



Headdress: Faith and practice in everyday life in Buddhism (The case of the temple of the tooth Buddhist religious activities and the cultural headdress of Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

Aim: Clothes are more than just a means of keeping warm; they also convey meanings about the social and cultural norms to which they belong. Since ancient times, Sri Lankans have dressed in accordance with cultural norms and traditions for Buddhist religious ceremonies. Located in Kandy, a city recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, the Temple of the Tooth is the subject of this investigation into a particular type of musician's headdress.

Method: The study is ethnographic in nature, with the participation of observers serving as its conceptual foundation. Scholars attended rituals held at the Temple of the Tooth, conducted interviews with musicians who performed there and analysed the results.

Findings: This vital piece of the headdress has been worn in a specific manner since ancient times. The headdress can convey various meanings, including the importance of the occasion, the wearer's glitzy personality, the depth of their hospitality, the respect they have for the Buddha, and their level of artistic skill.

Implications/Novel Contribution: This study summarises the significance of the turban in Sri Lankan culture. The research familiarises the world with Sri Lankan culture.

Keywords: Headdress, Buddhism, Faith and Practice, Temple of the Tooth, Sri Lanka

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient Sri Lankan doctrine held that religion and the state were inextricably linked. Buddhism and Buddhist authority have always gone hand in hand, which means that the people the King rules over are Buddhists. 'the pressure to identify the Buddhist religion with the state and the Buddhist state in turn with the society was a deeply constructed trend in the Buddhist kingdoms of Southeast Asia,' says the user ' [Tambiah \(1975\)](#). There is a close relationship between the King of Sri Lanka and various religious symbols. The most significant Buddha relics are the most iconic of these icons. Kings must demonstrate their personal connection to and official care for these artefacts so that subjects will recognise their divine right to worship them in a centralised setting. Each year, those in power must prove they still have the relics by displaying them publicly. The idea that religion is the ultimate ruler of the state and that kings ruled only by virtue of being granted the right to do so provides a clear interpretation of this bond. Because of this belief, we can comprehend the longstanding tradition of monarchs abdicating in favour of the religion that has become such a central role in modern society.

As the holiest Buddhist Temple in Kandy, Sri Lanka's second-largest city, the Temple of the Tooth Relic is a must-visit for any traveller to the island nation. The Temple grounds are recognised as a World Heritage Site. Four official ceremonies are held each year to honour the Tooth Relic and receive government funding. The first of these is the New Year's Day ceremony of rice planting and offering to the Tooth Relic, which takes place in January and symbolises the fertility and gift of a special rice field. As the old year ends and the new one begins, April is the time for the New Year Festival. The beliefs, ideas, values, and sentiments of the Kandyan Sinhalese civil religion were most manifest in the fourth ritual, which was the most important and glorious of all the rituals

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of the Kandyan Sinhalese monarch. The Asala festival takes place every August. They have a large cast and thousands of viewers for their performance. Indeed, such pervasiveness indicates its significance as an expression of civil religion. The Temple of the Tooth is the primary institution and includes the shrines of the gods Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama, and Pattini; it coordinates the participation of the other four central religious institutions of the kingdom. In 1739, during the reign of the Nayakkar kings, a festival of lights called Karthi (full moon day of November) was established (Azhar, 2015; H. L. Seneviratne, 1979; Tatiyanantakul, 2017; Yildiz, 2016). As an act and method of political unification, it was carried out simultaneously by lighting lamps on the same day across the entire kingdom. The sacred tooth relic is treated with the utmost respect during daily ceremonies and rituals. The rituals at the Temple of the tooth relic require the wearer to dress in the prescribed manner. Ancient fashions have been passed down to the present day. Sri Lanka's political, religious, and civil culture are all strongly represented in the official dress.

Objective of the Study

This article explores the aesthetics and cultural significance of a headdress worn by a musician at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka (a UNESCO World Heritage Site).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Clothing, as a statement of signs, may transmit meanings of individual character or social character of the wearer (Rosenfeld & Plax, 1977). Clothing may be a sign of the social, political, economic, and professional status of a person (Beals & Hoijer, 1959). Certain styles of dress, which are still practiced in the Temple of the Tooth Sri Lanka in ritual performances for the Buddha daily, convey both the religion and the culture of the wearer, and may transmit such a solid message that all forms, colour, silhouette, lines are regarded as a means of ritual dissemination of religion and culture of today. The Temple of the Tooth, Kandy, Sri Lanka follow a very traditional system of life in which styles of clothing, especially when in community; convey a strong sense of cultural values of the society. Dresses are a key aspect of identity presentation, representing a visual declaration of an individual's role performance. As Hall et al. (1997) says clothes are also held as signs. They compose a meaning and bear a message'. Culture and dress are symbolic agents of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. These symbolic forms are the means through which "social actions of sharing, systems of behavior and outlook within a community are transmitted" (Abdullah, Laily Ramli, & Rafek, 2017; Hannerz, 1969; Nyihana & Astuti, 2018).

The Sacred Tooth Relic

The national religion of the Sinhalese was introduced to Sri Lanka in 236 B.C during the reign of King DevanampiyaTissa. The Buddhist practice was gradually growing connecting to cultural events such as venerating the sacred boo tree, maintain monasteries, monuments, and the tooth relic of the Buddha. One significant moment in the ancient history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is the arrival of the Tooth relic, from India about 805 B.E (311 AC) during the reign of King Sirimeghavanna. Ever since then this sacred tooth relic has been a national treasure of exceeding value and a physical insignia which is attached to the Sinhalese. King Sirimeghavanna held a great ceremony for the tooth relic and commanded that it should be held every year at the Abhayagiri-Vihara. Today it is protected in a golden casket in the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, where it has become the center of worship sincere pilgrims from all over the Island and the world. The Tooth Relic is associated inseparably with monarchy. Since the 12th century until the end of the Sinhalese kingdom in 1815 during the Kingdom of Kandy (De Silva, 2005), political sovereignty was inextricably associated with the possession of the Tooth Relic. It remains as of an utmost importance and an influential symbol in the civil religion of contemporary Sri Lanka. The sacred tooth relic holds absolute power in tradition and practice of civil religion.

Vicissitudes of Tradition in the New Nation of Sri Lanka

The Tooth Relic is not as closely connected with the government today as it was in history. The contemporary government of Sri Lanka is not a kingdom: it is a democratic state. However, signs and values of the kingdom have not vanished, as the country has a living so-called Buddhist tradition. The Tooth Relic does not safeguard the government as it did before. Slight changes are evident in the meaning as it developed. But it survives as a significantly important and strong symbol in the civil religion of contemporary Sri Lanka. According to [H. L. Seneviratne \(1979\)](#), Sri Lankans value the annual procession of the temple of the tooth relic as a fine example of a rite that occurred or existed before the beginning of colonial rule one which shows cultural prestige, however the admiration for the rite is brought with uncertainty. The rituals were held as official duties by a great number of traditional administrations clad in age old traditional costumes.

[H. Seneviratne \(1984\)](#) states that it was obvious that these services were 'work' and not 'worship', a usage maintained up to today by the staff that now perform the rituals ([H. Seneviratne, 1984](#)). The Temple grants its lands to the people who perform services from various castes, who in return are required to conduct services at Temple rituals and in the annual procession. The attendants must show their subordination during the rites. The core of precolonial Kandyan ritual has descendant without any change. [H. Seneviratne \(1984\)](#) states that the annual procession and the Temple rituals were keystones of political authority for the Kandyan Kingdom. The long-standing nature of the rituals, after the collapse of the kingdom, in part, forms the symbolic value for people trying to reformulate their identity in the wake of colonial rule ([H. L. Seneviratne, 1977](#)). The political parties of Sri Lanka also can be observed trying to obtain the blessing of the Temple of Tooth relic and have been very significant during the recent political changes in November 2018.

The government sponsored rituals of the Tooth Relic is a complicated procedure of the institute held daily, weekly and repeated rituals, constitute a central event of the civil faith of Sri Lanka. Three main services are highlighted at the daily service such as the six officers called rala are entitled to the fulfillment of the main duties, four musicians called panikkyo are entitled to hewisi mandape, and officers who serve in the kitchen are called muluthan ralala. The service called rala consists of seven officers who are traditionally called kariya korala(head man),vattorurala (serving keys of the chamber of the tooth relic),geparala (helping priests for the service),kath thiyana rala (serving royal meals from the kitchen to the chamber of the tooth relic), hak gedi appu (conch blower), dorakada arachchi (guarding the gate) and palle male rala (helping priests in the service at the lower shrine of the temple of the tooth relic). There are other officers who cover duties in unavoidable circumstances such as attending funerals which are considered inauspicious. During the Kandyan Kingdom, all services were provided by only particular traditional families. It is not the duty itself but the concept of the heir that has been subjected to change today. It is observed that the traditional notion of the service has gradually declined. On the other hand, it was observed that their service is an obligation to the institute which is firm and they are obliged to perform their service.

Musicians of the Hewisi mandape have descended from traditional families of Ihalawela, Malagammana, Molagoda and Uduwela. The so-called musical sounds are also traditionally known as Sabda Puja. Presenting of musical sounds in the daily office is a special ritual at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth-Relic in Kandy. Devotees have the opportunity to listen to a variety of drum beats and horns during the services regularly performed three times a day; in the early morning from 5.30-7.30 am, mid-day from 9.30-11.30 am and in the evening from 6.30-8.30 pm. The performance of offering of the sounds has been continued according to a traditional system. The tooth relic is offered a variety of sounds by the horn, cymbals and a horn called nagasinnam, a drum called thakburuwa, drums called thammattama and daula. Each Wednesday, the Navam ceremony, and the bathing ceremony called nanumura are performed. For these special days, the royal singing service called kavikara maduwa sings for the tooth relic. The daily sound offering is accompanied only by the thammattama, daula and two kinds of horns. There are three regular rituals per day and special occasions are held each Wednesday and the full moon day of every month. These rituals are constructed around the idea that the Tooth Relic was the Buddha in the sacred form in which he was idealized in the common acceptance. The rituals state the divine form of the Relic in that the form of its worship was derived from worship of Hindu deities. In the early morning the sacred Relic was awakened by the Temple bell and then ceremonially offered breakfast followed by flowers, incense and music. In the daytime, food

was offered and, in the evening, liquid refreshment is offered to the relic. These three offices are known as the early morning service, mid-day service, and evening service; officers' dress in traditional costume 15 minutes before the ceremony begins.



Figure 1. Is show the religious rituals conduct by a retinue of traditional officers in their traditional dress

METHODOLOGY

The research is an ethnographic study. Ethnography is the art and science of helping to define a group of culture (Fetterman, 2009). Ethnography is associated with a full engagement of the researcher in the everyday lives or culture of those under study (Sangasubana, 2011). Ethnography can gather a large number of materials to characterize what people believe and how they behave in everyday situations (Roper & Shapira, 2000). The data were collected through observation, interviews and archival research. Data on the actual lives of the people of the study were collected through participant observation. Interviews or direct conversations were held for data gathering. Archival materials were observed, recorded for confirmation of the data. Data analysis began while the date was collected. Data were coded for descriptive labels and categorized according to setting, types of activities, events and methodology of wear. The pattern or connected findings were unfolded while reviewing the literature related to the subject. Reliability was confirmed by cross-checking of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The headdress is conveying by the religious, cultural as well as its function is displayed. Colour, texture, volume, accessories give rich cultural sentiment and ceremonial ambiance. The ceremony is key in exhibiting cultural values as it provides a variety of events. Trice, Belasco, and Alutto (1969) described ceremonials as an important element of all social systems and explained them as clear sets of systematic practices, methods and techniques which are accepted and admired by the people of the social system. The word ceremony will be utilized in the research to be regarded as ritualized occasions that are pre-prepared to happen in a delegated time and place and are accepted and desired by some members of society. These activities are ceremonial as they have a cultural definition or importance to participants, beyond their clear task-oriented aim (Moberg, 1981). The meaning of ceremony may fit Langer (1953) idea of presentational symbolism, as an experience of art or religion.

Musicians, headdresses are all similar and are arranged by wrapping a piece of rectangular cloth over the head. Traditional dress and the headdress are depicted in the Kotte and Kandyan era temple paintings (Karunaratne, 2015). The beauty, neatness, and tightness of the headdress depend on the hand and the practice of the wearer. The musician himself arranges his headdress. The young thammattama drummer dresses his cultural headdress in the costume three times per day for the ritual activities. He is shown as very competent and quick in dressing his headdress which takes 2-3 minutes. His aesthetic appreciation of the dressing of the headdress is achieved through hands and practice which has been carried over eight years of service. He is the fourth in his generation from the heir.

The headdress is a turban type. The head-dress is of the wrap-around type constructed or forming in a simple pattern, but it may present an appearance which simulates that of a ready-made hat. The materials, from which a

particular head-dress is made, may be formed from only cotton cloth, and where the material permits, it is easily laundered. The cloth is white and it is rectangular in shape. The invention is disclosed in several forms in the accompanying steps.



Figure 2. Formation of the dress in the first step of its application and forming the frilled held end



Figure 3. The cloth is tightly wrapped around the head and the end part is tucked in panels. Upon proper adjustment, the head-dress is thus held securely in position



Figure 4. Forming the elaborate frill which stands to the side of the head. The remaining material hangs somewhat in a draped form and the corners, folded as shown by the relative location of the edges



Figure 5. The headdress



Figure 6. Official musicians are depicted in temple murals of mulkirigala of the 18th Century, wearing similar headdresses

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The headdress conveys the living culture of Buddhism in Sri Lanka today. The headdress is worn at the annual religious events and daily rituals conducted for the Tooth Relic of Sri Lanka. Colour, texture, volume, methodology used for headdresses express attitudes and beliefs of honor and the meaning of the ceremony.

The most important cultural belief which is connected with the headdress is its value, the value that has been connected to the persons, who first made or utilized the item, or to us today, or to people at any moment that

is significant for the survival of the object. Headdress has aesthetic value, possesses spiritual value and more importantly, reflects cultural beliefs.

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