) and *natya* (the dramatic art of expression). It would be false to assume that these three divisions cannot be found in Sri Lankan traditional dances. From the above mentioned categories, the one which falls under the category which gives priority to dance based on *bhava abhinaya* is part of the *Nritya* mode of dance. *Nritya* is a dance that amalgamates both *rasa* and *bhava* (Ghosh 1975:39). This feature can be traced back to the *Nanumuraya*. The *yakadura* who disguises himself as *Riddi Bisawa*, wears the *selaya* (a long cloth wrapped around the waist), jacket and uses *gok kola* (tender coconut leaves) for his hair and an ornament on his forehead. He places a *thilaka* (a mark) on his forehead as well. The *yakadura* manages to captivate the audience with his dramatic entrance as he enters the *ranga madala* (performance arena) while *aashirwadha kavi* (verses invoking blessings) are being sung. The manner in which he gazes at the audience, his smiles and his feminine gait is no doubt highly entertaining to the audience. This is indeed a rare

instance where such a highly colourful performance imbued with *lasya nirtya* can be witnessed in Sinhala dance. The drum beats used for each *pelapali* are also in synch with these mime dances.

When taking a closer look at the *Solah Shringara* in India and the *Ratayakuma* in Sri Lanka we can note that both these traditions come from the same source. In the *Solah Shringara* we see a woman beautifying herself in accordance to Hindu cultural practices, whereas in the *Nanumuraya* there is a depiction of a similar process that takes place in relation to Sri Lankan cultural traditions.

There is clear indication that the *Nanumuraya* denotes sexual overtones as it depicts the manner in which a female gets well-adorned and beautifully dressed in possible anticipation of sexually uniting with her lover. The *yakadura* gets adorned by engaging in all of the activities mentioned above in order to demonstrate the ways in which females get ready to sexually arouse their partners. In the book titled *Kavya Shekar*, which chronicles the history of the Sinhala community, it is stated that when a woman is about to engage in a sexual encounter with her partner she has to go to him dressed and adorned like the *shriya kanthawa* (Goddess Lakshmi) (Kariyawasam 1976: 124). This then is how in the *Solos Pelapaliya* the *yakadura* dramatises the manner in which a woman prepares herself in anticipation of the sexual act. The *pelapali* that subsequently follows this act portrays how the performer sings lullabies to a doll as if it were a baby. Hence, the fact that an infant has been born to *Riddi Bisawa* further substantiates this claim since in order for

her to have a child she has to first engage in sexual intercourse.

Similarly this argument can also be validated in terms of the *Solah Shringara* in *Kathak* dance. For example, the tradition of *nritya* which can be found in classical dances in any part of India is depicted in, for instance, the dramatic presentation of the love story of Radha and Krishna. This story got included into *Kathak* dance at the *Raslila* (which is a festival that depicts the fun filled time Krishna spent with Gopis) (Strucker 1995: 45). In this particular instance we get to witness how Radha gets ready in the *Solah Shringara* to meet Krishna. It has been a practice of Hindu women to thus adorn themselves before meeting their lovers (Abu-'l Fadl 1978: 342). *Solah Shringara* is depicted through *abhinaya* in instances where Radha's character is portrayed using *geet abhinaya* such as *gath bhava* or *Thumri*. Consequently, Radha awaits the arrival of Krishna once she has beautified herself according to in the *Solah Shringara*. What is important to note here is the fact that just as Radha gets adorned in the *Solah Shringara* for Krishna, *Riddi Bisawa* also does the same with a similar intention of enticing her lover.

Therefore, when examining these two traditions, we can state that there are obvious parallels between them. (Table 1).

As can be seen from the Table 1, apart from *alakath dharan* and *seel* all the other procedures in the *Solah Shringara* are present in the *nanumuraya*.

<i>Solaha Shringara</i>	<i>Sixteen Pelapali of the Nanumuraya</i>
<i>Snaan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> -bathing
<i>vastra dharan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> - wearing clothes
<i>snehanulepan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> - applying oil
<i>kesha-prashadan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> - combing the hair
<i>thilak dharan</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as part of the beautifying process
<i>anjan dharan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> - applying collyrium/ <i>andun</i>
<i>thilnirman</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as part of the beautifying process
<i>alaktak dharan</i>	Not included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i>
<i>alankar prasadhan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> in several <i>pelapalis</i> - putting on earrings, hair ornaments, bangles, and necklace
<i>thambool charvan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> - chewing betel leaves
<i>sugandhi lepan</i>	Included in the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a <i>pelapali</i> - applying sandalwood

<i>vilas gathi</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a part of acting
<i>speet drushti</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a part of acting
<i>smeeth</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a part of acting
<i>Prem</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a part of acting
<i>Seel</i>	Added to the <i>Nanumuraya</i> as a part of acting

Table 1: *Solah Shringara* and the Sixteen *Pelapali*

Even though, according to the ninth item in the *Solah Shringara* twelve types of ornaments are used, in the *nanumuraya* only four are used. This is because just as the jewellery that is used by Indian women are included in the *Solah Shringara*, only the ones that are commonly used by Sinhala women have been included in the *Nanumuraya*. Nevertheless, according to *nanumura kavi* (poetic verses) *Riddi* uses sixty four types of jewellery.

I have seen some *yakaduras* sticking flowers behind their ears and wearing flower garlands apart from the hair ornaments, flower garlands, earrings and bangles. In the *dwa dash aabushan*, these items are named as *graiweyak* and *karnpuul* (pulli mal).

It is common for Indian women to apply kohl on their eyelids. Although such an activity is not popular



Figure 1: Putting on earrings in the Indian dance item *Kathak*.



Figure 2: Putting on earrings in the Sri Lankan Low Country culture ritual (*Shanthikarma*) “*Ratayakuma*” in *Nanumuraya*



Figure 3: Applying collyrium in the Indian dance item *Kathak*.



Figure 5: Looking in the mirror in the Indian dance item *Kathak*.



Figure 4: Applying collyrium in the Sri Lankan LowCountry culture ritual (*Shanthikarma*) “*Ratayakuma*” in *Nanumuraya*



Figure 6: Looking in the mirror in the Sri Lankan LowCountry Culture ritual (*Shanthikarma*) “*Ratayakuma*” in *Nanumuraya*

amongst Sinhala women, it is rather surprising that this has been included into the *Nanumuraya*.

The last item of the *Nanumuraya* is the act of looking into the mirror. It is a tradition for the *yakadura* to use a model of a mirror made out of the bark of a banana tree. Despite the fact that the act of looking into the mirror is not an item in the *Solah Shringara*, its use is symbolically demonstrated. What is different about the scene is that unlike using a model mirror, here the use of a mirror is implied through *mudra* and *abhinaya*.

The act of covering the performers head with a shawl is a tradition that has possibly come down from Muslim culture. Though this does not occur in Sinhala culture, nevertheless, it has been added to the *Nanumuraya*. A particular poetic verse included in the *Mottakkiliya* specifically mentions this kind of action.

Considering the above discussion as a whole, we can state that the *Nanumuraya* shares some of the same features of the *Solah Shringara* since they both exemplify natural female characteristics and mannerisms to the audience. However, although there are similarities in terms of the portrayal of *bhava abhinaya*, there are various differences in the dance techniques used. Here, one has to note that the representation of the *bhava abhinaya* in Sinhala dances is by no means inferior to those that are depicted in traditional *Kathak* dances.

Ultimately, it becomes evident from the above discussion how, due to its close proximity, both Sri Lanka and India has engaged in various forms of cultural and artistic exchanges from ancient times (Kottagoda 2001: 282).

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Photographs courtesy:

Figures 1, 3 and 5: Kathak Dance in India by Pali Chandra (Wikramasinha Gharana)

Figures 2, 4 and 6: Traditional Dance in Sri Lanka (Ratayakuma Shanthikarmaya recorded by the media unit of University of the Visual and Performing Arts)

Rituals, Ethics and Societal Stability in the SAARC Region with Special Reference to Bangladesh

Shikha Noor Munshi

Abstract

The paper deals with a correlated study of the cultural harmony owing to rituals, ethics and societal stability in the SAARC region with special reference to Bangladesh. An attempt is also made to understand the great strength of the SAARC to confront the past in a meaningful way, linking the history with contemporary reality. Bangladesh is a land of cultural diversity, heritage and festivities. Different religions, communities and tribes have been living together in peace and harmony for many years. At present, around eighty percent of the total population is Muslim while thirteen percent are Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and other ethnic groups. The absorption and fusion of different religious culture in Bangladesh affects the nature of Bangladeshi identity and civilization as vibrant culture. All religions are settling on an integrated stability, including public and state security. Nowadays, the affects of the powerful social movements e.g. the civil rights, free speech, anti-war, women's and student's movements, rise of religious fundamentalism and lastly, terrorism have altered the nature of the citizenship globally and given rise to policies of multiculturalism. With all of these contextual characteristics the people of Bangladesh are bracing themselves with a distinctive cultural identity.

The twenty first century began with new hopes of international peace, security and democracy particularly for the countries associated with the South Asian Association for Regional Corporation (SAARC), each aspiring to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the path of freedom and development is not an easy one. All the countries in the SAARC region strive to overcome the burdens of history, conflicts of interests, economic inequalities, entranced social divisions and cultural differences. The new era of globalisation marked by democracy, technological revolution and economic interdependence has brought people closer on a regional basis. This changing political landscape in the new millennium leads us to rethink the paradigm of human interactions and good governance in the national as well as regional context. It is the outcome of the realisation of the people of the SAARC region that through united and concentrated efforts they can ensure a better future for themselves. A new wind is now blowing and it is changing the leadership pattern to achieve the desired goals of regional security and democracy through their common cultural acquaintance.

The SAARC region is an ancient, distinctive cultural prototype. Each country in this region had a very ancient history of which colonialism was only a thin crust. That applies to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. On the regional context, all South Asian countries largely represent the similar system of values, regulative principles of life and a common heritage of struggle for liberation. As a result, we share with each other similar concepts and beliefs, similar traditions and experiences. At the same way, we also have differences

in terms of language, religion, race and ethnic identities. We have axis of conflicts as well as arena of cooperation; we have unity as well as disparity with renewed sense of history and destiny. But, we all aspire for freedom, development and stable regional status.

In 1947, this part of British India became the eastern wing of Pakistan, as it was a major Muslim inhabited area. In 1971, after a bloody war, East Pakistan became an independent state, Bangladesh. The independence of Bangladesh in 1971 was a great historical achievement because people of different ethics and social values formed a democratic and exploitation-free state. Bangladesh is generally regarded as a home where a majority of moderate Muslim people live harmoniously with the Hindus and the Buddhists. All religions are settling on a distinctive societal stability over the centuries. At present, around eighty percent of the total population is Muslim and thirteen percent of the population consists of the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and other forms of ethnic people. It is worth noting that though Islam remained a major religion, the roles of different communities such as the Hindus, Christians and Buddhists in the cultural life of Bangladesh were largely integrated with a multifarious religious theme. The historical and sociological evolution of all these forms of religion shaped the social ethics of living. As a whole, social ethics of culture have influenced religious faiths, philosophies and patterns of living. The absorption of different religious cultures in Bangladesh affects the nature of Bangladeshi identity and civilization as vibrant cultural tradition.

Societal stability of Bangladesh is rooted in its cultural and ritual tolerance. Rituals serve as a social

control gadget and it is maintained through different festivals of different mythological people and ethics to societal stability. Depending on the personal dimensions of worship and reverence, rituals have some basic differences in expressing, fixing and reinforcing the shared values and beliefs of the society. Social rituals have formed a part of human culture for thousands of years. The social rituals of past and present societies are typically involved with special gestures and words, recitation of fixed texts, performance of special music, songs or dances, processions, use of special dresses, consumption of special food, drink etc. In Bangladesh, a person or a family with any organised religion (Islam, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, etc.) celebrates the religious ritual services such as birth welcoming ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, wedding ceremonies and funeral ceremonies, etc. as their own beliefs.

Bangladesh is a country where colourful festivals are held throughout the year in a befitting manner and with great zeal and zest. Festivals, which evolved in the primitive society out of the prayer for food, rain, prosperity etc., have now become vibrant and colorful. The main foundation of festivals is rituals and most of the ancient rituals were collective activities. With the changes in social and economic structures, the nature of festivals also changes. Some festivals are so deeply rooted in the social organism that they continue to entertain people from generation to generation. Some of the festivals bear the mark of the community and nation, some have the stamp of religion, and again some bear the impress of politics. Many of the rituals were related to agriculture and their dates were determined according

to the lunar calendar. The spontaneous agro-based ancient festivals lost their spontaneity with the passage of time and became more formal. Bangladesh, the small agro-based country has developed over the centuries with an excellent societal stability on humanism and secular thoughts. Mainly four streams of ritual forces mingled in this social thought process. They are small ethnic anthropomorphism, Buddhist Nihilism, Hindu Vaishnavism and Muslim Sufism. The absorption of these different religious ethics affects the nature of Bangladeshi identity and civilization as a vibrant cultural tradition.

The societal stability of humanism in the East Pakistan developed from the 1960s, and emanated from powerful social movements e.g., the civil rights, women's rights, anti-war, language movement and the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. In fact, in 1952, the Language Movement paved the way for the independence of Bangladesh. Politics of democracy strengthened the cultural aspiration of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the creator of democratic political force in accord with the people's cultural aspiration. In addition, the cultural movements through Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam and other renowned writers, painters, musicians acted as a source of inspiration. The people of Bangladesh pass their daily lives and their time of crisis traditionally. The cultural consciousness is evident from their behavioral patterns in the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh*, *Nabanna*, *Pahela Falgun*, *Pahela Ashar* using Bangla calendar. These developments have altered the nature of the citizenship regionally as well as globally. But, unexpectedly in 1990s the rise of religious

fundamentalism and terrorism has disrupted the profile of societal stability. Bangladeshi people fought against religious fundamentalism, fanaticism and autocratic establishment with their inner strength, own way to contribute in common endeavor and thereby develop the collective efforts. The present paper highlights some of the recent developments in social ethics in the traditional living of the people of Bangladesh.

This is an important period of Bangladeshi national history where Bangladesh is trying to escape from the 'uncivilised culture of impunity'. The trial of the war criminals of 1971 genocide is in progress. Bangladesh has changed quite drastically in the past. The general elections in 2007 have revived significant debates about the history, identity and future of Bangladesh. A new window has been opened for social reconciliation and for the legal prosecution and conviction of the war crimes of 1971. The hopes of the people lie with the support of the voting of young generation in the last general elections verdicts. With the sincerity of the government and the mandate the government got in the last election from the people for holding the trial of the war criminals, the criminal should be brought to justice.

Another historical event owing to the societal stability of socio-cultural system provides a radical change in structural leadership and understanding the societal revolution. In Bangladesh, the Supreme Court nullifying the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution is considered as one significant means by which history was restored to its natural course and in a direction that will uphold the interest of the nation. It is the court, which was enshrined in the 1972 Constitution. It has demonstrated in unmistakable terms

of the truth that the judiciary is often called upon to uphold the law and ethics through raising and placing on the heights the principles and core values that a nation must live by. Now that the judgment on the Fifth Amendment is before the nation; the Bangladeshis can be rest assured that, at least in principle, they are on the course to recovering the core values that were undermined by the said amendment.

The secular spirit as a nation has now been restored in the constitution. With intense regret and sometimes outrage, we have observed over the years that some quarters are deliberately twisting the meaning of secularism to suit their own narrow political ends. Secularism has never been and can never be a negation or abandonment of religion. It is a much higher principle. It can be the one that promotes and ensures the equality of all faiths and the right of all citizens to practice their religion in their individual ways. Unfortunately, those who have been vociferous against secularism have used religion to give themselves a political base. Politics is a game of power and using religion to achieve political goals only leads to a degeneration of politics and undermining of faith. By upholding secularism, the 1972 Constitution demonstrated deep respect for religions. Now we go back to reasserting that respect. These are some ethical lessons for both Bangladesh and for other states in the SAARC region. The hopes of the people lie within the support of the voting rights as they undertake this process.

The causes behind the rise in the terrorist movements in South Asia appear to be related to sectarian violence, ethnic tensions, religious, communal

and ideological differences. The technological sophistication of terrorist groups and their utilisation of modern communication systems are the crucial features for the present government. Bangladesh stands at the crossroads of cultural and societal stability. Bangladesh is aware and prepared for the challenges posed by the security concerns facing the region. Terrorism should be dealt ruthlessly with unstinted courage and determination. A group of senseless people cannot be allowed to hold the society at ransom. In keeping with the cultural harmony, the evil must give place to the good and a new world must be built with peace and harmony.

To create a peaceful state of the twenty-first century, a regional and societal stability that would serve to secure the equitable and peaceful coexistence of all nations. It is the duty of every country to strengthen and help it in settling all regional disputes in a peaceful way. Terrorism and violence perpetrated in the name of religion are crimes against humanity and cannot be regarded as domestic or internal concerns of any individual state. They in fact, threaten to destroy our civilised existence, and therefore constitute a serious threat to the regional peace. Democracy and security are complementary features of the system now being put in place by the current initiatives. There is a tide of new aspiration in our people, both in the political sphere as well as in the socio-economic arena. The new order will be visible on the rise of the new social forces and emergence of new Bangladesh that can contribute to the development of the SAARC as well as global policies with hope, sense of accomplishment and pride.

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An Overview of the Practice of Rituals and Ethics in Bhutan

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Abstract

Rituals and ethics are a perennial and enduring aspect of the Bhutanese culture. Their purposes are varied with religious obligations or ideals, satisfaction of spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, social and moral education, demonstration of respect or submission, stating one's affiliation, obtaining social acceptance or approval for some event - or, sometimes, just for the pleasure of the ritual itself. Today different kinds of rituals are in vogue and each carries their own meaning and significance in Bhutanese society. Yet the ubiquitous ritual ceremony has remained essentially unstudied. This paper explores how the practices of rituals and ethics became so prominent in the Bhutanese society and the multiple functions of such practices through an analysis of its constituent parts. Concurrently, this paper also aims to elucidate the challenges faced in an era of modernisation and how its performance helps to bring social stability and enrich a national cultural identity. As it is, these rituals and ethics are believed to constitute one of the pre-eminent symbols of the Bhutanese identity, and as it is practiced across the country on an almost daily basis it simultaneously asserts the Bhutanese sovereignty and independence.

Introduction

With a total area of approximately 38,394 sq. kms and a total population of over 683,407 (2009), Bhutan is a landlocked Buddhist Kingdom nestled in the Eastern Himalayas. The country's early social organisation was greatly influenced by its geographical and climatic features. Each valley was separated from others by the natural geographical barriers. Living in isolated valleys, people developed their own dialects, customs, traditions and religious practices which remained practically unaffected over the centuries. Bon religion, a shamanistic ritual, was followed in Bhutan prior to the advent of Buddhism. The Bon tradition and rituals are still practiced in some parts of the country as a part of celebration of the local festivals.

With the advent of Buddhism in the seventh century, Bhutan saw the integration of the already existing culture and tradition with Buddhism. Since then, Buddhism played a vital role in strengthening the Bhutanese way of life and as a foundation to the Bhutanese institutions, organisations, arts, drama, architecture, literature and social structure, thus contributing to the evolution of unique cultural and spiritual traditions which have been carefully preserved and passed down from generation to generation by our forefathers.

Due to the self-imposed isolation from the international community until the 1950s, the cultural heritage of the country has remained to a great extent unblemished. Bhutan today is considered culturally a

very rich country, although Bhutan is by no means small by its economic, population and geographical size. We see our unique culture as the symbol of our national identity and unity. Therefore, the Royal Government of Bhutan adopted preservation and promotion of cultural heritage as one of the pillars of Bhutan's development philosophy, broadly termed as Gross National Happiness (GNH) along with the other three pillars of good governance, sustainable and equitable socio-economic development and preservation of environment.

Gross National Happiness is a philosophy that embraces every aspect of development policies in Bhutan. It is a holistic approach based on the idea that there should be a balance between the spiritual and material development for a nation to attain development in its true sense rather than focusing on the growth of Gross National Product (GNP) only. It is believed that this can be best achieved by complementing economic growth with the promotion of spiritual and cultural values. Development must not only lead to physical and economic well-being but ensure the emotional and spiritual comfort and advancement as well. These two complement each other and form the body and spirit of the Bhutanese society.

Measures to preserve and promote spiritual and cultural values in Bhutan are initiated during successive five-year plans – promotion of language and culture, art and architecture, documentation and inventorying of artifacts, performing arts, traditional code of ethics, textiles, sports, and so forth. Among other measures taken are the reorganisation and strengthening of the regulatory body to oversee the implementation of

policies, plans and programmes of cultural preservation and promotion.

Today, the Department of Culture under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs functions as the main body for framing and implementing Bhutan's cultural policies. A directorate consisting of ten divisions supports the Department of Culture. They are: Royal Academy of Performing Arts, Division for Conservation of Architectural Heritage, National Library and Archives, National Museum (Paro), Division for Cultural Properties, Research and Media Division, Division of Driglam Namzha (National Etiquette), Textiles Museum, the Folk Heritage Museum, Trongsa Tower Museum (Trongsa).

To strengthen and promote our culture further, the government has identified the following organisations as main Centre of Culture: Central Monastic Body and district monastic centers and institutions; Royal University of Bhutan, Institute for Language and Cultural Studies, Institute of Traditional Arts and Crafts (*Zorig Chusum* or the Thirteen Arts and Crafts), Institute of Traditional Medicine, Centre for Bhutan Studies and all schools across the country. Through the concerted efforts and support of different organisations, our unique identity is not only being preserved and safeguarded against any negative influences emerging with globalisation, but it is also being strengthened.

Bhutan, being a Buddhist country, almost all aspects of ritual and ethical system is influenced by the Buddhist teachings and practices. The paper will not be able to highlight and justify the entire spectrum of rituals and

ethics that are being observed and practiced in Bhutan within the limited scope of this paper. Thus, the paper will only attempt to give an overview of the Bhutanese rituals and ethics.

1. RITUALS

The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* (1999) defines ritual as 'a set of actions and sometimes words performed regularly, mainly as a part of a ceremony.' In Bhutanese context, rituals can be equated to '*rimdro*' or '*choga*' which generally refers to prayer-offerings and prayer services to clear the hindrances. Literally, *rimdro* can mean 'be useful' and 'be helpful'. It is helpful because by performing *rimdro*, one may be able to cure oneself from diseases, relieve oneself from suffering, and live a comfortable and happy life. *Rimdro* also means doing 'systematically' as suggested by the word 'rim' and this is the most apt because the offering and the performance of the rituals has but to take place very systematically as required by tradition.

Some other terms related to ritual also come to the limelight here. *Drodoen* and *Getsa* are a case in point. *Drodoen* is being helpful to others or being helpful to beings of the six realms. *Getsa* concerns with the root of the virtue, which is any wholesome act or practice such as giving and honoring that results in happiness and benefits. Understandably, *Getsa* denotes offering in a wider sense of the virtue, whereas *rimdro* appears to narrow its significance to a particular purpose.

1.2. Types of Rituals

Rites and rituals have been an integral part of the Bhutanese society since time immemorial as Bhutan is a

Vajrayana Buddhist country. Vajrayana Buddhism incorporates a variety of rituals and practices, which are intended to aid in the journey to enlightenment and bring blessings on one and all. The practice of meditation is central to nearly all forms of Buddhism, and it derives directly from the Buddha's experiences and teachings. In addition to meditation, Vajrayana Buddhism had developed a variety of other rituals and devotional practices, many of which were inspired or influenced by the indigenous culture of Bhutan that helped it spread.

The supernatural powers that exercise such a great hold on Bhutanese Buddhist beliefs, and that constitute the subjects of its rites and rituals, may be divided into two groups: white influence (*kar-phyogs*) and black influence (*nag-phyogs*) (i.e. positive and negative influences). While the good powers are propitiated, the inimical ones are repelled. The purpose of rites and rituals may vary from bringing about prosperity, health, good fortune, riches and victory to invoking rain, banishing hail and halting epidemics.

For the sake of easy understanding, rituals are further categorised into four broad categories, namely, Ritual for Living (*Sonpoi Rimdro*), Ritual for Dead (*Shinpoi Rimdro*), Ritual for Success (*Jawa Lamdro*) and Festive Rituals (*Dueton*).

1.2.1. Ritual for Living (Sonpoi Rimdro)

'The ritual for living' is that which is performed for one's well being – to clear those which causes obstacles and to bring good health, peace and prosperity, and to accumulate merit in one's life. It comprises of very intricate and detailed prayers. Some of the rituals in this

category are: daily ritual prayers, ritual for healing the sick, thanksgiving prayers to protective deities, ritual of appeasing local deities and spirits, ritual of repelling evil forces, ritual of summoning wealth, ritual of repelling curses, ritual of ransoming, ritual of fire, and many others.

The essential ritual service includes making offerings in seven bowls: two bowls of water (representing purity of mind and body), one of rice with an inlaid flower (beauty), one of rice holding an unlit incense taper (the Dharma's all-pervasiveness), one of oil with a lighted wick (illumination), one of scented water (devotion), and one of rice with a fruit upon it (gratitude). While there may also be other offerings, one particular kind peculiar to the Himalayan region consists of incense (smoke) offering which is basically being offered to appease deities and spirits, and then accumulate merit.

The worship of every Buddhist divinity in Bhutan involves seven stages. First is the invocation calling to the feast of sacrifice; next, the deity is invited to be seated. Offerings are then presented: sacred cake, rice, water, flowers, incense, lamps, music and occasionally a mandala or magic circle in accordance with the stipulations of a special manual. Hymns of praise, repetition of the special spell or mantra, prayers for present and future benefits, and a benediction follow.

A number of other ritual offerings prevail, such as Bodhisattva vows, the 100-syllable Vajrasattva mantra, mandala offerings and the seven-line prayer dedicated to Padmasambhava and *mon-lam* prayers. The prayers come to an end with a ritual in which people express joy over the good deed and merit of others.

1.2.2. Ritual for Dead (*Shinpoi Rimdro*)

'Ritual for the dead' is performed in order to relieve the deceased from suffering in the lower realms and guide them to higher rebirths. Generally, the ritual prayer is performed on the 4th day, 7th day and 14th day and the full service completed on the 21st day, thus concluding this service in about three weeks. However, some perform ritual prayers continuously from the day of death until the 49th day – the full term of forty-nine days.

It basically involves detailed recitation of texts by a certain number of monks. The recitation mainly consist of six syllable mantra, a ritual prayer dedicated to peaceful and wrathful deities (*zhithro*), a ritual prayer dedicated to Avalokitesvara, different kinds of prayers, raising *mani*-mantra flags, recitation of a one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, recitation of Vajrachedika Sutra, observing fasting, giving material gifts to the needy, lighting butter lamps in temples and so on.

1.2.3. Ritual for Success (*Jawa Lamdro*)

Be it business, war, travel, promotion, marriage, study, or for general wellbeing, individuals or groups spend significant amount of cash or kind to patronage such activity. Possible rituals in this category are, securing good fortune, increasing luck, the spontaneous accomplishment of all, clearing the obstacles on the path, the prayer which swiftly fulfils all wishes, prayers to protective deity, raising luck increasing flag, recitation of a prayer to Tara, recitation of a prayer of life prolongation, and so on.

Individuals, groups or the whole nation organise prayer recitations as it is believed that more times the

texts are recited, the better the impact will be. The purpose would be accomplished if the recitation takes place for days and months and as many times as possible.

1.2.4. Festive Rituals (*Dueton*)

Though Bhutan is small in size, it has diverse traditional festivals differing from region to region and ranging from the simplest form to more elaborate ones. They are known by different names in different regions; while most of the festivals have their origin in Buddhist practices, some have its origin in the indigenous shamanistic or bon practices. Some of the festivals in this category are: *choepa*, *lochu*, *rabney*, *chaa*, *kharphu*, etc. The most popular of these festivals is *Tshechu* dedicated to Padmasambhava which is observed in almost every district and community with much pomp and gaiety.

Besides, ceremonies and festivals also mark specific days of the Bhutanese calendar dedicated to Lord Buddha, Zhabdrung, New Year, Blessed Rainy Day, *Dromchhoe*, an individual's personal Bodhisattva, and the guardian deities.

1.2.5. Preservation Policy: Present Situation

Since the early 1960s, the Royal Government of Bhutan has established, through successive five-year plans (beginning from 1961), a network of infrastructure, economic and social services, and at the same time stressing on the major importance of our historical and cultural legacy. So, since the beginning of the National Assembly in 1953, a series of resolutions concerning the

protection of the cultural heritage were adopted, the most important being:

- All privately owned temples and *chortens* (stupas) must be properly maintained by their owner under the supervision of the district authority (21st session),
- The inventory of all cultural property in temples in public or private property should be undertaken by the government,
- The sale of antiquities from one national to another is permitted. However, the sale or the giving of the same articles to foreigners is prohibited (38th session).
- Legal Deposit Act was passed in 1999.
- Antiques Act was passed in 2005.
- Act of National Archives is being drafted.

The Constitution of Bhutan (2008) fully protects the cultural heritage of Bhutan. There is a provision under section 1 Article 4 (Culture) which states:

The state shall endeavour to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest. *Dzongs, Lhakhangs, Goendeys, Ten-sum, Nyes*, language, literature, music, visual arts and religion to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens.

There are four sections under Article 4 of the Constitution and all the sections protect the culture of Bhutan. It includes the skills of craft, knowledge and ideas about the arts and crafts, which if not protected and promoted, will disappear.

As already mentioned above, all the developmental policies are governed by the principles of GNH and any policy that contradicts GNH principles is not considered a development policy. So any developmental planning for any part of Bhutan is first assessed to determine if the plans and programs would affect the cultural life of the people in that locality.

Unlike in many other countries, rites, rituals and festivals are not remnants of a bygone age. Ceremonies and festivals are observed and celebrated as they were done in the past because they still continue to have religious and spiritual significance in the everyday life of the Bhutanese people. In fact, it is a living cultural practice.

In Bhutan, almost all sections of the society believe in rites and rituals. Especially, the rural folks believe that their fate is being regulated by some supernatural agent: local guardian deities such as *choesung*, *tsan*-spirit, *lu*-spirit, *zhidag*, etc. They believe that with timely observance and practice of rituals dedicated to these deities and spirits, their life will be rewarded with good fortunes: healthy life, success in one's career, comfort in life, peace and prosperity and many others. It is also believed that failure to conduct those rituals would bring misfortune on the family, village and society at large, which is attributed to wrathfulness of their deities. Such prevailing beliefs have allowed the continuity of ritual practices through generations until today.

The rituals and festivals are performed mostly on an annual basis, depending on the locality, and are sponsored and supported either by the government, community or an individual household. For example, an

annual ritual called *lomalochoe* is annually conducted by every household with variation from region to region. It involves detailed proceedings of family businesses for two to three days from fixing an auspicious day, inviting ritual performers (monks), preparation of ritual cakes to inviting guests for the occasion, selecting the food and beverages that are to be served and so on. It is counted as the most auspicious occasion for the household where family members, relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances gather, pray, eat and dance together in merriment. As Bhutanese villages are also looked at as the main cultural centre, many other similar rituals and ceremonies are vibrantly observed and practiced in almost all villages across the country.

1.2.6. Challenges

As the country enters into the mainstream of development with other nations, people's ways of thinking are gradually changing. And even if there are sound government policies in place, the promotion and preservation of spiritual values is a challenging and mammoth task for the government with the ever increasing population and with globalisation and assimilation of foreign culture. Foreign culture is seeping into the country and is having a negative impact on the already existing culture and tradition. This is an inevitable problem faced by every developing nation for which a common solution has to be found to minimise its effects.

The following are some of the challenges that Bhutan faces today:

- a. Due to rapid socio-economic development in Bhutan, the communities are increasingly exposed to modern lifestyles and amenities, thereby eroding the existing culture. And their genuine practices are constantly threatened with the onset of the modern and hybrid culture;
- b. The rural-urban migration is posing a great threat to the culture and tradition of the communities in Bhutan. The essence, practice and the seriousness of a ritual such as the *lomalochoe*, where the congregation of the entire household members is necessary, is undermined;
- c. As the younger generations are more oriented towards the modern and western education, the rituals and festivals are losing its original place of importance and priority in their minds. As these younger generations are mostly out in schools and colleges, their touch with the community and its cultural practices is lost.

2. ETHICS

Ethics is generally defined as a system of belief which seeks to address questions about morality; that is, about concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, justice and virtue. In Bhutanese context, the closest technical term for ethics is *kuenchodnamzhag*; in traditional sense it is *Driglam Namzha*; in religious sense it is *tshulthrim*; and in layman's sense it is *jawa chodlam*. Whatever terms we may use, ethics is a sum total of the principles

governing good conduct, virtuous life and righteous thought, action and speech. It also means a set of rules on good behavior with rational explanation.

2.1. Basic Foundation of Bhutanese Ethics

Ethics constitute an integral part of Buddhism. Even a brief note on one of the aspects of ethics will cover a wide range of deliberation and will not find adjustment in the limited scope of this paper.

The Bhutanese, as Buddhists, believe that no one could escape the result of his or her actions and that one is defiled or purified by one's own actions. If immoral roots prompt one's action, the action is immoral. Similarly, if the action is prompted by moral considerations, the action is moral or virtuous. In Buddhism, we find many essential moral precepts for monks, nuns, and householders to maintain the harmony in society. Amongst these, technically known as *Lhachoe Gewachu* (Ten Devine Virtues) is prescribed as the basic foundation of moral activities for householders as well as monks and religious persons for maintaining harmonious life. It consists of the following:

1. Abandoning the act of killing
2. Abandoning the act of stealing
3. Abandoning the act of indulging in sexual misconduct
4. Abandoning the act of telling lies
5. Abandoning the act of slandering
6. Abandoning the act of using harsh words
7. Abandoning the act of indulging in idle gossip
8. Abandoning the act of being covetous

9. Abandoning the act of harming others
10. Abandoning upholding wrong views or philosophies

Besides the above, one of the most important precepts is *Michoe Tsangma Chudrug* (Sixteen Human Principles). It has been established by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), the founder of Bhutanese nationhood, in the seventeenth century CE as a law of the country to guide and regulate daily social functionaries. It was established to render harmony, and to help shun difficulties in everyday lives. It has been handed down from generation to generation till today. The sixteen Human Principles are:

1. One must respectfully have confidence and faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (Buddha, the Teachings and the Monk Community).
2. One must practice sublime Dharma (Teachings) - through Body, Speech and Mind.
3. One must show honor and reverence to one's kind parents.
4. One must also show respect to those who are learned and wiser.
5. One must show honor and respect to elderly people and people of high descent.
6. One must always be honest and kind towards all relations and friends.
7. One must be benevolent, as well as one is able, towards people in one's locality and neighbors.
8. One must be honest and incorruptible.
9. One always has to follow examples of being gentle and decent.

10. One must live a moderate life free from extreme means of livelihood.
11. One must repay kindness to the generous.
12. One must avoid deceptive conduct - and all fraud, such as in weights and measures.
13. One must avoid jealousy of others' belongings, and cultivate friendship with all.
14. Avoid the influence of evil friends and deception.
15. Do not listen to the words of a bad spouse.
16. One must be patient and far-sighted and endure hardships in carrying out one's duties.

It is said that all acts of human beings become evil by transgression of *lhachoe gewachu* and *Michoe Tsangma Chudrug* and by following these principles, one becomes ethical. Hence, these two forms the backbone of the moral code of conduct both for householders and monks to maintain harmony in society and also as an indispensable aspect of the path to enlightenment.

2.2. *Driglam Namzha*, Code of Conduct or Etiquette

Based on the two important precepts mentioned above, as well as rules of Buddhist monasticism, especially that of tantric sources, a code of conduct and etiquette known as *Driglam Namzha* was developed. *Drig* denotes order, conformity and uniformity; and *lam* means the way or path, while *Namzha* refers to concept or system. Thus, *Driglam Namzha* is the path of an ordered and systematic way concerning physical, verbal and mental discipline, originating in Buddhist ethical practice.

Driglam Namzha (the Bhutanese social norms) covers a wide range of socio-ethical norms. This includes speaking, eating, drinking, walking, sitting, dressing, showing kindness, together with gratitude for social benefits received from parents, elders and spiritual teachers. These distinctive social customs have been carefully maintained and passed down by our forefathers. Today, they are deeply rooted in our society and enrich our cultural identity.

Precisely, *Driglam Namzha* involves action, speech and thoughts. Accordingly, it can be classified into three parts, namely: *Luekyidriglam* (Body Etiquette), *Ngaggidriglam* (Speech Etiquette) and *Yid kyi Driglam* (Mind Etiquette).

We conduct ourselves amicably in the society through these three means, i.e., body, speech and mind:

1. *Luekyidriglam* means conducting oneself through the body. This covers the conduct of eating, drinking, walking, sitting, seeing, dressing, showing respectful bodily gestures, etc.
2. *Ngaggidriglam* means conducting oneself through speech. This covers speaking the truth, speaking pleasant words (softly), speaking in a respectful way, greetings, etc.
3. *Yid kyi Driglam* means conducting oneself through the mind. This covers faith in the *Konchog Sum* (Triple Gem or Tri Ratna), dedication to work, and loyalty to the country, good intentions, showing kindness and gratitude; trust in cause and effect, etc.

Driglam Namzha thus is a way to live in harmony with the society. It is indeed a means of maintaining the

bond and faith between the government and the people, between parents and children, between families, between friends, and between husbands and wives, etc. It aims at enhancing development activities because of shared interests and the common path or value system of the society and of the nation.

2.3. Present Situation

According to the GNH principles, the overall happiness of the people will best be achieved by complementing economic growth with the promotion of spiritual and moral values. The royal government of Bhutan is aware that a task of such magnitude and delicate nature cannot be accomplished through bureaucratic decisions alone. Therefore, a greater awareness of an abiding faith in the continued relevance of spiritual and moral values is being promoted among the people today through various plans and programs.

The education policy of Bhutan encompasses GNH education whereby the values of GNH education are incorporated as one of the core components of the school curriculum. Students are taught traditional values and moral principles to groom and nurture them as the better leaders and citizens of Bhutan. His Majesty the Fourth King, during his visits to schools across the country, often reminded the students that learning alone will not suffice and that it is more important to possess the right attitude – the quality of thought and action – to grow up as responsible citizens.

Graduates after completion of their higher studies and before joining service, undergo a special orientation program for about three weeks during which they are

briefed on the government policies, plans and programs, especially on the national ethical code of conduct, and relevance of cultural values. This is done to prepare them to serve the nation with loyalty and dedication while in service. The existing civil servants (junior, middle and senior levels) too are briefed and trained on the ethical code of conduct from time to time so as to help them cope with the matters on ethics.

At the district level, local leaders and functionaries are briefed and trained frequently and they are made to play a leading role in the implementation and practice of the national ethical code of conduct in their respective villages and communities. The government has also started non-formal education in villages to educate people deprived of education in their young age and they are taught ethics and values besides reading and writing skills.

Thus, the government's aim in having such a policy is to maintain a correct balance between traditional and modern values.

2.4. Challenges

As mentioned above, although the royal government of Bhutan has good policies framed for maintaining and preserving our age-old cultural values and ethics, change has become inevitable in the face of modernisation. Some of the challenges faced now and foreseen ahead are:

- a. With the changing times and attitudes in the society towards materialism, peoples' character and the way of thinking are changing too. The bond between people from different sections of

society, involving both thought and action, does not seem to be maintained as in the earlier days;

- b. The core values and the essence of the Bhutanese society – the relationships between peers and subordinates, between parents and children, between religious persons and laymen, between teachers and students, between husband and wife, and between friends, relatives, and neighbors – are beginning to see signs of change in the face of modernisation;
- c. With modern education and the rural-urban migration phenomena, the younger sections of the population prefer city life, thus abandoning the older, and indulging in unethical conducts. This is leading to lack of care and concern for the elderly;
- d. With the increase in population, the factors contributing to the social downfall– drug abuse, alcoholism, robberies, burglaries, gambling, etc – are increasing, and if proper guidance and mechanism are not included in the development policies, this is going to be a major challenge;
- e. The Buddhist-based social values of honesty, fidelity, moral integrity, moral rectitude, moral coherence, reciprocal affection, gratitude, filial piety etc. will decline with urbanisation and the onslaught of materialism.

3. RITUALS AND ETHICS FOR SOCIETAL STABILITY

Having examined the present situation of rituals and ethics and the challenges facing Bhutan today, let us examine how we can identify some ritual and ethical

values which will be useful to achieve the goal towards societal stability.

What is important is our understanding of the nature of these values and why we practice them. All our rituals and ethical values are for the wellbeing, progress, freedom and happiness of all the people. In this regard, let us try to understand what are the good qualities and significances that rituals and ethics encompass.

3.1. Importance of Rituals

The rituals are religious obligations or ideals, that contribute to the satisfaction of spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, social and moral education, demonstration of respect or submission, stating one's affiliation, obtaining social acceptance or approval. It can direct the journey of a community or an individual through significant events. It is meant to establish orderliness while one is in chaos, to reach deep within the soul and enable one to see one's deepest state of being. It is the expression of what is going on within the soul and mind. It is to convey the presence of community with their sympathies, congratulations, sorrows and hopes because of what is being experienced.

It helps us mark an occasion - we recognise the event, rather than letting it go unnoticed or glossing over it. It can help one to see what is real, rather than imaginary or hallucinatory, so that one can make it real for themselves, believe it, accept it, and deal with it. Ritual is purposeful by helping a community define its most fundamental beliefs, and build trust and reliance on those beliefs. A community is richer when it can interpret past experiences and the meaning of life's

events. With this in place, a community can stand strong and face the fundamental conflicts, joys, and sorrows of life, and conceive of ways to live enriched lives.

3.2. The Importance of Ethics

Ethics is the core social values. It contributes to the enhancement of skills in good governance; it promotes good citizenship; it enables one to serve with loyalty and dedication; instills respect for social values; to combat vices that are inherent in human beings and to preserve our own tradition and culture; it also helps to gain political stability, social harmony and to think according to religious teachings and to promote and develop self-discipline. It also serves as a basis of peace and prosperity, and basis of government plans and policies; it protects spiritual and temporal laws; protects human rights – thus encompassing all good qualities that a nation or a society should have.

3.3. Concluding Views

From the above description, we have understood that ethics and rituals form the core of social, economic, political and religious ideals. The entire heritage of a nation would culminate in ethics and rituals. Considering the fact in view, I am proposing herewith some concluding observations or views with regard to ethics and rituals.

- a. As we move further into our socio-economic development, we need to take a closer look at the challenges facing each other's nation today and how the ethics and values can be used to promote societal stability. We should seriously reconsider how to interpret these values in terms of contemporary needs. The time has come for us to

transcend our narrow social views and to look forward to developing an understanding of what has been best described as 'universal ethics.' In this way, we will be in a better position to work for the happiness and welfare of the nation as a whole.

- b. Society can be peaceful as long as every member of society adheres to the ethical norms of a society. It should not be applied only at a personal level, but at a systematic level to be practiced by all members of society. Only then can peace and happiness prevail, as a result of the shared interests and the common paths, or value systems of the society and the nation.
- c. While extensive studies have been done worldwide in the area of bio-deterioration, not enough studies have been done on mind-degradation of cultural value. The reason being that in today's world there are chaos over cultural values, moral values and value education for the children in schools and higher institutions of learning geared to make the younger generation of today better citizens of tomorrow. All parents, policy makers, researchers and educationists are greatly concerned over this crucial issue. In this regard, the study on "mind degradation of cultural value and its control" is very important.
- d. Buddhism abounds in noble teachings encompassing every aspect of human life; with a great deal of practical advice on how to live with integrity, wisdom and peace, in the midst of a confusing world. Perhaps it is time for such teachings to be more widely disseminated.

- e. We must make an effort to convince the leaders on the relevance of rituals and ethics to our society, and how effective rituals and ethics are in bringing social harmony. We must also attempt to bring our leaders and policy makers come to a common understanding so that the values of rituals and ethics are incorporated in the developmental policies.
- f. The implementation of rituals and ethical value system involves making each individual understand his/ her responsibility towards society, and it is important to understand the interrelatedness of all rituals and ethics.
- g. Our education system and the media must also play a role in spreading these values so that every individual utilises the rituals and the ethics in their daily lives. A greater awareness of, and an abiding faith in, the continued relevance of moral values and the country's unique cultural heritage needs to be raised especially amongst the youth. If our culture is to survive and flourish, our youth must understand and accept their roles as custodians of a distinct culture; and the values and principles on which our country is founded.
- h. Institutional linkages must be established to exchange expertise amongst SAARC countries from time to time and share each other's knowledge and experiences; periodic inter-cultural meetings must be convened to promote greater understanding and harmony among the member countries;

- i. A networking and resource centre must be established for SAARC cultural activities with the objective of maintaining a database of cultural centers and of each others' programs; and the centre must bring out publications/ journals to educate the people on rituals and ethics.

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The SAARC Identity

Ajeet Cour

Abstract

If we were seriously endeavouring for cultural connectivity in the region, we must explore the cultural roots, lying intertwined under our earth, of the entire SAARC region, right from the Indus Valley Civilization. Our folk culture defines our identity as it is tied up with our historical memory, the way we look at life and the universe, at the nature around; the planet earth that we share, changing seasons, rains and sun shines, birds and animals; our attitudes and rituals, habits and customs, myths and legends; our relationship with our environment, nature's bounties and furies; and our social, religious and political evolution – in short, our whole civilization. In these days and in this age, the younger generation needs sensitivity towards these ancient knowledge systems, innocent rituals, and grandmother's tales which establish and reaffirm our relationship with the nature.

Rituals are only a minute fragment out of a whole world of the eternal charm of the folklore, which comprises of a universe of not only rituals, but also myths and legends, folk tales and songs, fables and cosmologies, folk theatre and grandmothers' tales, folk arts and crafts, life of Buddha and *Jataka* Tales, Mahabharata and Ramayana, the Hadees, and of Quran, the stories the

Bible, our histories, all are part of our awareness. They keep our age-old historical memories alive and vibrant. Their sensitivity and rhythm weave a unique kaleidoscopic pattern which is like a silent symphony of our lives! A silent stream flowing endlessly in the depth of our awareness. They all go deep down in the roots of our existence, and chisel our sensitivity and our ethics, our moral and social values, and form the core of our cultural consciousness.

Cultural consciousness of the countries associated with the South Asian Association for Regional Corporation (referred to as the SAARC region) as reflected in the folklore, tells oral tales and sings songs of the same elements of nature and the same wonder of life around: birds and animals, the little ants and snakes, the bees and butterflies, the trees and plants, the flora and fauna, the clouds and monsoons, the rivers and oceans, grass and crops, which share this universe with us. We sing songs and tell tales of the whole of nature and all the wonders of life around! In short, the whole universe of folklore underlines our cultural identity of the SAARC region and our collective consciousness.

I have worked for cultural connectivity, the most important ingredient for creating a connecting link in the SAARC region, since 1986. Even though the SAARC Charter was signed in December 1985, it somehow concentrated on trade and left out culture. If one drew a line from Afghanistan to Bhutan, and another from Kashmir to Sri Lanka and Maldives, one finds that there is no break in communication between any two contiguous points. Communication breaks down only on extreme points of the scale because of multiplicity of languages, cultures and ethnic Groups in the SAARC

region. While organizing SAARC Festivals of Literature since April 2000, I gradually discovered that besides cultural links, there are also civilisational roots which connect us. They are: Folklore, Buddhism and Sufism. We in the Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (FOSWAL) realised long back that if we were seriously endeavouring for cultural connectivity in the region, we must explore the cultural roots, lying intertwined under our earth, of the entire SAARC region, right from the Indus Valley Civilization.

We in the FOSWAL are convinced that our folk culture defines our identity as it is tied up with our historical memory, the way we look at life and the universe, at the nature around: the planet earth that we share, changing seasons, rains and sun shines, birds and animals; our attitudes and rituals, habits and customs, myths and legends; our relationship with our environment, nature's bounties and furies; and our social, religious and political evolution – in short, our whole civilization. Our collective ancient skills of goldsmiths, ironsmiths of mainly the nomadic tribes, leather craftsmen, potters, rural women who paint colourful murals on mud walls of village huts and earthen *choolahs* (furnace), the cooking places, the grain storage earthen pots, rare craftsmanship of carpenters, the marble inlay craftsmen, mask-makers, craftsmen who hand-craft musical instruments, enamel inlay work, zardozi work, tailoring, hand embroidery. All these skills can be shared with the modern world: a mechanical, insensitive crowd of people indulged in the rat-race of more sophisticated killing machines. In these days and in this age, the younger generation needs sensitivity towards these ancient knowledge systems,

innocent rituals, and grandmother's tales which establish and reaffirm human's relation with nature, from plants and animals, birds and clouds, to the changing colours of the sky, and with millions of stars in the cosmos! It is unfortunate that children have got busy in computer games and have no time for redundant grandmothers who tell stories. We keep them tucked away in their lonely rooms, in our kitchens, or worse: in homes for old people!

I confess I had to think really hard and long about the relation between rituals and ethics. It gradually dawned on me, that rituals do affect our ethics and our code of moral values in a very subtle but significant way. Right from our early childhood, when we have not yet entered the tight-jacketed rules and regulations of our society, and of our religion and of our state, we start absorbing the simple and innocent rituals performed by our grandparents and elders. Like doing *pooja* (prayer) in a particular way; with the tiny flames of little lamps flickering, the flowers and essence emanating soothing fragrance, the idols sitting silently in their serenity; in mosques, the ritual of saying the morning-afternoon-evening prayers, with all those joining the prayers moving in a rhythm perfected with years of bowing before Allah, and saying your *salams* (greetings) to *mashriq* (East) and *maghrib* (West) with harmonious serenity; the prayers and chants and fragrant incense in Buddhist *gompas* and monasteries! The chanting of celestial hymns in Sikh gurdwaras - soulful songs in homage to the sacred relic.

A couple of years back, I visited the site of the sacred Bodhi-tree at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. This was a sapling of the Bodhi-tree, under which the Lord

Buddha attained enlightenment, brought to Sri Lanka from India, as a gift, by Sanghamittra, the daughter of Emperor Ashoka. When I stood under it, and felt being lifted off the ground, of losing my body like a discarded garment and becoming a transparent spirit, being blessed by Lord Buddha himself! The thousands of tiny leaves, of strange mesmerizing colours of soft greens and purples and magentas and sky-blue, quivering and singing, fluttering like butterflies! That was the ritual and ethics in harmonious symphony of the soul. This is what joins our hearts and souls in a unique harmony. The same sensation, I experienced in the Sufi shrines and in the ancient Taxila and Mohenjodaro in Pakistan; in Nalanda; and in Raja Raja's Temples in Tanjore; in the Golden Temple and in Onkareshwar in India; Lalon Faqeer's *mazar* (shrine) in Bangladesh, in sacred chants rising up in crescendo in the Buddhist shrines across India, at ancient monasteries of Bhutan; in Pashupatinath Temple and Nirvana Buddha Temple in Nepal, who they believe is another form of Lord Vishnu!

Rituals, Myths and Legend are our first invisible teachers which teach us the values of life: the essence of ethics! In the whole of our SAARC region, rituals are intertwined with ethics in a very subtle, invisible way. And that is the beauty of our value system and our ethical values, which make us different from the maddening pace of the Western world, where personal success is the ultimate goal and ultimate achievement of life, where the rat-race of 'only the best wins,' and 'only the winner has a right to survive,' is the *mantra* of life! Bigger house, bigger car, fattest bank balance, limitless conquests in so-called love life! Best food, best cheese, best wines! And still the faces are devoid of that inner

glow which we often find at every other street corner, on the ordinary, wheat-coloured faces of ordinary people!

Years back, I saw a film *Where Green Ants Dream*. It was a part of an International Film Festival, but never heard of it after that. I am sure everyone like me, or like that film-maker, those who raises dangerous issues, are wiped out! The locale of the film was Australia. An American company buys a whole chunk of land which was home to a few original inhabitants living a quiet life, with that rarest of the rare gifts of contentment which a million luxuries cannot buy or acquire. The American company intends building a huge shopping plaza with their burgers and cokes, and is going to build factories all around it. A group of original inhabitants, the 'aboriginals' for the Americans, sit quietly in the middle of that dusty square, unperturbed by the noise of huge bulldozers. They sit there without moving their bodies. Only their eyes blink. The owners of the all-mighty American company argue with them. They don't even look at the white, polished, sausage-faced owners because they say "under the land of our ancestors, green ants are dreaming; they are the souls of our ancestors". This message reminds us over and over again of our duty to save the dreams of green ants, and dreams and hope of humanity, specially, that of the SAARC region. We at the FOSWAL also endeavoured to do when we celebrated our Third SAARC Folklore and Heritage Festival in December, 2010, where both the Academic Seminar and the Performances were held during this event, in Chandigarh, India.

From Cultural and Linguistic Diversity to Ideological, Ritualistic and Ethical Unity: the Pakistan Experience

Mariam Saeed

Abstract

Pakistan is a rich country due to its diverse cultural and linguistic heritage. However, it shares rituals and customs with its neighbours and at the same time ethics, morality and a code of life based on religion with Muslims all over the world. This makes Pakistan a unique case study for sociologists as cultural and religious identities create a nation, of this mix of 170 million individuals. These ethics, mores, traditions, rituals, all contribute towards a societal stability in the country as well as in the region.

Human prudence, since ever, mainly remained focused on the development of human life. The proponents demanded intellectual expansion of mankind, as a whole, based on a well-nurtured, wholesome personality of its individuals that any and all systems of human life can conceive. From the early Greek philosophers to the modern day theologians, all have strived as how to perfect the human being through societal checks and balances, so as to create a harmonious society. They realised however, that science can offer ease to physical life but religion can soothe the soul and wrinkle-out the fabric of human life. An Islamic Sociologist, theologian/philosopher Dr. Fazl-ur-Rehman Ansari (1975) in his

most renowned work, *The Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society*, argues that humans require religion to satisfy their metaphysical needs. It is so comforting to know that there is a divine power looking after us and, is there when we need it to guide us and respond to us. This feeling makes us human.

Yet, we live with dichotomies. This does craft the predicaments and anomalies in our lives. That is where the archaeologist, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, linguists, and even metaphysical scientists had been coming-up with one theory after another to define an alive, growing and thriving social being within the ambit of a balanced society. And this societal balance is needed for smooth functioning of our lives. Religion and Culture thus, come forth with ideas to tame the beast in man, to transform him into a social being, and then to discipline the social group for peaceful co-existence with other groups for higher values which mark the distance between animal-kind and humankind. However, once we are in a social group, being the 'superior divine creation', we develop identities.

1. Identities of Pakistan: Diversity in Unity and Unity in Diversity

Pakistan is an amazing case-study for any social scientist who wants to understand present day societal balance based on strong identities, which also pertains diverse and unified rituals and ethics. I say that because Pakistan is a heterogeneous mix of 170 million individuals, who, from their physical appearance to social and cultural practices vary from each other like north and south. Nevertheless, they blend in so well to

form a meta-social national identity, leading to nationwide unity. These overlapping identities create a diverse, yet a globalised nation. I want to divide them into two main identities: the linguistic and cultural identities based on geographic divides and; the ideological identities based on religion and ethics.

1.1 The Linguistic and Cultural Identities:

Pakistan has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity, acquired from layer after layer of 'acculturation' of this region spanning centuries – BC to AD. This culturally fertile and absorbent country has its influences from Indus Valley Civilization (3000 BC) and Gandhara Civilization (1000 BC) to the Native Indian influence (from early Christian eras, reflected in certain rituals especially in Sindh and Southern Punjab), Islamic influence (Arab and later Central Asian and Persian) – manifested in transformation of language, music, fine arts and architecture of the entire Indian subcontinent to recent modern Western influence from last 200 years of British rule of the subcontinent.

These influences have a deep impact on the societal and cultural development of today's Pakistan, and have resulted in linguistic richness of its traditions with Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Siraiki, Hindko (Hazarawal), Pushto, Urdu (National Language), Barohi, Persian, Pothohari, English (Official Language) and even languages like Kalash (spoken by only 5,000 people in Pakistan and declared UNESCO endangered language). It is a known fact that every language has its own cultural paradigm associated with it. Consequently, each language of Pakistan has a distinct culture of its own –

its own colours, foods, festivals, music, dance, folklore, traditions, rituals and mores.

1.1.1 Punjab (land of five rivers)

Predominantly Punjab is an agricultural society, full of traditional celebration of bountiful harvest with songs and dance, rich in folk tales of romances sung in large village gatherings, adorned with colorful dresses and people with customary warmth in attitudes and social behavior who make merry with Punjabi dances like *Bhangra*, *Luddi*, *Tappa* etc. Punjab has cultural similarities and influences of neighboring Punjab in India. It is undoubtedly a reason for congeniality between the two peoples of India and Pakistan. The cultural and linguistic similarities make the two neighbours comfortable with each other, despite the political rhetoric.

1.1.2 Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa (the Khyber Pass)

The people of former North West Frontier Province (NWFP), now called Kyber-Pakhtoonkhwa speak Pushto, Hindko, Pahari and many dialects of Pothohari as well. From their facial features to language and from their eating habits to celebrations they share no similarities with Punjabis. Pushtoo speakers – who make a majority in this province; are followers of honor-code of tribal tradition endowed with capable martial traditions of neighbouring Afghanistan. They value their tribal society based on the principle of respect of elders and traditions. These people celebrate with their *Khattak* dances and Pushto songs.

1.1.3 Sindh (land of the Indus River)

Inheritance of the Indus Valley Civilization and predominantly agrarian, Sindh has its Sindhi speakers – the followers of tribal codes based on value-system of honor and valor. It has however, also embraced and absorbed around twenty-five million ‘Urdu-speaking’ migrants in its areas. The land has a rich tradition of mystic poetry and has still retained some influences of ancient Indian rituals and caste-system. Sindhis are most famous for their ‘*Hey Jamalo*’ Dance, which is a reflection of jubilation and rejoices.

1.1.4 Baluchistan

This is the land of nomadic people, who form a strict tribal society with an ethical code very much based on concept of honor and valor like that of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa. The mountainous terrain of the province has made its inhabitants hard workers and society a closed-knit one. The province shares a border with Iran, and thus shares to some extent the societal values of ancient Persia. It has a rich culture with its oral heritage of folklore and dances like *Lewa*.

1.2 Cultural & Social Festivals

Though every province has its own culture, distinct and vibrant, yet, all share some common events like *Melas* (recreational gatherings) on festivals like *Eid*, and *Urs* (ceremony to pay homage to the *Sufi* Saints, who spread the message of Islam in South Asia – includes *Qawwali*; and also attended by people from other faiths) on either birth or death anniversary of the Saint. Other than these, there are festivals which are associated particularly with

a province or faith like *Nauroz*, which is celebrated in the *Parsi* tradition but *Basant* (kite festival) as a festival, is popular in the province of Punjab, while *Shandur Polo* festival is celebrated in up-north country with *polo* played at the highest altitude. Apart from these cultural festivals or events, a significant social and religious ceremony is the wedding. Here again there are two main aspects to it: the religious element that is *Nikah* ceremony and *Walima* (dinner or lunch to announce the marriage) is the same and does not differ from one part to another part of the country and; the social part may change from area to area; for example the customs attached with the celebrations may differ between various linguistic groups or areas of the country.

2. Ideological (Religious) Identity of Pakistan

Islam (literary meaning: Peace) is a religion which preaches compassion and tolerance – Prophet Muhammad forgave the murderers of his closest relatives. Like any other religion, Islam consists of a belief system, strictly observed, by its adherents. It also has a value-system which its followers are bound to observe. Pakistan, of its total population, has ninety-three percent Muslims. Therefore, religion is a relationship which holds these diverse linguistic and cultural groups together. In fact, this shared religious identity is the very cause of the genesis of Pakistan. Thus, ideological identity of Pakistan makes the peoples of Pakistan ‘one nation’. However, this identity does not restrict itself within the country but also allows its people to associate and fraternise with over one billion Muslims worldwide, regardless of ethnicity, nationality and race.

2.1 Islamic Rituals

Islam has many rituals of its own with a deeper meaning than just to create superficial cult-like practices to create a social discipline. For example before all *Ibadah* (prayers) ‘ablution’ – cleansing of the body; is performed like a ritual. It is not just cleaning of the body but is an invariable reminder that physical and spiritual purification is what brings us closer to God and greater virtues of humanity. Islam is a constant struggle to achieve and aspire for the love of God where every step is to promote inner-peace and social harmony. *Namaz*, the daily five-time prayers (often said collectively) is a ritual with two parameters. One which allows man to reconnect with Allah (God), re-pledge his faith, learn self-discipline, meditate, submit to God both physically and metaphysically and rethink the very reason of his existence, while on the other hand, learn the true principles of sociology in most natural way. A man goes to mosque to say his prayers and meets his neighbours. Hence, mosque is a place for social assembly, where people learn about how the other one is doing. Does he need help? Is he in some trouble? Or is he living a happy life? Then a level up, everyone stands together in straight lines, regardless of their social status, social role or worldly privileges. This teaches equality. No one is better than the other because of his possessions etc. Hence, Islam denies man made caste-systems. It however, inculcates social harmony, a sense of togetherness, a feeling of connection, and respect for other members of community and so on. Being a ritual with an aim, *Namaz* has a philosophy which makes it much more than just a symbol of social union. All the other rituals have a symbolism and attached philosophy

as well, which makes this ideological identity regardless of geographical borders, more powerful and supreme to man-made identities.

3. The Amalgamation of Identities: Rituals and Ethics

To reiterate, Pakistan becomes a unique but successful case of multiple identities and associations yet, identified as a ‘nation’. United States of America is called ‘melting pot’ however, contrary to that Pakistan homes, promotes and prides its cultural and linguistic richness and allows it to be as visible and distinct from the other part of the country as its people like. These people are like rosary beads tied in one thread of religion and this very identity and shared philosophy of religion bring heads and hearts close and develop cultural and social harmony.

Both the Islamic and cultural rituals coexist, like Islamic rituals of *Roza* (fasting) during Ramazan, *Qurbani* (sacrifice, so-called animal slaughter) – teaches the essence of sacrifice, which is the essence of any relationship. A mother sacrifices her sleep for her babies to nurture the relationship; it is the similar sentiment which is attached with *Eid-ul-Azha*, *Jama’at* (collective prayers) – creates social equality, *Zakat* (obligatory charity) ensures the regulation of money in society. Then, some common and prevailing cultural rituals like *Pagdi* (men’s head-dress) – symbolises honour, *Chadar* (cloth to cover woman’s body) – is a representation of modesty and honour, *Musafiha* (embrace) – represents brotherhood, create a distinctive national psyche and attitude of Pakistan. Similarly, *Eid* is celebrated twice a year, to mark historically important Islamic events but

Hindu Pakistanis also celebrate ‘Holi’ and ‘Diwali’ festivals especially in Sindh, while, Christmas is also celebrated by the Christian community of Pakistan.

The ethics of Pakistan are mostly inspired by Islamic Ethics which laid a code of conduct even for wars – no burning of trees, destruction of crops, or killing of unarmed people. It also introduced ‘Women’s Rights’ fourteen hundred years ago, when girl children were buried alive in Arabia. Similarly, in South Asia, Islam abolished the cruel ritual of ‘Sati’- burning of wife alive with the dead body of her husband. Islam gave right of divorce to women, even when a century ago even West denied it. It also introduced the concept of human equality, charity, sacrifice and Jihad – a misunderstood concept means struggle ‘against one’s desires’.

Pakistan has thus, overlapping cultural and linguistic identities, meaning, affinities with its borders, and yet a larger religious identity with similarities beyond its borders. I would make my argument by saying that the cultural and linguistic similarity between Punjab of Pakistan and Punjab of India, shared traditional heritage and Pushtoo language of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa and Afghanistan, tribal mores and culture of Baluchistan and Iran make Pakistan a key jigsaw piece in the South Asian region, as evident from the map shown in Figure 1:



Figure 1: Pakistan : Major Ethnic Groups

Source: <http://www.travelbbb.com/pakistan-ethnic/>
(last accessed 17 March 2011)



Figure 2: A young girl attired in Shalwar Kamiz, the national dress of Pakistan, but also popularly worn in Indian Punjab makes it difficult to guess if she is a Pakistani or an Indian.



Figure 3: The old man wearing Pakistani Shalwar Kamiz is painting a vase in predominantly Iranian-influenced style, wearing a head-scarf worn by men in Middle-East, represents diverse influences and affiliations of the Pakistani population with its neighbours and beyond.

Source: <http://twitterpakistan.com/tag/pakistani-culture/> (last accessed 17 March 2011)

4. Problems of Overlapping Identities

However, with richness in ethics, traditions, culture and language, there are some issues as well. Some non-Islamic practices are still followed due to tribal-cultural ethics, like honour-killing, sprouting from concept of Honour, deep-rooted in South-Asian mentality, though an alien concept in Islam. Similarly, Queen Elizabeth could become the 'virgin queen' but such practices are negated by Islam, yet some remote tribes in Sindh marry their daughters with Quran for financial gains. Or giving away a daughter to compensate killing of a male

member of rival tribe etc. as practiced by tribes of neighbouring countries is another forbidden act in light of Islam. These practices based on cultural ethics clash with the teachings of Islam.

Furthermore, these overlapping identities sometimes create counter-cultures and non-conformist sub-cultures like the "partying" youth, indulging in alcohol, drugs, etc, influenced by the West, despite living in a society, which follows a strict doctrine of religion that prohibits the consumption of alcohol, drugs etc. thereby giving rise to modern day social conflicts. This xenophilia among youth and clash of identities in the name of globalisation is creating identity-crises within the country.

Interpretation of religious teachings on cultural ethics also becomes challenging especially with issues like dressing up. People with more fundamental bent of mind want exact physical manifestation of words of Quran, while liberals interpret the same words with much flexibility. Do Muslims have a universal dress-code? If so why have a culturally influenced national dress? Such debates create communal friction at times and become responsible for social segmentation. Say xenophilia versus xenophobia!

Conclusion

Pakistan – founded in 1947, is still in the process of evolving a country-wide cultural identity of its own and at the same time dealing with global influences. It can easily associate itself with South Asian Association of Regional Countries (SAARC) region as the cultural aspects – the festivities of a Pakistani wedding are similar to an Indian wedding; it has kite-festivals, like

ones celebrated in varying degrees and various ways in SAARC Region. Similarly, harvest celebrations ‘*baisakhi*’ (harvest festival) has shared sentimentality with India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives. Lighting of oil lamps is another feature common in this region. Hence, Pakistan is a true member of SARRC in its spirit.

Yet, Islamic rituals like in Hajj (Pilgrimage), canons of Quran, shared faith creates a bond beyond geographical bounds and, Pakistan becomes a very important member of Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). It does not matter whether you are meeting another Muslim for the first time, you share and understand his/ her language, you share same cultural nuances, and just ‘*As-salam-o-Aliykum*’ (greeting, meaning peace be with you) binds you in a unique relationship of brotherhood. One greeting make you a member of much larger community. I can associate myself with my neighbours easily but an African Muslim of Sudan or Ethiopia, with no apparent resemblance or familiarity is also not a stranger to me. That is how these overlapping identities make me a successful connector between and within SAARC region as well as the whole world where there are Muslims. My overlapping identities, my culture, my languages, ethics, mores, and traditions make me a universal citizen without the need of a passport for any further identification!

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The Country Situation in Using Ethics and Rituals from Ancient Stages: Beliefs, Observances and Practices in Sri Lanka

Chandrasiri Palliyaguru

Abstract

Though the effectiveness of ritual beliefs and their observances of the Sinhalese masses has been gradually disappearing in modern times due to modernisation and urbanisation along with the new economical and social forces, the majority still value ritual practices and observances as they give solace to their lives. Life cycle events such as birth, puberty, marriage and death are also viewed according to the notion of karumaya. Planetary gods (graha deviyas) demons (yakas) and malevolent spirits (pretas) cause misfortunes or illnesses mainly during the bad period (apalakale) of one’s horoscope. If a Sinhalese Buddhist suffers from illness or misfortune, he may conduct a merit making ritual for a monk and recite benedictory verses (seth kavi) for the gods (devas), and at the same time he may go to a soothsayer or an astrologer and the basis of his instructions propitiate demons or malevolent spirits. In this article the author elaborates the various kinds of rites and rituals, performed by Sinhalese Buddhists to avert these kinds of misfortunes and crises, which are categorised into three main groups: Calendrical rituals (recurrent cyclical); Crisis rituals (recurrent non-cyclical); Life cycle rituals (non-recurrent non-cyclical).

1. Introduction

A ritual is the meeting point of myth and metaphysic or reflective thought and religious living. It is the frontier between time and eternity; the known and the unknown. Rituals are necessary because they enable man to comprehend and to realise that which is the ultimate basis of life, to communicate with the powers that preside over the destinies of the universe to which s/he belongs. Man cannot afford to live in a state of giving up one's beliefs or faiths, once the awareness of the unknown has dawned on him. Every society, ancient or modern has not been able to dispense rituals - in fact they cannot - they worship their flags, their heroes in exactly the same manner as the ancients revere and worship their sacred objects. Man is not only congenitally inclined to believe in and relate himself through rituals to powers superior to him but he does so to live with his community in harmony and decorum and to show that he is rooted in the structure of human existence. According to sociologists, there can only be two forms of ritual: the metaphysical and the mythical. Rites and rituals possess an intellectual character in so far they are looked upon as symbolic and sensible expressions of the doctrine and social character when considered as 'practices' requiring the participation of all members of the community.

2. The Sinhalese Ritual Field

Sri Lanka is predominantly a Buddhist country. About seventy percent of the population in the country is Buddhist. Buddhism was officially introduced to Sri Lanka during the third century BC by Maha Mahinda

Thero from India, who was a religious emissary of the Emperor Ashoka.

Subsequently, myths, rituals, religious observances and practices of the pre-Buddhist era as well as Hindu and other belief systems crept into Sri Lankan Buddhism and this religious admixture can be called as Sinhalese Buddhism. My intention here is to present the ritual field of the Sinhalese Buddhists according to its contrasts and similarities, linkages and hierarchy in a concise and formal manner. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, it must be stated that the picture I am going to present of the ritual field of the Sinhalese Buddhists is not a conscious formulation on the part of the Sinhalese Buddhists; rather it is a composite picture derived from several analytical procedures and is hence an academic one. By systematically working through their basic concepts, ritual idiom, ritual types, kinds of offerings and the types of ritual specialists, I will try to present the total field of rituals practiced among the Sinhalese Buddhists.

In the first place the Sinhalese Buddhists are mainly concerned about the beliefs affecting *melova* (this world) and *paralova* (the next world) which centre on the fundamental Buddhist notion of *karumaya* (the popular term for the Buddhist technical term *kamma*). The individual is responsible for his *karumaya* which can be carried over from his earlier lives into his present existence. The balance of an individual's *karumaya* over his good deeds (*pin*) determines his chance for attaining a better or worse state in this life and the life hereafter. *Karumaya* has two extremes, i.e. *vasanava* (luck) and *avasana* (bad luck). Even though human life is bound by *karumaya*, one can avoid its effect temporarily and

achieve *vasanava* (luck, prosperity, health) by propitiating various supernatural categories of being or as a long term measure by performing meritorious deeds (*pinkam*) and living a virtuous life. Life cycle events such as birth, puberty, marriage and death are also viewed according to the notion of *karumaya*. Planetary gods (*graha deviyas*), demons (*yakas*) and malevolent spirits (*pretas*) cause misfortunes or illnesses mainly during the bad period (*apalakale*) of one's horoscope. If a Sinhalese Buddhist suffers from illness or misfortune, s/he may conduct a merit making ritual for a monk and recite benedictory verses (*seth kavi*) for the gods (*devas*), and at the same time he may go to a soothsayer or an astrologer and on the basis of his instructions propitiate the demons or malevolent spirits. This does not mean that he is confusing Buddhist rituals with non-Buddhist rituals, it simply means that misfortune may be interpreted as a consequence of *karumaya*, or as an affliction caused by spirits or as both working in conjunction. To avert these kinds of misfortunes and crises, Sinhalese Buddhists perform various kinds of rites and rituals and they can be categorised into three main groups:

1. Calendrical rituals (recurrent cyclical);
2. Crisis rituals (recurrent non-cyclical);
3. Life cycle rituals (non-recurrent non-cyclical).

2.1 Recurrent Cyclical Rituals

Most of the Sinhalese rituals are calendrical and are held at the Buddhist temples or the temple precincts and are presided over by the Buddhist monks. These calendrical rituals are closely connected with the cycle of

agricultural activities, namely the cycle of paddy cultivation and other cultivations on dry lands (*chena*), which forms the basis of the village economy. These rituals are performed on predictable occasions, at fixed periodic intervals. Usually every Sinhalese Buddhist is aware of the *poya* day (full moon day). In general most of the rituals that come under the category of *pinkama* rituals take place on full-moon days. There are four *poya* days in a month: *amavaka* (moonless), *pura atvaka* (eighth day after the full moon), *pura pasalosvak* (full moon), *ava atavaka* (eighth day after the full moon). Even though all these four days are supposed to be religiously sacred, *pura pasalosvaka* (full moon) is the most important day on which *pinkama* ceremonies are performed, and again some of the full-moon days are important than the others. The full-moon day in the month of May is connected with the most important events of the Buddha's life. According to tradition the Buddha visited Sri Lanka on three occasions and these visits always coincided with the full-moon days in January, April and May. The full moon day of the month of May is not only a ceremonial and religious occasion, but it is also an occasion for national celebration. According to traditional belief, Prince Vijaya, who is regarded as the forefather of the Sinhala race, came to Sri Lanka on the very day of the Buddha's passing away, i.e. on the *Vesak* full moon day.

The ceremonial cycle of the Sinhalese Buddhists consists of a series each of different duration such as daily, weekly, monthly and annual cycles. Almost all of these ceremonies are performed at every structural level of Sinhalese Buddhist society; home, village, town and the country as a whole.

Daily religious services at household shrines are mainly observed by the oldest female member of the house. In almost every Sinhala Buddhist house, there is a little corner or a separate room in which daily religious rituals are performed and this varies according to social status and economy.

The ceremonial word *uposatha davasa* came into Sinhala Language as *pohoya* or *poyadavasa*. Up to 1818 *poyadavasa* was an official and religious holiday, and it was changed into Sunday under the British occupation of Sri Lanka. In 1970 the then government reverted to the old system and abolished the Sunday holiday, but this did not last long. Within three years the Government introduced Sunday again as the weekly holiday and some of the most important *poya* days were made official holidays.

On *poya* days Sinhalese Buddhists belonging to various trades such as farmers, carpenters, builders, bricklayers and fishermen etc., do not undertake their daily trades (except for the people any case because of their sophistication might not strictly adhere to their practices, mercantile and Government offices all over Sri Lanka might be open on such days), because all these trades involve harm to insects in soil, wood or water.

The *poyaday* is a normal occasion on which *pinkama* (meritorious acts) and *pujava* (religious offerings) are held at the temples. The other important function connected with the full moon day is the observance of *ata sil* (the eight precepts) by the lay devotees. Usually the lay followers of the Buddha's doctrine, the particular individual or group who want to observe eight precepts, go to the temple early in the

morning on the *poyaday*, take the eight precepts from Buddhist monks of the temple and stay in the temple compound or in the *sil ge* (a house built for people who observe the eight precepts) till next morning, meditating, listening to sermons by the monks or reading religious scriptures. During the observance of *ata sil*, the individual who observes *sil* is not called by his name by his kinship term. He or she is called *sil atta* (person who observe precepts) or *upasaka atta* and he or she addresses others as *dayaka atta* (person who provides food etc. to the clergy) irrespective of kinship terms. The feeding of *upasakas* is a meritorious duty for relations and friends of the *upasakas*. Therefore, every household takes great care to feed them their morning meal (*hil dane*), mid-day meal (*daval dane*) and beverages (*gilanpasa*) in the evening.

People who have social and economic obligations do not have much time for religious activities such as observance of *ata sil*. They only get such a chance once or twice a year. But instead of observing *ata sil* they acquire merit by performing food offering (*dana*) etc. to the monks. The majority of folk in a typical community like a Sinhala village get an opportunity to observe *ata sil* rarely.

Sometimes they observe *ata sil* when they are on a pilgrimage to sacred places like Anuradhapura, Kelaniya, Tissamaharamaya or Mahiyanganaya etc. For a Sinhalese Buddhist villager, going on a pilgrimage to a sacred place is both an important as well as a popular way of spending a holiday. When making a pilgrimage they pay particular attention to the acquiring of merit by paying homage to sacred places whilst enjoying a holiday too.

2.2 Recurrent Cyclical Rituals (Annual Cycle)

Annual religious events such as *Vesak*, *Poson*, *Asela* are fixed by long religious traditions of Sri Lanka, and all these events always fall on *poya* days. The observance of these days as sacred days is not particular to the Buddhist tradition but is based on older religious traditions of moon worship which were prevalent in ancient India and Sri Lanka. The Buddhists, however, legitimised them as Buddhist sacred days connecting them with myths and legends centering on the events of Lord Buddha's life or on the lives of religious leaders and the events which were important to the Sinhala Buddhists. The observance of these could be viewed as commemorating and symbolically reenacting those myths.

The majority of Sinhalese Buddhist rituals are based on the lunar calendar; the solar calendar hardly enters their calculation in arranging the programme of activities. The date added time is recorded according to the lunar observations but co-related with the present solar system as well. The only solar ceremony is the Sinhalese New year festival, commencing with the entry of the sun into the asterism of Aries. All the annual cyclical Sinhalese Buddhist rituals are closely tied to the agricultural calendar, and some of them do not show Buddhist elements, though they are observed by Sinhalese Buddhists. In Sri Lanka there are two agricultural seasons called *Yala* and *Maha*. The *Yala* season is from September to March and the *Maha* season is from March to September. As stated above, Buddhist ritual events like *Vesak*, *Poson* and *Asala* are fixed by religious tradition, and they have nothing to do with the agricultural calendar. Nevertheless, the

observance of *vas pinkama* (religious festival performed during the rainy season) coincides with the rainy season. It is interesting to note that the majority of cyclical Buddhist rituals fall in the rainy season as well as the dry and harvesting time. As a whole a good number of Buddhist rituals occur during the months of April, May, June and August. But generally *Deva* rituals (rituals connected with gods) connected with the ritual complex of *perahera* (ritual of performing processions) are performed after the harvesting or before harvesting.

2.3 Recurrent Non-Cyclical Rituals (Crisis Rituals)

According to Sinhalese Buddhist beliefs, life crises whether physical or mental, can be caused either by natural or supernatural agents. The naturalistic theory of the cause of life crises is entirely based on the Ayurveda medical system. According to Ayurveda life crises are caused by the upsetting or excitement of any or more of the three humors basic to human organism: *vata* (wind), *pitta* (bile), *semha* (phlegm). These are collectively known as *tun dos* (three evil influences). In addition to the diseases that spring from within the organism are those caused by supernatural agencies. Into the category of supernatural comes the *Yakas* (demons), *Pretas* (malevolent spirits of lower class), *Devas* (gods), and *Graha deviyas* (planetary gods). If a person is suffering from being possessed by a *Yaka*, a *Yakuma*, *thovilaya*, or *samayama* is performed or if he suffers from unfavourable planetary movements under any specific planetary god, a *baliyagaya* or *baliya* is performed. If none of these remedies work, then it will be because the disease is a *karuma ledak* (a disease caused by *karumaya*) which means it cannot be cured as his/ her

karumaya is so bad and the suffering must continue. The patient or his blood relations will then seriously engage in *pinkama* rituals in order to avert his *karume* or at least to alleviate it.

2.4 Non-Recurrent Non-Cyclical Rituals (Life Cycle Rituals)

In all societies there are two types of mobility or passage from one state to another towards which ritual is directed: role change and geographical movement. In both cases, persons passing from one state to another abandon certain attachments and habits; they must acquire certain other attachments and accept new responsibilities and must learn new things. Role changes occur more or less regularly and predictably in the cycle of individual lives and their timing varies from one culture to another. Birth, puberty and death are universal themes of rituals, for at these times an individual enters into new relationship with the world and the community.

As in every society, the Sinhalese Buddhists community also marks the change of status in life by life cycle rituals. But first of all it is important to mention that there is a difference between the life-cycle rituals of laymen and those of the priesthood. Life-cycle rituals connected with priestly life are ritualistic observances with Buddhist elements and are called *Pinkamas*. The religious significance of the life-cycle rituals connected with priestly life is both symbolic and instrumental. Symbolically they denote the passage of a layman from his status in lay society to that of a religious person, to a spiritual life lived according to the doctrine or his passage from temporary novice-hood to a permanent and higher spiritual life, namely ordained monk-hood.

Life cycle rituals connected with Sinhalese Buddhist laymen have nothing to do with Buddhism and they are called *magula*. The ceremonial occasions of *magula* are not religiously important and the participation in these ceremonies is limited to the kin group and to close friends. A *magula* is performed by the Sinhalese Buddhists to mark a certain stage in one's passage towards social adulthood. Those stages are like milestones that mark his or her progress from the cradle to the grave and each *magula* denotes a particular stage that has a social, religious, cultural, economic or other significance.

Ritual of the Sinhalese Buddhists is a complex whole comprising three units, *Pinkama*, *Magula* and *Setsantiya*. This ritual complex embraces every belief and action of the Sinhalese masses based on ritual concepts of ritual impurity (*killā*) and taboo (*tahanciya*). In almost every ritual they try to avert ritual impurity and taboos in order to get desired good results. All these beliefs and observances are natured and protected by them as these are very important to them because their livelihood is dependent on agriculture. They had the leisure not only to observe rites and rituals but also to make them a part of their lives as they made them happy and secure within the community or group.

Though the effectiveness of ritual beliefs and their observances of the Sinhalese masses had been disappearing gradually in modern times due to modernisation and urbanisation along with the new economical and social forces, they still value ritual practices and observances as they give solace to their life and to have community feeling surpassing individual isolation within the community.

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Fertility Rituals and Societal Stability among Sinhalese Buddhists: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore how rituals related to birth among Sinhalese Buddhists facilitate to construct a stable society in Sri Lanka. An investigation is made on the rituals performed during three periods which are centred around birth: marriage to conception, the gestation period; and the post-natal period. This study has attempted to provide a novel perspective by integrating a demographic outlook to the ritual-social stability relationship. Fertility rituals practiced by the Sinhalese Buddhist society demand a degree of self-sacrifice which in turn promotes selflessness. All the fertility rituals mentioned in this paper demand a considerable self-sacrifice by family and/or community. Performing those fertility rituals creates strong collective emotions and celebrates group values. Fertility rituals also guide and inspire the participants of the rituals to help each other both at family and community level which ultimately strengthen and sustain community structure.

1. Introduction

The main intention of this paper is to explore how the rituals and belief systems prevailing among the

Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka facilitates to construct a stable society. The study is confined to a major component of population change, namely fertility and its related rituals. Therefore, this paper attempts to introduce a different dimension to the ritual-social stability relation by integrating a demographic outlook. This component is a main event of any individual's lifeline. In turn the society that each individual belongs to, most often celebrates such events. It is frequently recognised that such celebrations are associated with a set of culturally or religiously determined rituals. Durkheim (1976: 47) claims that ceremonies and rituals have a revitalizing role which helps people to remind their commonality and the past. Rituals also provide people with a fine feeling of their belonging to the society which in turn helps them to strengthen their ability to overcome difficulties and resolve problems as a group. It will be quite interesting to investigate how a country which underwent almost four hundred and fifty years of western colonial pressure retained their social stability through Sinhalese Buddhist traditions. It is more imperative to scrutinise whether such constancy was a consequence of rituals related to various life cycle events of the Sinhalese Buddhists. This will offer a unique opportunity for the Sinhalese Buddhist society to discover appropriate strategies to preserve such rituals in the presence of the globalisation effects. The functionalist framework in Sociology stresses consensus and order in society. It also focuses on social stability and shared values. Functionalism started off from the work of Durkheim (1976) who analyzed how society remains relatively stable. Durkheim (1976) claimed that rituals produce group solidarity which is a function that may be distant from the apparent purpose of a ritual, such as

celebration of religious beliefs. Therefore, solidarity is an important function of rituals (Merton 1968).

Rituals and associated ceremonies have always played a vital role in the Sri Lankan society since ancient times. They have been transferred from one generation to another in the island which has a history stretching back more than 2500 years. Among the Sinhalese Buddhists, most of these rituals are embodied into their livelihood behavioural patterns specifically in the social and religious spheres. Although Sri Lanka is advancing towards a more technologically oriented state with benefits accrued via globalised technological progress, traditional customs and rituals seem to retain their strength within the Sinhalese Buddhists society. It is also observed that those rituals and related ceremonies have been constantly centred on important life events such as birth, marriage, mobility and death. In addition, those life cycle events are explicitly celebrated by the society and they attach precious significance to the kinship network within the society.

2. Evidence Elsewhere

Birth is the first significant event of the life cycle of a person. However, a birth is influenced by the factors affecting the mother and the foetus and/ or child during prenatal and postnatal periods. Rituals linked to the birth of a child can be traced from a variety of cultures all around the world as the Editor of the *Midwifery Today* quotes some of them:

In Central African Republic: *A call-and-response song is used during birth: "EI-OH mama ti mbi, ti mbi aso mbi"* ("Ei-Oh mother of mine, my belly

hurts me"). The response: "Kanda be ti MO!" ("Tie up your heart," meaning "Tough it out") (Jennifer Wright, *Midwifery Today*, Issue 32)

In Angola: *The Umbundu people do not take the new-born baby out of the home for the first seven days because they believe the child's life is tenuous and bad luck might befall it.* (Eliza Buck, *International Midwife*, Issue 2).

In Malaysia: *The bleeding postpartum woman is considered polluted and polluting. At the same time, she is still vulnerable to evil spirits. Therefore she is forbidden to leave the house or participate in cooking and cleaning.* (Tina Kanagaratnam, *International Midwife*, Issue 3).

In Mexico: *A pregnant woman should avoid all contact with anything death-related. She is forbidden from attending funerals or burials and from visiting cemeteries.* (Guadalupe Trueba, *Midwifery Today* Issue 32).

3. Food Cravings or Dola-Duka

These quotes suggest that a variety of rituals is being maintained persistently in diverse community groups but their common purpose is to guarantee either safe child birth or securing the health of the mother and child. In Sri Lanka, one of the most popular rituals performed during the early part of the gestation is pregnancy craving which is called *dola-duka* in Sinhalese language. Although *dola-duka* has been interpreted in various ways, the closest meaning can be 'suffering of two hearts' which appears to be originating from the Sanskrit term '*dhaurda dukka*'. It is a known belief that those women who suffer from food cravings should not

be deprived of them as it can make them very weak. Therefore, 'it was very important that such desires were satisfied, a belief reflected in medieval Sinhalese literature such as the fourteenth century *Saddharmalankaraya* of *Dharmakirithi*' (Hussein). There are many reasons as to why women experience food cravings during pregnancy. The simplest explanation seems to be the need for additional calories, nutrient deficiencies and hormonal changes during pregnancy (see website: *Women's Healthcare Topics*). Deutsch (1945) claimed that food cravings are influenced by psychological problems such as hostility to the foetus. Obeyesekere (1963: 325) argues that

... in *dola-duka* there is a great variety of foods desired by the woman. Many of these foods are not chosen arbitrarily by the woman but are culturally recognised as the 'normal' foods eaten by women during this period. The appetite of the woman may be perverse but the foods selected are often culturally determined. the psychological problems expressed through the complex of *dola-duka* are mostly (though not entirely) culturally and socially created. In other words *dola-duka* will be viewed as a symbol system, related very importantly to the psychological needs of the women....

Food craving plays an important role in community participation. It is not just psychological or physiological but also a social phenomenon which brings the community together for a common purpose. In this way, the society takes the responsibility of supporting the pregnant woman. Elderly women or those who are of childbearing age will endeavour to provide any food item that the pregnant woman desires during her gestational period. It is a custom among the Sinhalese women to ask their pregnant relatives or

neighbours what they would like to eat and then urgently supply it. In addition, regular visits by relatives and friends with a packet of rice and curry wrapped in a banana leaf is also a common practice among the Sinhala Buddhist society. It is believed that if such desires are not fulfilled with due respect, then there is a high tendency to experience miscarriages (or spontaneous abortion) or the new born to suffer from various illnesses. Regular visits by family relatives and friends with food provide a unique opportunity to strengthen social cohesion.

4. Veneration of the Bodhi-Tree

Typically traditional societies anticipate child birth after marriage within a stipulated gestational time period and it is still true for the Sinhalese Buddhist society even though the present day interpretation of marriage is rapidly changing in the western cultural context. A ritual performed in relation to delayed conception is a good evidence for such actions. It is believed that the first conception is late due to the misdeeds committed by the woman in previous lives. Therefore, Sinhalese Buddhists encourage such women to perform various religious activities in Buddhist temples such as *Bodhi Pooja* which is the veneration of the *Bodhi*-tree (papal tree: *figus religiosa*). It is understood that *Bodhi Pooja* will invoke blessings upon the woman and thereby eliminate the evil effects. Although this was highly prevalent when incidence of intra-uterine and neo-natal mortality was high in Sri Lanka, we still observe such religious performances among Sinhalese Buddhists even in the presence of high ante-natal clinics all around the island. A visit to Buddhist temples presents an exclusive opportunity to interact with others in a more peaceful

manner which in fact leads to establishing stable communities.

5. Devil Dances

Another ritual which is especially performed in southern Sri Lanka is *Rata Yakuma* and *Riddie Yagaya* which are known to be important ritual performances to ensure healthy gestation and confinement (Paranavitan, 2008). This is also performed for those who had miscarriages. *Rata Yaka* seems to be an evil spirit (or a devil) who expects offerings and then in turn ensures a comfortable pregnancy and delivery of a healthy child. The underlying rationale to this is linked to a story which explains how infertile seven queens known as *Ridie Bisav* became fertile after offering a robe to the *Buddha Deepankara*. This advocates that evil sprits linked to infertility can be eliminated by performing meritorious deeds. The husband of the pregnant woman is heavily involved in this performance and it is carried out in front of his own community. This ritual includes activities linked to a newborn child. Subsequently, another subritual called *Kumara Samayama* is also performed in order to protect the newly born infant from evil spirit. This is supposed to safeguard the well-being of the child. This ritual is intended to promote the health of the mother and the child but at the same time it allows participation of the surrounding community to witness its performance. Such gatherings in rural environment have always promoted communal harmony and secured social values.

6. Blessings of the Gods

Sinhalese Buddhists believe that gods can help them to perform better in any life activity by safeguarding them

from evil spirits. Almost every Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka has allocated special places for various gods for the purpose of worship. However, in turn, it is believed that gods expect offerings from people. It is customary for a pregnant mother to visit with her family temples or holy places which are of special significance. In this regard, Buddhist temples such as the Temple of the Tooth Relic, and the Sacred Bo-tree in *Anuradhapura* or holy places like *Katharagama* (God Skanda), *Aluthnuwara* (Goddess Paththini) and *Kelaniya* (God Vibhishana). Those who cannot travel to those places due to various reasons including distance and cost will visit temples close to their homes where a section of the temple is allocated for those shrines of gods and perform the expected rituals. A *pooja wattiya* (a fruit tray) is usually offered and a vow for a protected childbirth. They also promise that they will return and make those offerings, if their wishes are rewarded.

7. Protection against the Evil Influence of the Planetary Deities

Sinhalese Buddhists trust that planetary position at the time of the birth of the child can have a considerable influence on the child's as well as the parents' lives. It has been a practice to cast a horoscope at the birth of a child on the basis of the time of birth which usually is subsequently consulted at the very important events of one's life. If the horoscope demonstrates serious calamities such as severe illnesses, then astrologers usually recommend some rituals like cutting limes (*dehi-kepiema*) for a minor calamity and *bali*-ceremony for major ones (Kariyawasam 1996-2010). *Dehi Kapiema* is usually regarded as a family event but *Bali* is a ceremony which brings the surrounding community

members together to help the so-called affected family. In the *bali*-ceremony presiding deities of the planets or *graha* are invoked and pacified for protection against their evil influences. This ritual is a dancing and drumming act for *bali* sculptures by the *bali* practitioner who incessantly performs propitiatory stanzas calling for protection and remedy. It is assumed that the *bali* ceremony is a fusion of both Buddhism and folk religion. All the verses and *modus operandi* used in this ritual are those worshiping the merits of the *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* and of the Buddhist deities. Therefore, it comes into view that these spiritual virtues are invoked to fetch redress. The entire ritual is performed by incorporating main stanzas related to Buddhism. The preparatory work for a *bali* ceremony stretches over a few days and it is usually done with the active participation of the community. Therefore, it can be regarded as more of a community affair although it is connected to a particular family. It has been pointed out that sharing roles and responsibilities by communities and spiritual attachment of the residents to the ritual substantially contribute to the formation and development of social capital which is an extremely essential constituent for societal stability (Bandari et al).

8. Conclusion: Ethics, Fertility Rituals, and Stability of the Sinhalese Buddhist Society

As in any society, Sinhalese Buddhists also pay an utmost attention to the events related to childbirth. It is evident from the above discussion that Sinhalese Buddhists are deeply concerned with a safe delivery of a healthy child from the day of the marriage of a couple. It is a known fact that the life expectancy of a society is strongly correlated with the level of intra-uterine,

neo-natal and post-neo-natal mortality. Advances in medical technology and health practices have immensely contributed to lower such mortality and in turn improve the life expectancy of the Sinhalese Buddhists, but still the society upholds and exercises its cultural beliefs irrespective of their educational or any other socio-economic status. The continuity of the fertility rituals can also be attributed to their harmlessness, ethical acceptability and religious outlook.

None of the fertility rituals stated in this paper shows any sign of physical or psychological destruction of the mother or the child. Instead, they provide great psychological support by preparing the mother for a safe delivery. People most often use religious beliefs and rituals to acquire a psychological support, especially in the face of uncertainty (Obare 2000). Religion presents a system of connotations that can be used to craft sense out of people's lives. In this context, Buddhist beliefs and fertility rituals provide a strong basis for group integration and unity. In addition, their sacredness and supernatural nature construct a powerful foundation for social control both at individual and communal level.

Fertility rituals practiced by the Sinhalese Buddhist society demand a degree of self-sacrifice which in turn promotes the selflessness. All the fertility rituals mentioned above demand a considerable self-sacrifice by family and/or community. The performance of those fertility rituals by various members of the community sensitises one to the fact that each member is part of a large community working for a common objective. It also creates strong collective emotions and celebrates group values. The atmosphere generated through such a sacred environment usually promotes ethical behaviour of the community.

It is shown that 'ritual performance brings to mind an awareness of fundamental reality according to Buddhism, namely, dependent arising. 'Being aware of mutual interdependence brings a deeper sense of compassion for all beings, and a more focussed inspiration to act morally on their behalf' (Mitchell 2000). Fertility rituals also guide and inspire the participants of the rituals to help each other, like in the case of food craving or *dola-duka*, both at family and community level which ultimately strengthen and sustain the community structure. In addition, all the Buddhist fertility rituals mentioned in this paper consist of some kind of bodily actions, sounds, aroma and various types of oral articulations which blend together and transfer as values from one generation to another. Such a process has always promoted tradition and thus solidarity within the Sinhalese Buddhist society because it has the power to continually strengthen the community's shared values and beliefs.

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The *Poruwa* Ceremony of Sinhalese Buddhists as a Marriage Ritual

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Abstract

The Poruwa ceremony has been an age-old tradition in Sri Lanka and this article explores its social and cultural value. It has been one of the rituals of a series of rituals practiced when a couple gets married. The article documents the origin of the Poruwa ceremony and the present socio-anthropological value it bears among the Sinhalese Buddhists. Even though it has undergone so many changes over a period of time, still the Sinhalese Buddhists follow the tradition with much reverence.

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important rites of passage in anyone's life. So many sociologists and anthropologists have launched extensive research on marriage in all types of societies. Even though marriage is a universal phenomenon it does not mean that the customs associated with marriage in all societies are universal. According to Nanda (1980) marriage refers to the, 'customs, rules and obligations that establish a special relationship between a sexually cohabiting adult male and female, between them and any children they produce, and between the kin groups of husband and wife' (p. 196).

According to this definition it is understood that marriage is not between only two individuals; husband and wife, mainly from the opposite sexes. Its focus moves beyond the two individuals concerned and it develops a series of social networks. So a marriage means a large number of individuals, the kin groups, coming together to form uncountable social relationships among them.

The definition discusses the customs, rules and obligations that are practiced over generations and these formulate a set of rituals that we see in any marriage in any society. A ritual, according to Tylor (1991), is 'a set or series of acts, usually involving religion or magic, with the sequence established by tradition' (p. 457). 'Poruwa ceremony' (a series of rituals conducted on the wedding day as the couple gets married) is a common marriage ritual among the Sinhalese irrespective of their geographical differences. During the *Poruwa* ceremony a set or a series of acts, rituals that are associated with religion, myth and magic take place.

Among the Buddhists in Sri Lanka the *Poruwa* ceremony holds an important place in a marriage due to numerous cultural implications and obligations. It is assumed that the history of the *Poruwa* goes back as far as two thousand years. There is the decorated granite *Magul Poruwa*, (a temporary stage erected to perform marriage rituals of the couple that is going to be wed), in the *Magul Maha Vihara* at Lahugala in Ampara district in Sri Lanka (Figure 1). The historical belief is that this was used during the marriage of King Kawantissa of Ruhuna and Vihara Maha Devi, the parents of the well-known Sinhala King Dutugemunu (161-137 BC).



Figure 1 (a and b): *Magul Poruwa* at Magul Maha Vihara at Lahugala in the Ampara district

Source: Figure 1 a

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~lkawgw/devi.html>
(last accessed 18 March 2011).

Figure 1 b

<http://amazinglanka.com/heritage/lahugala/lahugala2.php>
(last accessed 18 March 2011).

2. Objectives of the Study

In this study the primary objective was to find out the acts (rituals) that take place in the *Poruwa* Ceremony.

The secondary objective was to identify the sociological and or anthropological importance and the nature of each act as a marriage ritual.

3. Methodology

In conducting this study both primary and secondary sources were utilised by the researcher. The secondary sources used to complete the preliminary survey were the text books written by many eminent authors about the marriage rituals among the Sinhalese Buddhists. The primary sources were the participant observations and in-depth interviews. The researcher himself opted to observe as a participant in many marriage ceremonies to find out the similarities and the differences in relation to geographical location, socio-economic backgrounds and different ideologies of the concerned individuals. Further some in-depth interviews were conducted to verify the rationality behind some of the differences in the rituals that different families or localities have practiced.

4. *Poruwa* Ceremony as a Ritual

On the day of the marriage the cynosure of all eyes of the participants of the wedding is on the *Magul Poruwa* (Figure 2). Ratnapala (1991) describes *Magul Poruwa* as 'a ceremonial dais built with wooden planks decorated with young coconut leaves' (p. 74). The colourful construction of the *Poruwa* is the responsibility of the bride's family. There are some individuals at village level who are especially noted for

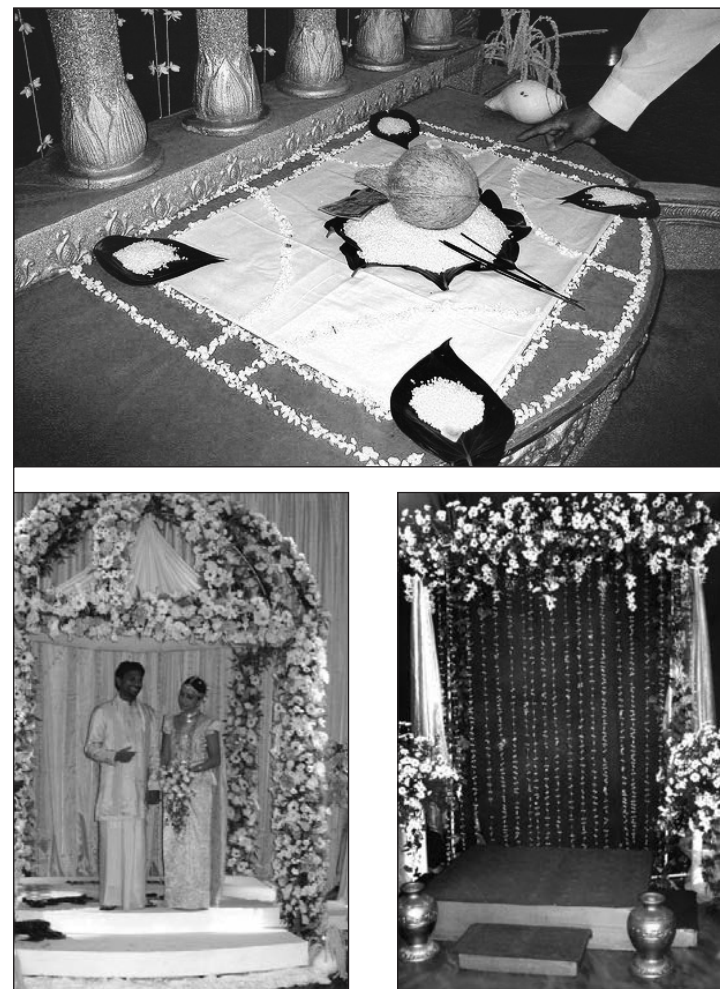


Figure 2 (a,b and c): *Magul Poruwa* – different arrangements

Source: Figure 2 a <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isurusen/686107497/> (last accessed 18 March 2011)

Figure 2 b: <http://sl-models.blogspot.com/2009/03/sachini-ayendra-wedding-photo.html> (last accessed 18 March 2011)

Figure 2 c: http://www.hotelsapphire.lk.com/image_gallery.html (last accessed 18 March 2011)

such artistic work. It is the attraction of the entire ceremony so it should maintain the dignity of the family in front of their friends, neighbours and relatives alike. Senarathna (1999) cites that the artistic outlook of the *Poruwa* differs from marriage to marriage and it displays the innovativeness of the creator.

The commencement of the construction too begins according to a *nekatha* (an auspicious time). As the bride's family consults the services of an astrologer (a person who deals with astrology) in matching the horoscopes (a description written on an ola leaf or on paper describing what someone is like or what might happen to him in future based on the positioning of the planets at the time he/ she was born) of the future bride and the groom, the astrologer predicts an auspicious time based on the nature of the positioning of the planets on both horoscopes. This is very important since the entire future of the couple begins at the *Poruwa* on which their social union takes place. The blessings of the Buddha and the Gods are invoked immediately before the construction begins. Thus the religious affiliations of the *Poruwa* rituals are noted.

The placement of the *Poruwa* is also vital. It should face the direction that gives prosperity to the couple as stated by the astrologer at the consultation of both horoscopes. In constructing and decorating the *Poruwa* people of different localities use plantain trunks (*Musa acuminata* or *Musa balbisiana*), arecanut logs (*Areca catechu*), coconut flowers (*Cocos nucifera*), young coconut leaves, *Na* leaves (*Messua ferrea*), *Kohomba* (*Azadirachta indica*), *Koboleela* (*Bauhinia*), Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*), and Lily (*Nymphaea stellata*). *Kohomba* (*Azadirachta indica*) is used since people

believe in its qualities like hardness, medicinal value and its divine affiliations.

A white cloth which is known as *pawada* (a cloth to be tread on) is laid on the *Poruwa* and the *Poruwa* is covered from above, under the roof or ceiling of the house with another white cloth which is known as *viyana* (a cloth placed above the head of the people who stand, sit or are seated). The use of white above and below always symbolises purity because the purity of the bride is a prime concern of both parties and all the participants gathered. The bride who has preserved her purity till her formal marriage brings dignity not only to herself but to the parents, relatives and all her associates. Thus the use of the colour white becomes extremely symbolic in this context.

To denote prosperity, flowers, paddy or rice (*Oryza sativa*) or both and grain, betel leaves (*Piper betel*) and coins are strewn on the *Poruwa*. Flowers are associated with all the rites of passage of a person, like birth, puberty, marriage and death. Flowers are used in many day-to-day religious and non-religious activities too. Flowers add beauty to the occasion and mainly the white colour of different flowers like *pichcha* (*Jasminum*) again represents charm and purity. Flowers add a revered nature to the context also because the marriage is the most important and ceremonial rite of passage that 'accompany the changes of status that occur in the course of the life cycle' of any individual (Jary and Jary, 2000: 525).

Paddy and/ or rice with grain stand for the food in life. No elder wishes their children or younger generation who are going to start a new life to starve so the abundance of food is vital for anyone in their lives.

The strewn paddy, rice and grain on the *Poruwa* depict that the couple's future life will not be without food for their survival. Since Sinhalese have been mainly an agricultural community, the self-sufficiency of the family is of paramount importance. So this symbolises that the future of the family unit of the couple will be blessed with food in abundance.

The strewn betel leaves too indicate the prosperity in relation to food. The Sinhalese have a saying in their heartiest greeting '*batha bulathin saruwela*' (prosperity in rice and betels). *Batha* means rice and the *bulatha* means the betel leaves. A person having *batha* means he does not starve. Betel leaves play an important role in the lives of the Sinhalese in many ways. In all important instances of one's life betel leaves are used as a food to share intimacy, a form of invitation and greeting. So, betel leaves are an inseparable element in the lives of the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese believe that betel leaves are brought to the human world from the world of *Naga* (one of the ideal realms in folklore). So there is a form of reverence attached to it. The coins strewn on the *Poruwa* too denotes that the couple will have the much needed and the desired economic or financial stability.

On the four sides of the *Poruwa* four '*punkalas*' (the earthen pots that symbolise prosperity) decorated with arecanut (*Areca catechu*) or coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) flowers are kept. These are placed to denote prosperity. So the person who captures the beauty of a *punkalasa* is delighted and psychological satisfaction is critical for an individual who is going to assume a very serious role in his or her future life. The four coconut oil lamps lit on four sides meant for the '*sathara waram devivaru*' – *Drutharashta*, *Viruda*, *Viroopaaksha* and *Vaishravana*. This symbolises that the couple that gets wedded will be

protected by these divine powers in all their good and bad times.

The couple is ushered on to the *Poruwa* at the auspicious time by their uncles; the elder or younger brother of the mother. Even though there is no exact reasoning for this action one elderly person who has been conducting *Poruwa* rituals for many years explained to the researcher that when the sister is in distress or experiencing hardships it is the brother who assumes the responsibility after the father. So this has been a customary practice among the Sinhalese that the brother of the mother is implying those who are present that he is taking over the responsibility of his relative at any time of his or her hardship.

There is a specific direction which the couple and the uncles must face as they step onto the *Poruwa*. In the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, people are highly concerned about the 'time' and the 'direction'. They believe that there are 'good' and 'bad' times in their lives according to the planetary movements of their horoscopes. So before starting anything they need to know a 'good' time that will bring them better results. The direction is also the same. They believe that the influence of a particular divine power will be on the individual if he commences his work by looking in that particular direction. If one starts work looking in a direction that is unsuitable or at an inauspicious time then he or she will get an undesirable result. So in the *Poruwa* ceremony too the time and the direction of things at the beginning of life are vital.

As the couple is ushered on to the *Poruwa* by the uncles at the auspicious time, conch shells are sounded and drums are played. This has been another customary

practice or ritual among the Sinhalese to inform the others that a special event is taking place. The conch shell sounds are used to convince the dignity and the majesty of the action and the environment is filled with their gorgeous sounds. The playing of the drums is also common practice or ritual in all important occasions. The sound of the *magul bera* (a type of drum) fills the entire surrounding with a charming and a majestic atmosphere.

The first thing done at the *Poruwa* ceremony is the dressing of the bride with clothes and jewellery. One thing the female needs as the wife is receiving love and care from the future husband. The husband acts it out symbolically here on the *Poruwa* by dressing the bride, so he is accepting and proving to other participants that he is going to provide the basic necessities to his future wife as she is going to live under his care. Adorning jewellery too becomes symbolic because jewellery signifies the value the husband has placed on the wife and economic security.

As the couple is mounted on the *Poruwa* '*ashtaka*' (stanzas recited at the *Poruwa*) is recited by the proficient elders to invoke the blessings of the gods and any other super-human or non-human powers to the newly wedded couple. In many cases two elderly males represent both sides in doing this. These *ashtaka* are not only to invoke the blessings of the divine realm but also to avoid the 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth' of the people and to minimise the influences of the malicious planets. So all in all these '*jayamangala gatha*' (benedictory verses) are sung or recited to make the future life of the couple less troublesome (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The recital of '*Jayamangala gatha*' (benedictory verses)

Source: <http://www.traditionalporuwa.com/2.php> (last accessed 18 March 2011)

While the *ashtaka* are being chanted or recited an elder ties the *sulangili* (the small fingers) of the bride and the groom with a thread to symbolize their marital union. This indicates that this tie should remain forever, and the couple should not separate or divorce. The act of tying in front of the crowd gives a social acceptance and recognition to the bride and the groom since all the participants know that they are legally married. Their hands are joined and water is poured over them. Water is another symbol since time immemorial. Water is life, without which no one can survive. So water poured on their hands means that they will never lack anything in their future life. As water flows, the things they dream of will flow into their lives.

The groom then gifts the mother of the bride with a *kiri kada selaya* or *redi kachchi* (a pile of white cloth) which has many meanings (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Offering of *redi kachchi* (40 yards of white cloth)

Source: <http://anchibride.blogspot.com/>, (last accessed 18 March, 2011)

First, it is the paying back for the suffering the mother of the future wife has undergone in nurturing the bride till now. The mythical implications of this action too are noteworthy. According to the tradition during king Okkaka's time, the daughter of Malathi was given in marriage to the son of the Brahmin Subrahma, the mother of the bride started crying because she could not tolerate the separation of the daughter. At this moment the groom handed over a pile of cloth to soak the tears of the bride's mother. So the Sinhalese Buddhists believe that to pay gratitude to the future mother-in-law the groom should gift a pile of cloth as a ritual.

The *Poruwa* ceremony ends with offering betel leaves to the elders, relatives and the kin of both parties (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Offering betel leaves to pay gratitude to the future mother-in-law

Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shehal/2072753975/> (last accessed 24 March, 2011)

Each shaft of betel leaves has forty (40) betel leaves symbolizing the fingers of the one who gives and receives in their hands and legs. The first seven shafts are offered remembering '*hath muthu paramparawa*' (the seven generations), that are dead and gone. It is a paying of gratitude, but these betel leaves are left to fall on the side of the *Poruwa* because no one is to accept those. This ritual too signifies the recognition of the sufferings and sacrifices the past generations have made to build the present generation up to this level.

As the couple dismounts from the *Poruwa* at an auspicious time a coconut is broken to drive away any

evil influences that will plague them in the future. The eyes of the participants remain in this action because they all believe that if the coconut is broken exactly into two halves the future of the couple is better. Otherwise it is considered an ill-omen. Finally the rice or paddy, money, clothes and betel are given to the *dhobi* (the washerman or woman from the *Rajaka* caste). Since the entire process of the *Poruwa* ceremony cannot be completed without their specific role as a form of gratitude and an evaluation of the services provided to the bride's family, the washerman or the washerwoman is gifted many items such as money, food and clothes. They are the ones who deal with the two main concepts of 'purity' (being pure or the status of purity) and *killā* (being impure or the status of impurity) in the local tradition.

5. Conclusion

In studying the *Poruwa* ceremony as a ritual in Sinhalese Buddhist marriage, the researcher has identified the validity of the definition given in Abercrombie et al (1988) as 'any formal actions following a set pattern which express through symbol a public or shared meaning are rituals (p. 209). Overall, the entire ritual shows the influence of the 'Hindu' tradition through the myth of King Brahmādhāttha, the bridal dress (*sari*) and reciting the Vishnu *ashtaka*. Local tradition is symbolised by the *punkalasa*, the recital of 'jayamangala gatha' (benedictory verses) and betel leaves. The *Poruwa* ceremony has undergone so many changes over the generations. With the influence of the western tradition the wearing of the veil, the exchange of rings and the western dress can be seen.

So, anyone who observes the *Poruwa* ceremony from a sociological or anthropological perspective would note that it has become a major ritual comprising of many minor rituals that have undergone timely changes.

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Rituals and Ethics in Sri Lankan Tradition

Nimal de Silva

Abstract

Sri Lanka is a small island in the Indian Ocean where Sinhala civilization has grown for the last 3000 years and lived with Buddhist philosophy and practices benefiting this society. Rituals and ceremonies, which have evolved, pertain to every stage in life, from birth, to marriage, to death, and for the mental and physical health of individuals in the society together with evolved cultural ceremonies with art and dance. These rituals and ceremonies centre on personal responsibility social responsibility, health and the sustainability of the society. It has brought mental satisfaction, religious affiliation, social interaction, health and responsibility. The arts and ceremony evolved have brought identity to the civilization.

Sri Lanka is a small island in the Indian Ocean located below the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. As an island nation, its civilization has grown for many thousands of years with a recorded history documenting a rich heritage running for a period of more than two thousand five hundred years. Further, the archaeological evidence stand testimony to the achievements and practices that enriched the culture of the people who built many thousands of irrigation tanks to irrigate the fertile soil for paddy cultivation, obtaining two or three crops a year. Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka by

Emperor Ashoka of India in the third century BC and it became the guiding force behind the achievements of the Sri Lankans who built the tallest brick structures in the world from the second century BC. These monuments still stand as evidence to their achievements. No doubt, with India as the main source of inspiration and the closest neighbour, the interactions between the two countries were frequent throughout history.

Sinhala, the native language of Sri Lanka is one of the oldest languages found in the world with a written script continuously using for a period of more than two thousand three hundred years. The Buddhist *Tripitaka* that was verbally transferred from generation to generation since the sixth century BC was documented in the first century AD. A rich literary tradition has grown resulting in producing a large number of chronicles such as *Mahavamsa*, *Deepavamsa*, *Bodhivamsa*, *Thupavamsa* etc. documenting the richness of the Sinhala Buddhist civilization. A large number of palmleaf manuscripts were found documenting Buddhist scriptures, grammar and language, poetry, medicine, art and architecture, philosophy, astrology and many other subjects. Sinhala language in the succeeding centuries was influenced from and enriched by other languages like Pali, Sanskrit, Tamil, Portuguese, Dutch and English.

The Sri Lankan culture has grown and lived with Buddhist philosophy and practice. A peaceful society always valued and worked to live observing the five precepts indicated in Buddhist practice. It was mainly an agricultural and village based culture. With South Indian influence, many Hindu beliefs and practices have also entered the Sinhala Buddhist practice. Hindu gods have been worshiped by absorbing them as Buddhist Gods,

expecting their blessings, by performing Hindu rituals. Icons of Hindu Gods other than Siva have entered into all Buddhist temples. They are considered as protectors of Buddhism while also expecting help and blessings from them in people's day to day activities. With the arrival of Portuguese in the sixteenth century, Christianity faith and the Western customs and traditions also entered into Sri Lanka and gradually managed to deviate the converts to a certain extent from the prevailing traditions of the Sinhalese.

Religious beliefs have brought in ritual practices to the civilizations. All were performed to achieve health, prosperity, and also to achieve a sustainable society. In fact, Sinhalese culture and practices in villages, in spite of all variations and mutations under Hindu and Western influences, it is relating to the rational and self disciplined aspects of human nature. It was always based on Buddhist way of life. It was found that every ritual begins by paying respect to the Buddha with the Pali saying '*Namotassa Bagavatho Arahato Samma Sambuddassa*'. Even though Sinhalese have integrated certain elements of Hindu culture they have eliminated noblest forms of mysticism with the extreme forms of self-torture, blood sacrifice and sensual indulgence. All rituals performed are directly related to different stages of life, happenings and occurrences. In all these occasions astrology played a major role as it is a strong component of the Sinhala tradition. Rituals related to birth of a child begin prior to the birth. That is when expecting a child they perform a ritual at the sacred Bodhi-tree shrine in the village temple or at a special shrine considered as an off spring of the Sri Maha Bodhi the sacred Bodhi-tree (*Ficus religiosa*) at Anuradhapura. Bodhi-tree represents the tree of wisdom and the

wishing tree, the tree beneath which Buddha attained enlightenment. The main ritual is that after paying respect to the Buddha with recitations, seven pots of scented water is poured at the base of the Bodhi-tree by the expecting mother to obtain the blessings of the Buddha to gain courage for a peaceful delivery.

First rice feed is given to a child when he is one year old and it is done at an auspicious time. This ritual is a ceremony where closest relatives gather, an auspicious oil lamp is lit and different kinds of food is placed in front of the child allowing him to take what he likes. At this occasion relatives bless the child and some present gold jewellery. Normally a gold medallion '*Panchauda*' depicting five weapons of god Vishnu is placed around the child's neck for protection.

In the Sinhala tradition pubescence of a girl is considered as an important event in her life. It was not only a biological occurrence; it is enriched with socio-cultural rituals. When the occurrence is revealed, child is isolated from the society and has to go through a period of vigilance until the selected auspicious time for the ritual bath. Mother or an elderly woman will accompany the girl during the period of isolation. At the auspicious time she will be bathed by the mother or the washerwoman who serves the family using a new clay pot with water scented with floating jasmine flowers and turmeric juice. At the end of the bath the clay pot is broken by dropping it on the ground indicating that it is only for her and not to be reused. Any jewellery or clothing that she was wearing is presented to the washerwoman. After the bath she gets a new dress and jewellery indicating a fresh beginning. After covering her with a white cloth she is taken to an oil lamp placed at a central place in the house. Then she is unveiled and

requested to blow off the flame. For this ritual, close relatives are invited to witness the occasion. They give jewellery and many presents to the girl, bless her at that time and she pays deep respect by kneeling down in front of the parents and the elders. It is important to understand the ethics and meanings of this ritual. This is done for the child to realise that you are no more a small child, you have reached adolescence, you are a responsible person, always have to act with responsibility, respect your personal dignity, the dignity of the family, observe chastity until given in marriage to a husband and further, relatives also have a responsibility to respect her as an adult and protect her. This is a ritual that promotes personal and social responsibility that will ultimately lead to a good family life.

Marriage of a person is not considered as just a union of a boy and a girl, it is a series of rituals performed in a ceremonial manner and to introduce the couple to the four clans of relatives; that is the relatives of the parents of both the bride and the groom. Traditional marriages are proposed marriages. In this castes and clans play a role. First cousins are accepted other than the blood relatives. That is father's brothers children or mother's sisters children are not allowed to marry. Generally the girl is younger than the boy and girls are given in marriage when they are 18 to 25 years of age.

In a marriage the horoscope plays an important role. At the beginning horoscopes of the two are compared, and out of the twenty factors (*visi porondam*) inquired, at least fifteen should match, otherwise the proposal is dropped. If the horoscopes are matching, grooms parents prepare a ceremonial or ritual chart of auspicious times,

present it to the girl's parents for acceptance and the date of the marriage is fixed. Relatives are invited by offering betel leaves. Main rituals of the marriage are organised by the bride's family in their house. When the groom's party arrives for the ceremony the groom is received by washing his feet, usually by a younger brother of the bride and for that he gets a gold ring as a present, which is usually dropped into the vessel of water by the groom.

The main ritual of the marriage is the *Poruwa* ceremony. *Poruwa* is a ceremonial pedestal or platform made with plants of a tree with latex, mainly of a jack tree (*Artocarpus Indicus*) on which is spread a mat with red rice and covered with a white cloth. This *Poruwa* is decorated with flowers etc, two or four coconut oil lamps are placed at the four corners on clay pots fitted with coconut flowers. At the auspicious time the bride and groom are brought on to the pedestal and a series of rituals are conducted. The rituals are conducted by an elderly uncle of the bride or another elder as a lay priest. The rituals are always beginning with recitals respecting the Buddha. Then the small fingers or thumbs of the bride and groom are tied together with a sacred cotton thread chanted with *pirith* and by pouring holy water on to the tied fingers in front of all relatives around. Then the couple is wrapped together at the hip with a white cloth. The groom dresses the bride with a valuable gold necklace and rings are exchanged between the two as influenced by the European customs. Four or five young girls dressed in white recite *Jaya Mangala Gatha* to bring blessings of the Buddha.

The groom presents a large bundle of white muslin (*Kiri Kachchiya*) to the bride's mother as a present of gratitude saying 'mother you have brought up this girl to

be my wife by feeding her with more breast milk than the amount that can soak this bundle of cloth. This is to pay my respect and gratitude for all what you have been'. The mother accepts the gift and carries it on her head showing the value of that present. Then all elderly relatives from both side come to receive betel leaves from the young couple and they bend and pay respect to the relatives. This is a demarcation of accepting the new couple to the family. The wedded couple descends from the *Poruwa* at an auspicious time with their right foot in front. At this time a coconut is broken by cracking it with a knife, if both halves are facing upwards it is auspicious, and if both are facing down it is inauspicious. All these rituals were built up to emphasise the responsibilities of the young couple and their responsibilities toward the relatives and vice versa. Social ethics behind all these rituals are to highlight a notion of responsibility between the wedded couple and the relatives to each other and ultimately to have a sustainable family life.

There are not many rituals related to a funeral of a person but there are many customs involved. Main objective is to dispose the body by either burying or cremating and offer '*pin*' or merit to the dead by the relative in performing meritorious work on behalf the dead person for him to be happy and prosperous with the next birth. On the day of the funeral Buddhist monks are invited to the house to perform the religious rituals and a white cloth is offered to make their robes. Food and other offering are given to the monks in the village temple on the seventh day after the death, then after three months and then followed annually by remembering the death and offering '*pin*' or religious merits for the next life of the dead.

In addition to the natural occurrences people believe that mal-effects can come to their life due to the bad planetary arrangements found in the horoscope and evil spirits around them. This can bring illness and bad time to their lives. With the identification of the cause they have evolved different rituals and practices to avoid and eliminate these bad effects coming on to their lives. The remedial rituals adopted and performed are always socio-cultural based, some are performed individually and some are performed in public. These rituals are performed by traditionally trained persons who are well conversant with astrology, the use of charms known as mystical graphics (*Yantra*) and repetition of incarnations (*mantra*) to ward off evil forces that are practiced either singly or together. Sometimes these are accompanied with more elaborate rituals known as *Bali* and *Tovil* ceremonies. In most of these ceremonies the performer or *adura* prepares a *Yantra*. It is a form of inscribing letters with pre-designed pictures and graphics on a sheet of copper or gold. This is rolled and put in to an amulet tied or hung on the patient's neck with repetition of incantations. These *Yantras* constitute religious, astrological or numerological perspectives.

All these healing rituals are connected with chanting, singing, drumming, dancing and certain other ritualistic procedures. It needs an auspicious day, an auspicious time and different ingredients for various rituals; prepare colorful facades and structures, masks and dresses. Chanting, singing, and dancing create a rhythmic vibrant atmosphere that can facilitate the healing of the mind. These performances have generated and advanced traditional arts, crafts, drumming and dancing.

In *Bali Tovil* (exorcisms), offerings are made to various divinities and evil forces in order to mitigate the effects of evils believed to cause diseases. The simplest form of such a ritual is known as *santikarma*; the prayers to the planets, while the diseases grave in nature involve the performance of such ceremonies as devil dancing.

Tovil are accompanied by mask dances, incantations, astrological rituals, etc. all of which have a mutually integrated tradition. Even these performances vary from simple ones to more elaborate performances with masked dancing etc. *Gam-Madu* and *Devol-Madu* are ceremonies held to bring prosperity to the whole village in which these are performed. These rituals have evolved in numerous dance forms existing in Sri Lanka connected with artistic traditions and folk medicine. All these rituals are to bring health and prosperity to people individually or as a community. When the community rituals are held it brings all villagers together to perform one collective task leading to social harmony.

The Buddhist worship is intricately connected with a variety of ritual systems, which in Sri Lanka have been organised in to a tradition that continues to present times. The main sites of worships such as the Sri Maha Bodhi (a sapling of the Bodhi-tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment and brought to Sri Lanka in the third century BC from India) at Anuradhapura, Sacred Tooth Relic Temple in Kandy and Sri Pada (Footprint of the Buddha on the Samanola mountains) have different types of rituals which are conducted daily, weekly, monthly and annually. The Sacred Tooth Relic being the palladium of the Sinhalese kings, elaborate ritual programmes have been conducted since the fourth century AD, when it was brought to the island from India. For instance, at the temple of the Tooth Relic,

during three periods of the day, morning, noon and evening, when the public is allowed to enter the shrine room, the drumming is conducted as a service as continuous offering to the Buddha at the time when the *Buddha Puja* are being conducted.

The full moon day in the month of May is celebrated as *Vesak* and on this day Buddhists engage in many religious rituals commemorating the birth, enlightenment and the passing away of the Buddha. On this day they participate in observing *sil*, meditation, listening to Buddhist sermons, distributing prepared food to the people and they engage in other meritorious activities. The full moon day of June (*Poson*) is celebrated as the day Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka by the Rev. Mahinda, Son of Ashoka, in the third century BC. The full moon day of July (*Asala*) is the day of festivities and rituals that constitutes the holding of the processions, the *Dalada Perahara* in Kandy, where the sacred Tooth relic is kept in a special shrine for veneration. It represents the grand finale during which the golden casket symbolizing the sacred Tooth relic is conducted in procession. It is a chain of rituals conducted for seven days continuously with a procession at night, participated by about hundred colorfully dressed elephants and more than a thousand drummers and dancers. During this time the procession vibrates not only the hill capital of Kandy but the whole central province. It forms the grand festival of the nation. This festival is guided by long standing rituals, ethics and social stability. *Asala* festival is followed by all *Devala* Shrines dedicated to God Vishnu, Natha, Kataragama, and Goddess Pattini found in the area of the historic Kandyan Kingdom. They perform a set of traditional rituals with processions participated by the

lay guardians (*Basnayeka*) of the temples, the dancers, drummers and the elephants. All these are done with the participation of the people and for the benefit of the people.

Sri Lanka may be the only country in celebrating the dawn of a new year, both by Sinhalese and Hindus by cooking the first meal of milk rice at one auspicious time and the whole county eats the first meal at one auspicious time. This is a unique occurrence. New Year celebration is full of rituals and customs. It is a family performance and a social event that link all the relatives and the villagers.

Rituals and customs related to the Sinhalese and Hindu New Year begins weeks ahead. All close relatives and family members are presented with dresses and cloth as all have to wear a new dress for the New Year. Most interesting and important social custom is to offer betel leaves to elders in the family creed, kneel down in front of them and request for forgiveness for any mistake done in the passing year. They all want to enter the New Year afresh. This tradition of forgiveness keeps the family bond strong and trustworthy.

All rituals and activities related to the New Year ceremony are based on astrological norms and oriented towards prosperity and social harmony. There is a time for every house to stop all activities, especially in the kitchen, and nothing is given out from the house or received in. It is a buffer period before entering the New Year. It is the time to visit the temple, time for children clad in new dresses to play New Year games. It is an occasion where all members of the family return home to be with their parents, new sweetmeats are prepared, houses are cleaned and white washed and everybody in

the country gets ready for the New Year. On the New Years day after finishing the ceremonial meal they exchange food among the neighboring houses and renew their relationships. The first bath of the New Year is a medicinal bath with the application of medicinal oil to bring health and long life. It is performed according to the astrological norms at an auspicious time. This ritual is considered important and auspicious and is performed by everybody. Rituals of the New Year bring the family together, relatives together and the whole country together.

All the rituals performed socially by the Sri Lankans are based on religio-cultural traditions that bring social harmony, good health and confidence to the people to face difficulties in life.

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Social Organisation and Rituals in the Province of Sabaragamuwa

Sriyani Rajapaksa

Abstract

This paper elaborates the rituals performed for god Saman in the Sabaragamuwa Province of Sri Lanka. God Saman is considered to be the guardian deity of the Sabaragamuwa province. The paper discusses the evolution of the procession ritual, roles of officials appointed to be in charge of the Devala or the shrine of god Saman, services rendered by people living in the area and rituals performed for this deity. The procession for god Saman is conducted annually in the month of Asela (July-August). People living in nearby villages Nindagam render their services by personal participation, supplying the essentials and working manually. The traditional caste system plays a significant role in assigning duties for the procession. The completion of the procession ritual is informed to the Head of the Country by the Basnayake Nilame. Rituals performed for god Saman reinforces traditional ethics and values of the villagers. The meaning of the rituals should be further explored and adopted for the betterment of the society.

Sri Lanka is divided into nine administrative provinces, and Sabaragamuwa is the vast area around Ratnapura. Majority of the population are believers in Buddhism. The religion of the people is not pristine Buddhism but

a combination of many beliefs. Apart from the fact that they respect the supreme master, his discourses and his disciples (Buddha, Dhamma and Sanga) they believe in the power of god Saman, who is the guardian deity of the area, and to whom a shrine is erected at Ratnapura called *Maha Saman Devale* (the shrine of great god Saman). God Saman is considered by the people of the area as the protector of Buddhism. The shrine was destroyed by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and was rebuilt at a later stage. The province of Sabaragamuwa is also known as the abode of god Saman.

Some respect god Saman not only as a protector of the religion but also as the guardian god of the region. If one is eager to analyze the pantheon of deities in Sri Lanka it is interesting to note the place occupied by god Saman. He can be recognised as the one and only regional god whose influence is exercised in a province. Deities like *Ayyanayaka*, *Kadawara* and *Mangara* are respected in an area only, and they are not considered as regional deities.

Thus god Saman and the shrine of the god Saman are in a way unique in the system of religious and social behaviour of Sri Lanka. The qualities attributed by the people to god Saman, can be attributed into two levels, one is that of a deity and the other is that of a Buddhist devotee. Therefore, the deity Saman had become a popular figure among the people in Sabaragamuwa.

The deity is residing, according to folk beliefs, at the shrine in Ratnapura, which was built earlier, but destroyed by the Portuguese and renovated thereafter. The province of Sabaragamuwa was administered by a

Disava, the highest lay official in the area and his appointment was made by the king of Kandy until 1815. After the subjugation of the country to the British, the governor appointed the officials continuing the same procedure adopted by the Kandyan kings. Thus in consultation with the *Basnayake Nilame* at the *devale* who is also a government officer and the leader of the officials of the shrine, the villages were administered by the British. The *Basanyake Nilame* as the head of the lay officials of the shrine was in charge of all the ritualistic aspects of the *devale*.

All the lay officers in the *devale* are compensated for their services by giving them an area called *Nila Pangu*, or 'share of the post'. The officers and their duties to the deity are codified in the book called '*Nila Pangu Lekhana Pota*' or the register of the shareholders. Their subordinate officers are called *Mohottala*. The main *Mohottala* are three in number. The most significant feature in the structure of the human resources at the *devale* is the non-existence of positions for *bhikkus* or Buddhist priests. There exists a drastic difference between the Temple of the Tooth and the shrine of deity Saman – it is the formation of the officers. When *Mohottalas* are appointed only the people from the higher ranks of the society will enjoy these benefits. These are the *Mohottalas* attached to the shrine, the *rathnaka Mohottala*.

When these appointments of officials are made, their participation is sought under the following categories of activities:

- a. They should be responsible for the smooth running of all the religious rituals of the *devale*.

- b. They should safeguard the ownership of the lands of the *devale*.
- c. They should protect the land tenure system.
- d. While participating in the maintenance of the temple, they should facilitate the fertility of the lands.

When they are given posts they receive a *Nindagama*, a cluster of villages with farms to cultivate. They will hand over the lands to the villagers who will cultivate the lands and offer their services to the *devale*. In order to continue the successful completion of the procession all those villagers, who have received a plot of land for cultivation will supply the *devale* the following services:

- a. Participation in the rituals.
- b. Collection of goods, and other essentials.
- c. Engagement in various services during the Procession.

All these *Mohottalas* and *Nilames* must arrive at the *devale*, with their respective village devotees two weeks prior to the procession. They and the members of their families are well looked after by the organisers of the procession. *Lekams* (secretaries), *Vidanes* and *Kankanamas* are the retinue attached to each and every *Mohottala* and they will supervise all the activities of the other attendants.

Whoever owns a *Nila pangu* belong to various guilds, but the severe caste restrictions are unimportant at this point. In a feudal society the services rendered by guilds such as *Ajaka* (*dhoby*), *Badahela* (potter), *Berakara* (drummer), *Vahampura* (jaggery suppliers),

Yakdehi (exorcist), *Naide* (ironsmith) and *Acari* (goldsmith) are essential for the existence of that society. Though the feudal society is no more in Sri Lanka, this system is proved to be of assistance to a successful completion of the procession of the shrine of the deity Saman. There is one point we have to note, that is the relationship between the deity and the lay officers. The lay officers in the services of the shrine were only the high ranking *Govigama* officers. These high class officers of the *Govigama* caste and the noblemen (*Radala*) can be divided into two groups namely *Atul Kattale*, or officers of the inner circle and *Pita Kattale* (officers of the outer circle) respectively.

Another significant feature of the character of the deity Saman is that he is constantly represented not alone but with the queen and the child prince (*kumara*). They are known as *Biso Devi* (queen deity) and *Kumara Dev* (child prince) respectively. In areas such as Mahiyangana the deity Saman is accompanied by his sister according to folklore. This is a unique feature in the procession of Sri Lankan deities. The procession too is named as the procession of the deity Saman, the procession of the queen, (*biso perahare*) and the procession of child prince (*Kumara Perahara*), a feature which cannot be found in any other procession attached to any shrine in the island. Inclusion of the queen and the child in the procession along with deity Saman can be the symbolic representation of the 'family institution'. Therefore one cannot deny the fact that the belief in the deity Saman can be interpreted as the acceptance of the family unit for the wellbeing of the society.

This is one interpretation of deity Saman. There is another meaning in the belief of the deity Saman, that is,

he can be interpreted as the symbolic representation of the King. This interpretation can be culled at by examining the offerings in the name of this deity. He is offered the food that is eaten by the ordinary people, without any specialties, which thus brought him down to the plane of a common man. The king in Kumara is known as *Naradeva* (a god in the guise of a man). Therefore, the deity should be a common man to be elevated to the position of the king by the devotees. The deity Saman is officiated with an offering called *Bola Pan Theva* (the offering of pure water) which can only be found at *Dalada Maligawa* (the Temple of the Tooth) in the name of Buddha. This water is being offered not to drink but only for the purpose of purification.

In the light of such evidence it is quite clear, that due to the service he has rendered to the people like a king, he is elevated to the position of a guardian god, and is included as one of the most primitive trinity of deities.

There is another aspect which invites our attention in the procession. The devotees carry a statue called *Maha Bamba* (or the *Maha Brahma*) *Maha Bamba* represents the king according to the view expressed by the officers of the shrine. There may be other versions too. The two faces of a king is symbolised in this character. They are the gentle compassion towards human beings and justice.

Three months prior to the procession, the people of the Sabaragamuwa lead their lives in a religious manner, refraining from eating meat and fish. When the procession commences, they erect a flower altar in their gardens in front of their living quarters, and light an oil lamp until the end of the procession. Apart from this annual event the devotees at the shrine are in the habit of

performing daily rites at the *devale*. To perform the daily rites the *Nila Pangu* system is conducted.

The procession at the *devale* is conducted in three phases and they are as follows:

- a. *Kumbal Perahara* (the inside procession)
- b. *Devale Perahara* (the two service procession)
- c. *Maha Perahara* (the great procession) (*Randoli Perahera*)

Kumbal is a Tamil word which according to Prof. Tissa Kariyawasam means the procession circling the inner *Devale*. The *Kumbal Perahera* of the *Saman Devale* is conducted five days in the *Uda Mahuwa*, carrying the paraphernalia of the deity in a palanquin. Usually this starts on the day when the sacred pole is erected.

Devale Perhara is also peculiar to this shrine only. It is performed twice a day for five days and will take the same route as the *Maha Perahara*. Though it is known as *Devale Perahara*, now this custom is extinct, and the priests perform it once a day. But still they employ the term *Devale* (thrice a day). An interesting item takes place during this ceremony, which cannot be seen anywhere in Sri Lanka. All the dancers and drummers who are the members of the two groups of *Nila Pangu* sharers gather at the *pahata malaya* (lower ground) at 14.30 in the afternoon just in front the *shanti mandapa*. The player of auspicious drums after playing the drum beats, invites the others to the arena to play while announcing thrice thus, “ye dancers and drummers, decked with your costumes and jewellery come quickly.”

While they perform the *Devale Perahara*, for five days on the first day a special sequence is enacted called *hoal padiya deema* (handing over the share of rice). This has some resemblance to the “festival of new rice” at the Temple of the Tooth. Here, *Gabada Mohottala*, (the storekeeper of the shrine) distributes the share of rice to the *Gabada Vidane*, *Pol Kankanama*, and *Peli Vidane* respectively. This sequence symbolises the solidarity of the share holders of the shrine in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The main procession at the shrine consists of five processions;

- a. *Dalada Perahara* (the procession of the Sacred Tooth Relic)
- b. *Pattini Perahera* (the procession of goddess Pattini, the goddess of chastity)
- c. *Kumara Perahara* (the procession of the prince)
- d. *Biso Perahara* (the procession of the queen)
- e. *Saman Devraja Perahara* (the procession of God king Saman)

In all these processions, the activities associated with them are performed by the *Nila Pangu* holders in lieu of the land they received from the shrine.

On the day of the *Maha Perahara*, all the land holders with the assistance of all the villagers will arrive at the *devale*, with rice, coconuts, sheaf of betels, coconut oil, vegetables, jaggery and arecanuts, which were grown or prepared by them in the lands given to them by the Chief *Nila Pangu* holder. These things will

be stored in the storeroom by the *Gabada Vidane* (the officer in-charge of the store). Some of the villagers will prepare the route of the procession while others engage in the preparation of the four pandals at the four cardinal points.

Vihara Maluwa and *Linda Lange Maluwa* (the areas around the viharaya and the well) are decorated by the people of five villages (*gam paha*) in Kuruwita. The area around the Pattini shrine is prepared for the occasion by the villagers of Huanwala, Bulathalgoda, Amuwala, Hangamuva, Atoya, Weragama, Pannila, Bibilegama, Kolambugama, and Sabaragamuva.

On the day of the great procession, a ritual entitled *Nanu Muraya* (bathing sequence) is performed. The sequence is an essential part of the other two annual events associated with the shrine, namely, the 'festival of new rice' and the 'festival of the new year'. For this purpose a tray of offerings is prepared by the *Naide* of Bodhinagala. He prepares the *nanu* (medicinal herbs) from which the *Kapuralas* of the shrine wash the embellishment (*adbharana*)

The Bodhinagala *Paramparawa* receives the *Aacari Panguwa*, when the paraphernalia of the priests are carried to the *Shanti Mandapa*. The drummers play the *Gaman Pada*, and *Nannmara Padaya* is used when it is the time for applying *nanu* (medicinal herbs used for washing). All the necessities for *Bodhinagala Naide* is prepared by the *Maratan rala* at the end of this *nann mara* sequence offers of milk rice to the deity is contented by the *Battana Kapu Rala*.

Another important event takes place on the same day. That is known as 'decorating the chariot' (*ratayata*

pili dameema). Clothes are brought for this purpose by the *Vidane Henaya* (*dhobi*) and the decorations commence at an auspicious time calculated by the *Nakat Rala* (the astrologer of the shrine).

The next sequence is *Bola Pan Tevava* (offerings of sacred water). All the *kapuralas* will offer flowers and light the lamps in the shrine. This is not a special event meant for a procession but a part of the day to day offerings taking place at the *devala* premises, and it is the responsibility of the *Vattorn Appu* (checking officer). By now a Buddhist priest is resting at the *Avasa* (residence) until it is time to recite the five precepts, before the procession starts.

Near the octagon (*Pattirippuva*) devotees are trying to place the receptacle of relics on the caparisoned elephant. A man of the *Vedikkara Panguwa* (a gunman) is getting ready for his duty. The *Basnayaka Nilame* will throw all the betel leaves brought there by a man of *Vatukara Panguwa*. This sequence is known as the *Dalada Perahara*.

The other lesser processions too commence at this instant. They are the *Pattini* procession, the procession of the queen and the procession of the prince.

The routes taken by the devotees are *Badal Veediya* (Goldsmith street) *Uda Veediya* (Upper Street) *Karuvita Gampaha Veediya* (the five villages of *Kuruvita*) and finally reaching the *Sanhinda Veediya* (the street of the shrine) to rest. At this resting place a special chamber is prepared called *Sinhasana Mandapa*. The *Sinhasana* is the seat of the king and *Basnayaka Nilame*, the leader of the *devale* resting on this seat is the symbolic representation of the King.

Basanyaka Nilame, with all the land sharers (*Nila Pangu Karu*) dancers, drummers and *Kapuralas*, finally enter the *devala* (*Gevadeema*). Then the Buddhist priest will be invited to the *devale* by the *Lansakara*, *Uligakkara*, *Kuda Nilaya* and *Chamarakara*. The priest will chant the Three Discourses (*Tun Piritha*) and leave the shrine.

The first offerings will commence often the priest leaves the area and this will start a new season in the lives of all the villagers. The rituals of the *Saman Devale* reach its end with the water cutting ceremony. *Peli Vidane*, *Adhikari Naide*, *Muratan Rala*, *Tandal Rala*, *Alatti Ammas*, *Pandam Panguwa*, *Kande Nila Pansuva*, *Vahala* drummer will perform the water cutting ceremony.

Thus it becomes clear, that the maintenance of all the ritualistic aspects at the *Saman Devale* rests on shoulders of its higher officers, and the villagers who have received lands for their services. The solidarity and unity in the name of god Saman in the Sabaragamuva province is a rich field of study for folklorists.

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Ritual, Myth and History: with special reference to the Ritual of “Mahasohonsamayama”

Anuruddhika Kumari Kularathna

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore the interdependency of myth on history as well as its significance on ritual. This study is based on a particular myth which is recreated in a ritual called Mahasohonsamayama. There are four major demons propitiated in Sri Lankan tovil rituals, namely Riri, Mahasohon, Sanni and Kalu. Among them Mahasohona occupies a unique place as he is supposed to be a demon of Sri Lankan origin and the other major Yakkas (demons) are called rata yakku (foreign demons). The story of Mahasohona is a synthesis of legend and myth. The earliest mention of this legend is recorded in the classical Sinhala prose work, Saddharmalankaraya (fourteenth century) and it was taken from a much earlier Pali version and from folkloric tradition. Birth of Mahasohon Yaka (demon) can be traced to the time of King Dutugemunu (161-137 BC). According to the literary sources Jayasena alias Mahasohona was a historical person living in the vicinity of Ritigala. Later on he was degraded to the status of yaka (demon) after his accidental death at the duel with Gotayimbura, one of the giants in king Dutugemunu's army. Myths can be treated as 'thought fossils', which reveal the story of cultures and civilizations that preceded ours. It is intended in this paper to explain and explore the Mahasohona Myth illustrated in the healing ritual, in the light of operative, and iterative aspects.

This brief paper examines a ritual known as *Mahasohonsamayama* which is primarily practiced in the southern region in Sri Lanka with special emphasis on its affiliation to myth and history¹. This particular healing ritual falls into the category of '*sethsaanthiya*' which is performed to avert malevolent influences caused by *Yakas* (demons) (Palliyaguru 1976). To commence with an annotation on ritual is apposite. A ritual is a formalised pre-arranged set of symbolic actions generally performed in a particular environment at a regular repetitive interlude. The assortments of actions that constitute a ritual generally includes, but are not restricted to such things as recitation, singing, group processions, repetitive dance, and manifestation of sanctified and revered objects.

The intentions of rituals are diverse, with religious obligations or paradigms, gratification of spiritual or emotional requirements of the practitioners, strengthening of social affinities, moral and social education, illustration of reverence or acquiescence, demonstrating one's amalgamation, obtaining social acceptance or approval for some event; or sometimes for the sheer pleasure of the ritual itself. It should be noted that alongside the personal dimensions of worship and reverence, rituals can be endowed with a more primary social function in expressing, anchoring and emphasizing the shared values and beliefs of a society. Cultural anthropologists believe that rituals can aid in creating a firm sense of group identity. Over centuries humans have utilised rituals to create social bonds and even to nourish interpersonal relationships. Hence rituals are the symbolic interpretation of society, national harmony and collectiveness in the society.

Assuming that rituals are defined as a set of actions in religious and social activities, Sri Lanka, although an island of diminutive proportions, is bequeathed with a profusion of rituals. Eventhough the pantheon when it is venerated by native Sri Lankans, is colossal, filled with hierarchies and sub-hierarchies, its synthesis is a spiritual landscape where Buddha reigns supreme. It is the folk belief that worldly life is a constant struggle against malignant forces such as *Yakas* (devils) and *Prethas* (goblins), who forever seems all too ready to pounce upon man, inflicting numerous afflictions. On that account, a cast of specific characters in rituals have developed over the centuries to counteract almost every affliction and ailment. In the low country of Sri Lanka, mainly along the southern belt, four major *Yakas* (devils) are propitiated in the healing rituals. They are *Sanniyaka*, *Kaluyaka*, *Suniyam yaka*, and *Mahasohona*. Rituals performed towards them are respectively *Sanniyakuma*, *Kalukumara Samayama*, *Suniyama*² and *Mahasohon samayama*. *Mahasohona* means the great graveyard, demon. The devil is so denominated because he chiefly frequents graveyards. In Sinhalese folklore he is said to be 122 feet high, has the head of a bear with a pike in his left hand and, in his right, an elephant whose blood he squashes out to partake. He administers cholera and dysentery and presides over graveyards and junctions where three roads meet. He is said to appear riding on a pig and is also the superior to thirty thousand demons. The Sinhalese presume true that a man struck down by this demon would exhibit on the back of his body the mark of a hand with the palm and finger standing out flesh, embossed as it were. People possessed by *Mahasohona* will become boisterous and violent. *Mahasohon samayama* is a healing ritual

performed to avert malevolent influences of *Mahasohona yaka*. A few European and local scholars have done research on this ritual and its ritual practices. Among them the earliest scholar to pay attention to this was the Rev. Fr. Johan Callaway who has published his work in 1829. It contained a drawing of *Mahasohona* devil and some of the verses recited in the ritual. Then there was an impressive and long research paper titled, 'On Demonology and witchcraft in Ceylon' by Dandris de Silva Gunaratna, which appeared in the *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1866. Apart from these pioneering works there are few studies by foreign and local scholars. Among them works of Paul Verse (1995) and Tissa Kariyawasam (2001) stand out. According to these scholars, *Mahasohona samayama* is not a widely spread ritual like other major rituals in the Southern Province (Kariyawasam 2001: 7). It is limited to the two districts namely Hambantota and Matara. Our intention here is not to offer a detailed description about the ritual as it is a combination of a good number of rites which turn it into a major ritual. But it should be noted that it is a ritual with drumming, dancing, reciting of ballads and miming. The performer disguises himself as a bear wearing a gruesome mask and a dress. Although the healing ritual is a ritualistic ceremony held at the premises of the *Aathuraya* (harassed patient) it is not restricted to his kith and kin or the immediate neighbours. Most often the whole village is involved. Here it is not baffling to observe the potency of the proceedings of socialisation involved therein and the importance of this for the success of the complete populace.

In *Mahasohon samayama* ritual, the myth of *Mahasohona* is recited in ballads. When compared with

each other, few, yet stark variations are apparent in the versions maintained in mainstream classical Sinhala literature and its counterpart, the folkloric tradition. In all these stories the common motif inherent is that Jayasena alias *Mahasohona* had offended Gotaimbara, one of the ten warriors of King Dutugamunu and he subsequently was defeated in a duel. Although the *Mahavamsa* the greater chronicle offers a lengthy account of the birth, feats and adventures of Giant Gotaimbara it is interesting to note that no attention was given to his rival (*Mahavamsa*, Chapter 13: Verses 49-54, see Geiger 1908).

Even the author who compiled a commentary to *Mahavamsa* namely the *Vamsatthappakasini* failed to offer a version of this episode. However *Saddhammalankaraya* of fourteenth century which is based on the Pali composition *Rasavahini* of the thirteenth Century did not fail to illustrate elaborately the latest version of the origin of demon *Mahasohona*.

As per the author of *Saddhammalankaraya*, Venerable Dharmakīrti Thera, Jayasena alias *Mahasohona* was also a historical person living in the vicinity of Ritigala (the hill of Riti). Once on an excursion to Thambapanni, the chief necropolis of the demon clan, he witnessed a grand-scaled drinking party organised by the giant warrior, Gotaimbara. Jayasena happened to catch a glimpse of the wife of Gotaimbara and enamored with her beauty he possessed her. Consequently she collapsed down and lost consciousness and was a pathetic sight to behold with froth emitting from her mouth.

Gotaimbara was greatly offended by this impudent act and challenged the demon to a duel. At first,

Jayasena turned down the ultimatum stating that Gotaimbara is far beneath him in terms of chivalry and valor. He accepted the confrontation after he was aroused by Gotaimbera's sardonic repartees. However, Gotaimbara easily defeated his rival and injured him to death kicking his head off. Dharmakirithi Thera emphasises here that Gotaimbara was bestowed with supreme energy owing to a meritorious deed done in a previous birth. During Kashyapa Buddha's time, he offered Bhikkus an almsgiving comprised of milk rice and this explains the reason for his mightiness (*Saddharmalankaraya*, Chapter 14: 518, see Sangharaja 1997). At this juncture the myth encompasses the legend.

Before proceeding to examine the relation of myth and ritual it may be pertinent to offer the folkloric version of the myth. The exorcist while performing the ritual of *Mahasohon samayama* vividly narrates the birth story of *Mahasohona*, which contain a lot of details that cannot be located in the mainstream historical or literary sources. In accordance with the ritualistic recitations, after Gotaimbara decapitated Jayasena, precisely at the moment God *Senasuru* (Saturn) who was a spectator of the scene seized a bear and tearing its head from its body, applied it to the headless trunk of Jayasena (Gunaratna 1866: 22-3).

Through God Saturn's paranormal powers the head fastened and become a part of the physique. So the diseased Jayasena instantly arose alive as a demon and has since been known as *Mahasohona* in reference to his mannerism of haunting grave yards. In this healing ritual a certain spell called *Gotaimbaradahana* is recited by the exorcist (Gunaratna 1866: 22-3). In this charm the particulars of this episode are narrated interminably.

An important factor manifested in the ritual is that the folk who invented the myth were not hesitant in resurrecting the deceased giant, who was a regional chief. The discrepancies and differences found so far among mainstream literary sources and the ritual enclosed the common people's version of history should be further analyzed in the light of theories forwarded by cultural anthropologists. G.S. Kirk (1970: 253) suggested working on the typology of mythical functions. They are;

- a. Narrative and entertaining
- b. Operative iterative and validatory
- c. Speculative and explanatory

From here on I endeavour to explain the formation of the *Mahasohona* myth in the light of first and second perspectives. Elaborating on the first aspect of the mythical function Kirk states that legendary myths are not only told for entertainment, they glorify famous leaders and tribal history by telling of wars, victories and defeats (Kirk 1970: 253). Hence the myth of *Mahasohona* found in the healing ritual provides an example on this kind of mythical history. According to the interpretation forward by Gunaratna (1866), Gotaimbara's rival Jayasena is not a supernatural entity but just a human being endowed with great physical strength. The fact that Jayasena was a great regional chieftain and lived in the proximity to Ritigala offers a further clue to solving the true origins of this person. In ancient times indigenous people of this land often referred to as *yakshas* (devils) and their abodes were erected in proximity to mountains and hills (note that according to the ritualistic recitation the resurrected *Mahasohona* is also supposed to haunt the summits of large rocks and hills).

The operative, iterative and validatory type is a broad category. According to Kirk, myths it include tend to be repeated regularly on ritual ceremonial occasions and meaning (1970: 253). Sometimes it will be magical intentionally, part of a ritual designed to be efficacious, to bring about a desirable continuity in society. In the Gotaimbara Dahanathe conflict of two men belonging to two different backgrounds is chanted at length. The main practical purpose of this ritual is not only the curing of the possessed, but also to maintain the memory of and provide authority to communal customs and institutions. Interestingly this ritual is mainly practiced in the district of Hambantota which also happens to be the birth place of Gotaimbara (*Mahavamsa*, Chapter 23: Verses 49-54, see Geiger 1908). It may disguise contradictions between national ideals and actuality. The memory as the basis of ritualistic narrative elaborates a kind of historical fiction.

One can surmise that the duel between the Jayasena and Gotaimbara symbolised the power struggle between two clans of people, the indigenous and the invader. This folklore can be located in the context of subaltern studies. Criticizing the elite histories, Guha (1994: 4) states that parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed another domain in which the principal actors were the common people of the country. The elite authors who recorded history clearly left out this unhistorical historiography, the politics of the people.

It can be presumed that this it is the dialectic that informs myth of *Mahasohona* and can be seen to operate within this paradigm of subaltern histories.

In the ritualistic narrative the common people privileges subaltern subjectivities, hitherto unnoticed

indigenous histories and identities. Hence certain incongruities between the dominant historical and literary sources lend support to the claim that folklore is the voice of the voiceless.

The aftermath of the combat of Jayasena, as illustrated in the *Saddharmalankaraya*, was not recorded in any other literary sources. As per the author, after slaying Jayasena, the jubilant Gotaimbara leading a procession of thousands of merry makers paid a visit to the king. Hearing the commotion the king inquired into it and learned that Gotaimbara has killed Jayasena the demon of Ritigala and celebrated the victory for seven days consecutively.

The author of the *Saddharmalankaraya* states, King Dutugamunu, did not allow, Gotaimbara, the warrior giant, to enter the palace premises as the latter was intoxicated with alcoholic beverage. The *raison d'être* is that the king was displeased because Gotaimbara has violated the last precept of the *Panchasheela* (Five Precepts).

Notwithstanding one can surmise the king may have thought that best way to pacify indigenous people's wrath towards central rule and the only way to avoid a possible rebellion and civil war from Jayasena's supporters was this sanction. Hurt by the king's reaction Gotaimbara bid farewell to his motherland, crossed the ocean and remained in exile in India (*Saddhamalankaraya*, Chapter 15: 581-2, see Sangharaja 1997).

The elite book makers produced the literature and historical records for the people to read and to hear. Yet the myth connected with the healing ritual undoubtedly preserved people's version of the tale.

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Notes

1. A legend is a narrative, believed to be based on the essence of a true story which is often embellished with the traditional beliefs of a society on a person, place or an incident. In theory history and myth stand opposed. History is what “really happened”. Myth is a fictitious tale about the past casting a dogmatic from so as to justify some present belief.
2. The birth story of the demon Suniyam is presented in this work. Buddha granted a boon to Suniyam to live in Thammanna Nuwara where all the demons live. Thammanna Nuwara can be interpreted as a stronghold of indigenous people. See Gombrich and Obesekara (1990: 117).

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Kotahalu Yagaya: the Ritual Pertaining to Sinhalese Puberty Rites in Sri Lanka

Yasanjali Devika Jayatilleke

Abstract

In Sinhala culture, reaching puberty is a very important event in a girl's life and it has been celebrated since time immemorial. This custom consists of many features. The main objective of all these features is to socialise the girl to play her future roles as a woman, wife, and a mother. These grand celebrations leading to the girl being taken out of doors is referred to as Kotahalu Mangalya.

Kotahalu Yagaya is performed during the puberty of a girl. If she has attained puberty at a non auspicious time this ritual was performed by shamans belonging to a special caste called 'Rajaka' or 'Ridee'. The ritual consisted of meaningful verses and simple dances. There was no drum beating during the ritual. The objective of this ritual, which was performed throughout the night, was to educate the girl on the important episodes of a woman's life.

1. Introduction

Sinhala culture regards the attainment or coming of age or the puberty of a girl as an event of utmost significance in her life. Once a girl reaches puberty, she is kept indoors and isolated from outsiders and even from the males of her own family. Sinhala people have been celebrating this event from time immemorial as

evident in the annals of their history. This custom which is followed to make the physically matured girl to become mentally matured consists of many features. The main objective of all these features is to instill in the girl who has attained puberty, the discipline and restraint while establishing her in the society with a new identity. Through all these customs pertaining to puberty, the girl is socialised by subjecting her to various procedures and techniques leading to play her future role as a woman, wife and mother. Sinhala people refer to these grand celebrations leading to the girl being taken out of doors as *Kotahalu Mangalya*.



Figure 1: First bathing after puberty

Photograph: by author

2. History of the Ritual

Sinhala people refer to the coming of age of a girl as *kotahalu-weema*. Scholars put forward various opinions

on the origin of word *kotahalu*. According to some of them, *kota* is derived from the Telugu word *keota* which means new, *halu* is *salu* which is clothes in English. Hence *kotahalu mangalya* refers to a new clothes festival or a festival where the girl who comes of age wears new clothes. According to J.E. Sederaman (1968), since the exorcists who perform the ritual recites poems to exorcise the girl of any evil spirits and bless her, refer (in their poems) to a *saluwa* or *haluwa* and blesses her using a cloth or *saluwa* and therefore this is called *keti saluwa* or *kotahaluwa*.

However, it is quite possible that *keti* has become *kota*. It is evident that the term *kotasaluwa* or *kotahaluwa* means a short cloth. In this regard, it is said that *kotahalu* is removed when a girl comes of age. This means that a girl who used to wear short dresses during her childhood, should wear long dresses after she comes of age.

According to Sedaramen (1968), this is also mentioned in the book, '*Kotahalu Upata*' (The Birth of *Kotahalu*) written by the poet Middellawa Korale born in Devabandi Hathpaththuwa, Sath Korale in Sri Lanka's central highland. According to this book, *Ridee Nenda* and *Hene Mama* (*Dhobi* woman or the washerwoman and man) brought a long *salu* (cloth) from heaven and gave it to the King, when princess Saraswathie saw the *salu*, she requested the King to give it to her. The King tore the long *salu* into two parts and the long *salu* became short or *kotasalu* or *kotahalu* and the King gave it to her.

There are various legends about this incident. One such legend is about King Maha Sammatha who became

the ruler with the consent of everybody. This happened at the birth or beginning of the world. Incidentally, '*Maha Sammatha*' means overall consensus. His wife died and when the King's daughter came of age, he entrusted his sister and her husband to perform the rituals. She bathed the princess and tore a *salu* or cloth into two and gave one piece to wear and the other piece to cover herself. Hence the *salu* was torn into two. Piece of cloth given to the young girl to wear was shorter which came to be known as *kotasalu* or short cloth.

A *dhobi* (washer) woman at Ginigathhena, in the Central Province had put his incident into verse thus:

<i>Mahasammatha Raju</i>	<i>kaalē</i>
<i>Kotahaluwakpēwatha</i>	<i>vunē</i>
<i>Mahasammatha Raja</i>	<i>niridaa</i>
<i>Sōken veda</i>	<i>sitiya</i>

<i>Rajuta gosin</i>	<i>pavasannē</i>
<i>Kumana</i>	<i>deyak</i>
<i>Siduvunideyi</i>	<i>naranindunē</i>
<i>Neketh sondin</i>	<i>thōraalaa</i>

<i>Bamunan hanikata</i>	<i>kendaa</i>
<i>Mē kivu dē</i>	<i>sapayaalaa</i>
<i>Kotahalu goda</i>	<i>thanavaalaa</i>
<i>Ran ridee muthu</i>	<i>menikdamaa</i>

<i>Kotahaluvata seth</i>	<i>karalaa</i>
<i>Seta riyanak saluva</i>	<i>genath</i>
<i>Palandinnata dunne</i>	<i>edaa</i>
<i>Kadaa dunnu nisaa</i>	<i>thamaa</i>

<i>Kotahaluvak pevatha</i>	<i>ennē....</i>
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Translation:

As the King Maha Sammatha was distressed, Brahmins were called. After studying the situation according to astrology, the Brahmins gave instructions to prepare the necessary items to perform the *kotahalu* ritual and blessed the attained princess. Thereafter, a forty feet long cloth was torn into two parts and given to the princess to wear. Since then this ritual is continued.

3. Story of the Great Soldier, *Neela Maha Yodhaya* (Neela the Giant)

In the history of puberty rituals in Sri Lanka, the story of Neela the giant occupies a prominent place. Other stories connected with the ritual are those of King Maha Sammatha and Ma Devi.

According to Sederaman (1968), Neela Maha Yodhaya (Neela the giant) or Neela who occupies a place of honour among the great soldiers or giants of Sri Lanka lived during the reign of King Gagaba. Gagaba the first, who lived in the Buddha era (655 years after the birth of the Buddha) was himself a giant by birth. The only person who was equal in physique to Gagaba at that time was Neela. Legend says Gagaba had a massive iron *yagadava* (mace) made by melting twelve thousand iron bars, which was used by the giants to perform their drill displays.

One of the stories related to Neela is as follows:

There was a *dhobi* (washer) woman who frequented the King's palace. One day she accompanied her only child to the palace. The playful boy meddled with the royal implements was carrying the above mentioned

yagada to and fro. The mother ordered the child to keep it in the proper place. But the child kept it in a different orientation. The King who arrived at that instance noticed that the *yagada* was differently oriented, and inquired as to who had done that. The *dhobi* woman explained to the King how her son carried the *yagada* to and fro. The King who was so pleased with the boy kept him in the palace and made him a Kings-man. It was this Kings-man who later became known as *Neela Maha Yodhaya*. According to chronicles, *Neela Maha Yodhaya* was the only bodyguard who accompanied the King Gajabahu when he invaded the Chola Kingdom in mainland India in retaliation. A person from the hill-country belonging to the *dhobi* clan who provided information on the Neela legend claims that during King Gagabahu's reign, Neela went to the Chola territory and fought with the Chola army. He not only brought back the Sinhalese, the natives of the Island, who were in Chola captivity, but also brought down some Cholas as punishment. There are plenty of *kotahalu* poems portraying the various mysterious acts performed by Neela in the Chola territory; however, they made him a deity by pushing this Gajabahu legend to the back-seat.

Neela is said to be born in an interior village close to Ruwanwella. Some believe that the Udawalawe Vally is the tenure land granted to him by the King.

Neelas are the earliest leaders of the *Dhobi/Rajaka* clan. It would be of importance and interest to know why Neela Maha Yodha is so important in the *kotahalu yaagaya*. *Rajaka* professionals or *dhobis* in the hill country believe that since Neela is descended from the *Rajaka* generation and he had enormous physical

strength, it is an opportunity to pay homage to him, through *pooja* (offerings). This ritual envisaged transferring the power and strength of Neela had to the girl who has come of age and exorcises all evils she had while honouring a powerful personality in their clan.

4. *Kotahalu* Ritual

It appears that the birth of the *kotahalu* ritual was as a result of a variety of beliefs. The *kotahalu mangalya* is held based on them. The *kotahalu* dance is a feature in Sinhala culture which dates back to time immemorial. It is probable that the *kotahalu* dance was performed during the time of Sinhala Kings, in the households of the nobility as well as in those of the village elite.

Still there are a few books pertaining to the *kotahalu mangalya*, which is similar to an opera and those are only a few remaining sources to enlighten us on the history of this *shanthikarma* or 'act of blessing'.

According to Sedaraman (1968) there are a few families who had become well known as performers of the *kotahalu* dance, in places such as Udunuwara, Matale and Sath Korale. Sedaraman categorically states that the *kotahalu* dance which has become obscure and unknown with the passage of time cannot be revived and that he had seen only performances of the *kotahalu mangalya* when he was a child. Professor Tissa Kariyawasam (1986) too has explained the information about this *yaga* which he has gathered from the few persons still living in Nochchiyaagama and Hiriyaagama. I also had the opportunity to gather important information, when I saw the same shamans, performing the *kotahalu yagaya* at Pandulagama in Anuradhapura on 19 March 1990.

5. How the *Kotahalu Yaga* is Performed

Inside the hut where the *yaga* is performed, a mat is laid out. All offerings are placed on the mat. This mat is known as *pidum karachchi*, a heap of paddy is placed at the centre of the mat. On the heap of paddy is a coconut with husk. A *pirith nool* (a chanting thread) is tied to the coconut and the free end of the thread is given to the girl to hold. On the right of the paddy heap, is an open container called the *Pass moru kulla*, consisting of *kevum* (oil cakes), plantains, *kiribath* (milk rice), white rice, *thala* (sesame), *mung* (green gram), paddy, cotton seeds and the *hath maluwa* (which consist of five vegetables and two meats, species living on ground and water). On the left of the paddy heap is the *malwila* (a basin with water, having flowers and a coin in it). Behind the paddy heap is a pestle. Behind the pestle is a sheaf of betel and rice placed on a tray. A coconut is placed on the rice *mal bulath thattuwa* (it is a tray woven with bamboo leaves on which seven betels, seven arecanuts, a mirror, a comb and a silver coin are placed). The *atamagalaenda* (the octagonal bed) is on the paddy and the rice; scholars say that the *atamagala* denotes the *atakona* or the eight directions. They do not know why the pestle is placed on the *pidum karachchi*. It is possible that it represents Neela's *yagadaa*.

Kiri leeya (milky wooden plank) known as the *Magul Poruwa* is placed behind the *pidum wattiya* (offerings tray). *Magul Poruwa* is made by wrapping white cloth around a plank from a *kiri* tree. There are two mortars on both sides of the *Magul Poruwa*. When the shamans enter the *mandapa*, they place the two copper trays with yellow rice they use to bless the girl on the mortar. The *yagaya* is performed throughout the



Figure 2: The special hut constructed for *Kotahalu Yagaya*.

Photograph: by author

night. During this period as it is impossible to keep the girl standing on the special dock right throughout, the girl and the other two blessing women are provided with a folding bed which is covered with a white cloth.

The shamans who perform this blessing dress up with *dhoti* and tie up a turban on the forehead and a belt made of cloth to the waist and a silver chain over it. Also they wear ringing hand bangles and a special ringing ring to each thumb. It is known as *wendama*. The shamans were bearing a white cloth in hand. Every shaman wears a blessed tying thread diagonally running over the left shoulder and the hip, known as *poona noola* – Poona thread.

Shamans (exorcists), the girl who has attained puberty and the two blessing women enter the hut in an orderly fashion. Chief shaman and the other four



Figure 3: The shamans performing the blessing, wearing the *wendama* and the hand bangles.

Photograph: by author

shamans holding wicks come inside the hut one after the other. The girl follows them with the other two blessing women. Her body is covered with a white cloth. The blessing women are dressed up with white *osariya* (a Sinhala saree). The shamans who enter the hut put the wicks to the coconut oil lamps which are placed on the wooden mortar. The girl and the blessing women stand by the side of the special dock.

This blessing consists of six stages. The chief shaman commences the blessing with the rest joining him. The veil is removed while reciting the verses. Thereafter the girl is taken to the dock while reciting the blessing verses. The girl has to take the chair in the midst of the blessing women and stay overnight keeping her feet on the ceremonial dock.



Figure 4: The two wooden mortars with lighted oil lamps on either side of the girl.

Photograph: by author

The wonder of a white magic could be observed right throughout the *kotahalu yagaya*. The shamans recite *kotahalu* verses and the sober manners are maintained throughout the ceremony. The shamans sing the verses while shaking the *wendama* and the hand bangles and stepping their feet rhythmically. It is interesting to note that no other musical instruments are played or no dancing is performed during the *kotahalu yagaya*. Prominence is given to the singing of *kotahalu* verses in this ceremony. Verse by verse the shamans invoke blessings and wave white cloth on the girl who has attained puberty. At that time the girl is also being blessed by the two women beside her, by touching the yellow rice in the plate and moving their hands from head to toe of the girl. Traits of Buddha are included in many *kotahalu* verses. It is evident that the *kotahalu yagaya* is directly influenced by Buddhism, inherited to

the Sinhalese culture with its advent in the third century BC. The girl's puberty evil effects are dispelled by the traits of Buddha.

As the *kotahalu yagaya* is rapidly disappearing from us, it is of paramount importance to preserve this in record so that we could study the socialisation of the early adolescence through this ritual. Let us consider one of the *kotahalu* verses under the title, *gabha uppaththya* (conception of the foetus) which is unfolded as a dialogue among the shamans. This verse explains the formation of the foetus, the step by step growth of the foetus and finally the delivery of the baby.

<i>Sathosa vadana mithurani ahapa</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Mama dën melesa kiyanu pada sathutu sithi</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Nidosa bilindu vadumata anganu</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Nisi koyi vayase sitada mata kiyā diya</i>	<i>n</i>

Translation:

Friend, who brings joy, please listens to my verses that I am singing merrily. Let me know the suitable age for a young woman to give birth to a child.

<i>Savu satha hata upathak ëthi vilasat</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Kavuruth dënagena ëthi dën bohokot</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Avurudu dasaya pirunoth alandut</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Kivu daru upadithi ethanin pasuwat</i>	<i>a</i>

Translation:

Now it is evident that once a woman reaches the age of sixteen (16), she is in a position to give birth to children thereafter.

Arrangements were made in the past for a girl to get married once she reached puberty or soon after.

Therefore it is evident that *kotahalu yagaya* had been cleverly used to educate the girl to acquire the knowledge required for a married life.

The ancient Sinhala society, nourished and shaped by the culture and ethics, considered sexual matters as extremely confidential. Therefore the young women in the past did not have an opportunity to learn about those matters. The elders believed that it is unethical to discuss such matters with their younger generation. But it is essential to provide a sex education covering from conception up to giving birth to the girls who reached puberty, in order to prepare them to face future responsibilities. The *kotahalu yagaya* was strategically utilised to provide the necessary sex education for the girls who had come of age. It is explained clearly in the verse below how to indulge in sexual activities in a healthy and fruitful married life.

<i>Thun dina ethulatha rudhiraya dutu then</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Kam rasa vindeemen sathahata leda en</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>In dahasaya dina thula daru pala den</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Min mathuwwata daruwan noma upadin</i>	<i>a</i>

Translation:

Having sexual intercourse during the first three days of the menstrual period would lead to diseases and from then onwards to the next sixteen (16) days are ideal for having sex in order to conceive. After this period conception is impossible.

Accordingly, although the age old villagers did not discuss the sexual issues openly, the knowledge they had about it is quite clear. Thus they practiced the natural birth control successfully and healthily.

The eleventh verse explains further the knowledge they had about the sexual intercourse.

<i>Kama sepehi nirathuruwa kamathi wan</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Prema ithiri dedenek ek vee men</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Boma raga paha kara gatthoth den</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Keema kusehi eta netthek upadin</i>	<i>a</i>

Traslation:

This verse indicates that lesbian activities are not encouraged.

Accordingly it is evident even at that time women had engaged in lesbian activities in order to release the sexual tension. Thereby the verse unfolds a fraction of the human behavior which had continued throughout the human history. It also reveals the breadth of knowledge that our ancient people had, and their disapproval of the lesbian activities. This is indicated by stating that those who indulge in lesbian activities are exposed to the possibility of giving birth to abnormal babies. Let us consider the following two verses in the dialogue which clearly reveal the knowledge that our ancients had about the development of the foetus. Further analysis of few more verses reveals the knowledge that our ancients had about the human body.

<i>Loba kota kavi bö</i>	<i>së- den numb a</i>
<i>Hema thena parakaa</i>	<i>së</i>
<i>Geba upadina maa</i>	<i>së</i>
<i>Kiyapan nova rö</i>	<i>së</i>

Translation:

Be generous to recite more verses, without boasting and without getting antagonised, please tell us how a child is conceived.

Kuhul wenda mokatada dangalann ě
Avul sandu bas motada kiyann ě
Vipul palamuveni gebaya landunn ě
Sevel watura piri dalambuwa wann ě

Translation:

Why do you have doubts? Why do you speak in a provocative tone? Human embryo in a womb is like a caterpillar in a pool of greasy water.

This is how the monthly development of the human embryo in a womb is explained by the verses in the form of questions and answers. In the final two verses it is questioned in verse as to how the mother gives birth to the child at the age of ten months, and the answer is given in the following verse:

Dasa masapirilaa bihivena kala kumarunn ě
Is mas den bihi vennata siritha bolann ě
Dosa vedi unu thena venas velaa bihivenn ě
Kohomada koi setiyata deyi thava pavasann ě

Translation:

On completion of ten months, normally the head of the baby comes out first. But due to some fault the baby may come out in a different orientation, please tell us more details on the child birth.

Isath payath katiyath elayath athakin loo
Pitath elath kondath namilla bihivē loo
Thavath bendun thum polakin ethakivvaa loo
Namuth meyin luhunden vaga nima keruvaa loo

Translation:

The baby comes out bending by head, by feet, by hip, by back, and by spine. In addition to this there are three other bends in the body. Thus the detail of the child birth is summed up in short.

6. Conclusion

It is clearly evident that the information available in the *kotahalu yagaya* brings out the social history related to folk beliefs. This cultural event (*kotahalu yagaya*) will be extremely helpful in gaining sufficient knowledge regarding the ancient social system, the world view, the values and the attitudes on life acquired by these people through their interaction with nature. Therefore it is important to investigate the socio-anthropological concepts arising from the historical *kotahalu yagaya*. This cultural event consists of ideals important for a prosperous life.

The ancient adults hesitated to discuss a number of matters pertaining to life with their younger generation as a result of the culture they inherited. From the distant past nature has provided numerous legacies to the human beings, among which male-female dichotomy and the roles associated with them, which are inevitable. The role entrusted by the society on a girl who has reached puberty is enormous. In order to bear those responsibilities she has to understand a number of things. It is anthropologically important to investigate the subtle manner in which the *kotahalu yagaya* was utilised to provide that understanding.

Ancient Sri Lankan women developed their personality based on modesty which is common to womanhood. They did not have the understanding and the experience of the present day women. Therefore they had to maintain the modesty essential for the ancient social order at a certain level so that the modesty was not a hindrance to gaining an understanding of the vital events of life. *Kotahalu yagaya* is a creative attempt by the ancient people to educate the girls who had come of

age about their responsibilities and experiences through a legend. The fact that this legend was based on the attainment of the Umayangana, the daughter of the Great King, provides the understanding to the attained girl that puberty is an episode common to every woman. That understanding provided the mental stability for a girl, who has attained puberty, which in turn enhanced her personality.

A girl who has reached puberty is eligible for a marriage and therefore she should have a proper understanding of sexual matters. We have already discussed how the verses titled '*Gabha Uppaththiya*' (getting pregnant) in the *kotahalu yagaya* provide the sex education needed for a girl who has attained puberty. Unlike present day women, young women in the olden days did not have the opportunities of learning from books and mass-media. Therefore, the attempt made through the verses of '*Gabha Uppaththiya*' in the *kotahalu yaagaya*, is extremely useful in imparting a sex education to young women.

The *kotahalu yagaya* reveals, numerous information regarding the ancient social system. During that period, young women were isolated from the social relationships to a large extent. But it was extremely important to convey the message to the society regarding the availability of a prospective spinster in order to make arrangements for her wedding. We can infer that *kotahalu yagaya* was instrumental in facilitating this communication.

While the spinster has to fulfill the expectations of the society, the society should also provide the necessary protection to her. Through the rituals of the *kotahalu yagaya* certain social control is established around the young girl, at the same time creating a responsibility on

self control in her mind. Among the puberty rituals of a girl, the first bathing after her isolation period was done very secretly. It was a ritual solely restricted to women. But many villagers collectively participated in the *kotahalu yagaya*. During this whole episode, the attained girl had to face the audience bearing in mind her newly acquired status and the role. This creates a sense of control and responsibility in her mind. Therefore, it is of anthropological value to investigate how the *kotahalu yagaya* is instrumental in socializing the newly attained girl. I would like to highlight the fact that during the entire *kotahalu yagaya* no musical instruments were played and no dancing was performed. The reason for this may be to create the necessary atmosphere so that the girl's attention is not distracted from the message of the verses.

Kotahalu yagaya is also extremely important in arriving at conclusions regarding the solidarity and interdependence which is evident in village life. Since the villagers were accustomed to a self sufficient socio-economic pattern, there was no need for competition and exploitation of labour. As an example the shamans who performed this *yagaya* were rewarded with agricultural yield instead of cash. Unlike at present where everything is valued commercially, the ancient villagers gave priority to collective social interactions. When considering in these lines the *kotahalu yagaya* brilliantly denotes the cultural inclinations of the ancient village folk, thereby revealing many important features of their life pattern and the early stages of our immaterial culture.

It is also important to investigate the reasons for this type of cultural events becoming obscure with the passage of time. Sedaraman's (1968) explanation in this

regard is that, with the decline of the prosperity of a society, people tend to retain only the rituals which they can afford and let the rest to disappear. According to astrology there are some cases where the time of attainment of a girl is inauspicious. Sederaman (1968) further states that at present the expenditure incurred in performing the *kotahalu yagaya* is unaffordable to many people. Therefore in spite of the fact that this *yagaya* help to eliminate the evil effects of the inauspicious time of attainment of a girl, most villagers are unable to afford this.

The economic hardships experienced by the villagers largely contribute to the disappearance of such important rituals like *kotahalu yagaya*. Sedaraman (1968) provides another reason for the disappearance of *kotahalu yagaya*, according to which less expensive white magic has replaced it. He also mentions that the shamans are looked down in the present society, and their children and grandchildren do not continue the shaman tradition. Therefore, with the demise of the remaining shamans, the *kotahalu yagaya* has disappeared from the villages.

One of the most notable reasons for the disappearance of the *kotahalu yagaya* is the western cultural hegemony. The western cultural hegemony was implemented and still been maintained mainly through the education system imposed on us by the British. As a result of this, the generations produced through this education system were inclined to look down upon our knowledge systems and the associated culture, by condemning our rituals and practices as myths. In addition, this western cultural dominance is further multiplied through the mass media.

It is highly unlikely to resurrect this long lost cultural event, namely the *kotahalu yagaya*, which contained so many melodious and meaningful Sinhala verses. Therefore, like many other cultural events *kotahalu yagaya* has also faded into history. It is a tragedy that such an important ritual like *kotahalu yagaya*, which was so rich in educational, social and psychological values, has become obscure with the passage of time.

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- Photographs were taken by the author during her field reserch in 1990 at Pandulagama in the Anuradhapura district.

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The SAARC Cultural Centre

Idea of establishment of the SAARC Cultural Centre was initiated at the Tenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in 1998 by welcoming the offer of Sri Lanka to establish a South Asian Cultural Centre to promote the distinctive arts of South Asia.

At the 11th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu 2002, the Heads of State or Governments decided to mandate a meeting of Ministers of Cultural Affairs to finalise the details relating to the SAARC Cultural Centre.

The first meeting of SAARC Ministers of Cultural Affairs held in Colombo in 2003 welcomed the offer of Sri Lanka towards the construction of SAARC Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka.

At the 12th SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in 2004, the Heads of State or Government welcomed the proposal of the establishment of a SAARC Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka which will serve as a symbol of South Asian cultural heritage.

At the 13th SAARC Summit held in Dhaka in 2005, the Heads of State or Government expressed their satisfaction on the progress made in the establishment of the SAARC Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka and underlined the importance of making it operational at the earliest.

At the Second Meeting of the SAARC Ministers of Cultural Affairs held in Colombo in 2006 and the 28th Session of the Council of Ministers held in New Delhi in 2007 Ministers welcomed the offer of Sri Lanka to hold the first Meeting of the Governing Board of the SAARC Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka.

The mandate of the SAARC Cultural Centre was further expanded in 2007, when the higher SAARC bodies decided that the SAARC Technical Committee on Human Resources Development should be discontinued and that its mandate relating to Culture should be given to the SAARC Cultural Centre.

On this background Sri Lankan Government has opened the SAARC Cultural Centre in Colombo in March 2009, while taking necessary arrangements to complete the construction work of the buildings in Matara down South Sri Lanka. First Governing Board Meeting of the SAARC Cultural Centre was held in Colombo in April 2009.



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