

## **A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY ON "IS THE RELIC VENERATION IN SRI LANKA ONLY A VENERATION OF THE DEAD?"**

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### **Introduction**

Veneration of the dead, afraid of the dead and blessings of them can be seen throughout human history. Western civilizations which have more concerns with scientific basis could not able to get rid of such customs. Ancient civilizations like Egypt have built up massive pyramids on behalf of the veneration of the dead. In Eastern civilizations, Pagodas have been built to remember and venerate dead people. Buddhists in Sri Lanka have built up Stūpa enshrining relics of the Lord Buddha or Arahat people for worshiping matters. Therefore this study is going to study on "is relic veneration in Sri Lanka only a custom for veneration of the dead?"

### **Methodology**

Primary sources of Buddhism and other academic books, journals and websites were used to gather data for this study. In addition naturalistic observation method also used at relic showing ceremonies. Data were analyzed and discussed qualitatively.

### **Discussion**

Offering Relics of the Lord Buddha and Arahat people is being misunderstood as a traditional ritual of veneration of the dead by someone. Usually the body or parts of the body reflects one's identity. In ancient Periods people used to worship remains of one's body such as "bones" to keep him memorial and for offering matters. Even at present, some religious and cultural beliefs maintain this custom with following objectives.

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- \* Enjoying the dead.
- \* Maintain relationships with the dead.
- \* Getting blessings of the dead.
- \* Respecting the dead.

Comparing these objectives with the objectives of Buddhist relic offering make it clear that both streams have similarities and dissimilarities. According to Buddhism, four people are entitled to have offerings with constructing pagodas.

- \* Lord Buddha
- \* Paccēka Buddha
- \* Arahants
- \* King Cakkavatti

These four Persons are considered as noble persons at Buddhist Point of view. Therefore people can worship and respect the qualities of these noble persons constructing Stūpas. It is not merely a ritual of veneration of the dead. It is a psychological strategy to attribute and cultivate those good qualities within worshipers. Stūpas are only constructed to memorize and worship noble persons and not to respect every human beings who have passed away.

Respecting and worshiping the physical body of someone (even the lord Buddha) was highly refused by the Lord Buddha and always emphasized the impermanence of the physical body. Only internal qualities of someone are appreciated by Buddhism. Once, the Lord Buddha advised Vakkali thero with such a teaching.

Some Buddhists believe there is an invisible power of relics and they can move, hide or make magical things. But those beliefs came into account considerably only after the arriving of "the tooth relic" to Sri Lanka. With the arriving of "the tooth relic", the "Bodhi based rites and rituals" transferred to "tooth relic based rites and rituals" in Sri Lanka. When the tooth relic gets the highest position of Buddhist rites and rituals, offering relics was expanded all over the country.

At present, veneration of relics is the famous ritual of Buddhist people in Sri Lanka. Various relic showing ceremonies can be seen all over the country. Not only the relics of the Lord Buddha, but also relics of Arahants are being respected and offered by devotees. In addition, relics of

the Lord Buddha are offered with the Purpose of having finished disasters, sufferings and fears. Furthermore, relic showing ceremonies are conducted to earn money for different purposes.

Stūpas are sometimes constructed at Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka to memorize monks. But it is out of Buddhist teachings and can be identified as just a traditional custom for veneration of the dead.

### Conclusion

Veneration of relics is one of the famous Buddhist customs in Sri Lanka at present. With the arriving of the "tooth relic" it gets the highest position of Buddhist rites and rituals in Sri Lanka. Constructing Stūpas with enshrining relics is also one of the relic veneration methods. Veneration of the dead ceremonies can be seen worldwide in different cultures. Only physical body or a part of the body is offered at those ceremonies rather than the qualities of the person. But Buddhist concept of relic veneration is totally different from those historical traditional rituals of veneration of the dead. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of respecting inner good qualities of someone rather than the physical body. Finally, this study can conclude that Buddhist relic veneration in Sri Lanka is not a way to venerate dead people and it is a psychological strategy to get ascribed and cultivated one's good qualities within worshipers.

**Keywords:** veneration of the dead, relic veneration, Buddhism, Sri Lanka, Customs

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