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An Introduction to the Life Circle Rituals of the Sinhala Cultural Context as Traditional Communications Pattern in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Traditional Communication (TC) represents a key facet of folklore, which predominantly relies on the oral traditions of human societies. Central elements of folklore include folk poems, folk songs, folktales, myths, customs, beliefs, rituals, riddles, proverbs, tattoos, and other forms of aesthetic art. These are prominent phenomena in the village society. Such ethnographic elements can be identified from any ethnic group in the world. The topic of this article is “*An introduction to the life circle rituals of the Sinhala cultural context as traditional communication pattern in Sri Lanka.*” The primary purpose of this article is to identify the

life circle rituals of Sri Lanka and explain their cultural value.

This research is conducted as a qualitative study utilizing ethno-methodology. The primary data collection method involved referencing literature sources and conducting document analysis. For data analysis, the content analysis method was employed. The findings presented focus specifically on the transitional stages of Sinhala culture. A key conclusion of this study is that life transitional stages should be considered not merely as biological phenomena but also as sociological and anthropological facts.

Keywords: Communication, Life Circle Rituals, Traditional Communication Patterns, Culture, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Communication is a distinct area of study within the realm of Social Sciences. Auguste Comte, regarded as the father of Social Sciences, famously referred to Social Science as the queen of all sciences (Perera, 1993, p.9). If Social Science is indeed the queen, then communication is the lifeblood that animates all social studies. Cooley (1926) ^[3] elucidates that communication is the mechanism through which human relations exist and evolve, encompassing all symbols of the mind and the means by which they are conveyed through space and preserved over time.

Society itself is a network of relationships fundamentally grounded in communication. All cultural and behavioral patterns associated with human conduct are directly or indirectly predicated on communication. Consequently, it becomes evident that discussions within social sciences are intrinsically rooted in communication. Societal progression hinges on the dissemination of information, which significantly influences the survival of both humans and animals. As Rynin (1932, p.505) ^[15] asserts, "The communication of facts is the most important of social activities."

This article aims to enhance subject knowledge in the domain of traditional communication, while also contributing valuable insights to the fields of folklore and culture.

Literature

Humans are interconnected through communication. The evolutionary journey of humankind from ancient times is detailed in Segal's book, "How Man Became A Giant" (1982) ^[16], which was translated from Russian into Sinhala by Narawala Patrick. Traditional communication is a specialized subset within the broader field of communication. The term "tradition" encompasses various meanings, including beliefs, customs, religious practices, and rituals. Notably, traditional communication integrates the beliefs, customs, and rituals of folk culture. Essentially, it can be seen as a form of communication intricately linked with folk culture.

The theoretical background of culture can understand from 'primitive culture' written by Edward B. Tylor (1929) ^[17] which is most popular book. He mention that "culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which

includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society," (p.01). *Cultural anthropology*, (2014) [8] written by Kenneth J. Guest defines culture as follows.

Culture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, patterns of behavior, artifacts, and institutions that are created, learned, and shared norms, values symbols, mental maps of reality, and material objects as well as structures of power-including the media, education, religion and politics – in which our understanding of the world is shaped, reinforced and challenged. (Guest, 2014, pp35, 36) [8].

Culture is a focal area that has garnered significant attention from scholars, particularly anthropologists and sociologists. A comprehensive understanding of any subject necessitates an appreciation of culture. Within the broad concept of culture, various classifications emerge, notably Folk culture, Elite culture, and Pop culture. To effectively analyze folk culture, it is essential to grasp the overarching concept of culture.

Taylor's definition of culture, which has gained widespread acceptance among scholars, encompasses the attitudes, behaviors, creations, beliefs, and customs of a society's people. Ralph Linton (1945) further elucidates that "the culture of a society is the way of life of its members, the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share, and transmit from generation to generation" (Perera, 1993).

As per the definition of Wimalawansa Thero (1964) [23] the tendency towards tangible and intangible (spiritual) conditions is culture. The book *Bharatheeya Dharama shashthra and Sinhala customs* written by wimalakeerthi uditha thero (1981) [19] was a very important source of information in this effort. The book contains lot of information about Hindus life circle and Sinhalese life circle rituals

Many European scholars have written several books on 'Sinhala society and culture'. Robert Knox, who was a sailor, had come to Sri Lanka in 1660. The world-famous book titled '*An Historical Relation of The Island of Ceylon*' written by Robert Knox is used as a source of information by me for my research work. This book was translated to Sinhala under the name '*Eda Heladiwa*' (2005) by the veteran translator David Karunarathna. He was a prisoner who had served a sentence as long as twenty years during the regime of Rajasinghe II. The above book was written by him using his own experience. This book reveals many facts about the culture that had existed during the Kandyan era.

A Sketch of The Constitution of The Kandyan Kingdom written by John Doily, (2011) the permanent resident agent for the state of Britain is one of the most important sources of information. This book has been translated in to by Rathnayake (2011) as *Kandyan kingdom seen by doily*. The book reveals information relating to the contemporary social status that had existed in up-country during the regime of the Britishers. The administrative structure of Kandy, the social and the cultural background, the religious status, and the economic conditions etc. Are clearly stated in that book. Further this book was the source for the book titled '*Sinhalese Social Organization*' authored by Ralf Peiris in 1956. The book *Medieval Sinhalese Art* written by Ananda Coomaraswamy in 1956 presents important details about Sinhala artistic creations during the 18th century in relation to Kandyan Sinhala community, industries, embroidery, architecture, woodwork, stone works and sculpture.

The book titled "*Society in medieval Ceylon*" of Ariyapala (1997) [1] reveals a number of important fact relating to medieval times of the country. That was also a dissertation submitted by him for the Ph.D. offered by the University of London. In that book, he has an in-depth discussion on issues such as the religion and religious cults, superstitions and mythology in Sri Lankan culture. The book *Aspects of Sinhalese Culture* written by Martin Wichramasinghe (1973) a pioneering Sri Lankan writer also discusses about the stages in traditional communication methods in the chapters: The Pattern of Sinhalese Culture, primitive elements in our folk culture, folk poetry of the Sinhalese, Sinhalese Masks, Cultural Conflict in Ceylon and cultural synthesis. (Wickramasinghe, 1973).

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in ethno-methodology. The primary data collection methods included referencing literature sources and conducting document analysis. Numerous works by both foreign and local scholars on the medieval social background of Sri Lanka were reviewed, with a particular emphasis on secondary sources. Content analysis was employed for data interpretation. The findings focus specifically on the transitional stages of Sinhala culture, including birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Additionally, the APA 7th citation format was used throughout the compilation of this article.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Content analysis method is used for data analysis in this article. Much of the information related to the life circle rituals has been collected through literature review and document analysis. The facts are arranged in order related to the concepts of birth, puberty, marriage and death.

Life circle rituals (Transitional stages in life)

Within the journey of a person's life, spanning from birth to death, there exist numerous significant milestones. Sociologists have directed their focus towards four pivotal stages, often referred to as "life circle rituals" or "The Transitional Stages in Life." In Sinhala, these stages are denoted by the term "oajdr l34u" (Dwara Karma) as per Rathnapala (1995) [14]. These four transitional stages are outlined below.

1. The birth
2. The puberty (*adolescence*)
3. The marriage
4. The death

The above were termed as transitional stages since they are the turning points in one's life. According to the Buddhist literature, the life of a person divides into three parts from birth to death namely the primary stage, the middle and the final stage. This fact is depicted by the following gatha from the Dhammapadaya (Dhammapada, 12-1).¹

The primary stage is from birth to 33 years. The middle stage ranges from 33 years to 66 years. And the final stage is from 66 years to death (Uditha thero, p.63).

¹ අත්තනං වේ පියං ජඤ්ඤා - රක්ඛෙය්‍ය නං සුරක්ඛිතං
තිණ්ණ මඤ්ඤනරං යාමං - පටි ජග්ගෙය්‍ය පණ්ඩිතෝ
(ධම්මපදය 12-1)

Kalidasa, the great poet of India indicates three main stages in his book 'Raguwansaya'. 'Kumara Kalaya' (from birth to 7 years), 'Yawwana Kalaya' (from 7 years to 50 years) and 'Wurda Kalaya' (from 50 years to death). Tasks relating to each of these three periods are describe in the (Raguwansaya, 1-8)².

According to tradition, the phase from birth until the age of seven entails being under the guardianship of parents or adults, commonly termed as "infancy" or "babyhood." From the age of seven to sixteen, it was historically perceived as the period designated for education in ancient India. Subsequently, from sixteen to fifty years of age, individuals were expected to be immersed in family life, engaging in domestic activities. Lastly, from fifty years until death, this phase was regarded as an opportunity to pursue activities aimed at spiritual enlightenment.

The above lifestyle was described in another perspective in the tradition of Hinduism. Accordingly, the life is divided into four parts. They were termed under one name as 'Ashrama Dharma'. (wdY%ou O%4u) The names of 'Ashrama Dharma' are 'Brahmachari' (n%yaupdI), 'Gruhastha' (.Dyia:), 'Aranyaka' (wrKHI) and 'Wanaprastha' (jdkm%ia:) respectively.

Education should be received during the era of 'Brahmachari'. 'Gruhastha' era is meant for engaging in domestic activities. The eras 'Aranyaka' and 'Wanaprastha' both should be used for activities connected to the next life benefits. Division of life in the above manner can be applied to any society. Though there are limited time frames specified for birth, adolescence and marriage of a person no such specific time to predict death.

The birth

The birth of a child holds significant importance within any society, traditionally necessitating sexual intercourse between a man and a woman for conception. While advancements in medicine offer alternative methods such as test tube babies, natural procreation through physical contact remains the primary means. Conception occurs when a man's sperm fertilizes a woman's ovum, leading to the development of a fetus in the womb over approximately ten months.

Sexual intercourse between individuals is subject to cultural norms and restrictions across diverse societies, often requiring a legal basis in civilized communities. Regardless of the method of childbirth, societies commonly adhere to rituals and customs, a phenomenon observed in Sri Lankan culture as well.

Birth marks the onset of life's journey, with the period from fetal development in the mother's womb to approximately three months after birth representing a transitional phase for both mother and child. During this initial transition, the mother and baby receive heightened attention from society.

An expectant mother is held in high regard within society, receiving exclusive treatment and respect due to the significant changes her body undergoes from conception onwards. She requires attentive care from all around her. In many Asian countries, it is customary for expectant mothers

to return to their parents' home and stay until childbirth, a practice reflected in ancient stories such as that of Queen Mahamaya, who journeyed from Kapilawasthu nuwara to Kumbulwath Nuwara for the birth of Prince Siddhartha.

The tale of Patachara, recounted in the Saddharma Rathnawaliya, highlights a similar tradition where the expectant countess sought her husband's accompaniment to her parents' home for her second childbirth. This tradition persists in many societies today, with mothers often providing crucial support to their pregnant daughters if they are unable to return home. Throughout pregnancy, both the physical and mental conditions of the expectant mother undergo remarkable changes, underscoring the importance of having close relatives by her side for support. The phenomenon of "Doladuka" in Sinhala or "pregnancy longing" in English reflects the mother's cravings for various foods during pregnancy, believed to provide insights into the future characteristics of the unborn child. In the case of Queen Bimbisara's expectant queen, her craving for blood led to predictions of her son Ajasaththa's future cruelty, as he later fulfilled the prophecy by becoming a ruthless king who killed his father. It is mentioned in the historical reports that the Viharamadadevi had a strange longing when she was expectant with the baby Dugugemunu. As per the Maha Vamsa, the queen Viharamahadevi had a longing to offer alms to the Maha Sanga using a honey comb which was about 33 metres in length and to eat the rest by herself. Also, she had another longing to drink the water gathered by washing the sword used to decapitate the head of the prime giant of the king Elara. (Maha wamsa, 22-42,43)³.

King Kavantissa had inquired the astrologers as to why the queen Viharamahadevi had such longings. Their opinion to the query was that the baby to be born would one day eradicate the elements hostile to the country and would protect Buddhism. Longing is a strong desire of the expectant mothers. It compels the mother to partake special food mostly food having sour taste. The longing occurs in the mind of the expectant mothers thus predicts about a future state. (Rathnapala, 1995, pp.213-216)^[14].

A longing occurred in the mind of the mother of a god called *Weeramunda* adored by the Sinhala is as follows.

*Bisawata dola ata ganithi - Batha bulatha risi nethi
Ambulate bisaw risi wethi - Nethi kema dola gathi* ⁴
(ibid, p.215)

The meaning of the above poem is that the queen did not like rice. She liked sour food. Also, she liked to have food which could not be easily found.

When an expectant mother has a longing, everybody strives to accomplish same. They forget all grudges and come

³ “මහා පින් ඇති ඒ දේවියට මෙබඳු දෙළක් උපන්නේය. ඉස්බක් (රියන් 140 ක්) තරම් වූ මී වදයක් දෙළොස් දහසක් හිඤ්ඤන්ට දන් දී ඉතිරි මී පැණි වළඳනු කැමති විය. එසේම එළාර රජුගේ අග්‍ර යෝධයාගේ හිස කැපූ කඩුව දේවනය කර එය පානය කිරීමටද කැමති විය.” (මහා වංශය සිංහල පරිවර්තනය 22 පරිච්ඡේදය 42, 43, 44 ගාථා)

⁴ බිසවට දෙළ අට ගනිති
බත බුලත රිසි තැනි
ඇඹුලට බිසව් රිසි වෙති
තැනි කෑම දෙළ ගති

² ශ්‍රේණිවේණාස්ත විද්‍යානාං - යෝවනේ විෂයෙෂිතාං
වාර්ධකේ මුනි වෘත්තීනාං- යෝගාත්තේ තනුත්‍යජාමි (රජුචංශය 1-8)

forward to assist her in that respect. The general acceptance of the society is that a woman becomes fully fledged when she is honored with motherhood. The custom of the society is to assist her for the task in whatever the possible way. She gets the pride of place where ever she goes. There is a seat reserved for expectant mothers in the public and the private transport. Also, she is recognized as a sign of prosperity.

The puberty

Puberty marks a significant milestone in the transitional phases of life, signifying the period during which adolescents attain sexual maturity and become capable of reproduction. Procreation or reproduction is integral to societal advancement, with both males and females becoming eligible to procreate upon reaching adolescence. Alongside adolescence, numerous physical changes occur in the bodies of both genders.

In males, these changes include increases in height and weight, enlargement of the penis and scrotum, commencement of ejaculation, muscle growth, and broadening of the shoulders. Females, however, experience more prominent external changes, including increases in height and weight, breast enlargement, widening of the pelvis, thickening of the thighs, enlargement of the genitalia, and the onset of vaginal secretion. From a medical standpoint, puberty is marked by a young girl's first menstrual experience.

Adolescence is described under three stages medicinally. The first stage is between the ages ranging from 10 to 14 years. The second stage is between 15 to 19 years of age. The period between the ages of 20 to 24 years is the third stage. (Wp jQ fh!jkh) (Arisen Adolescence). The girls and the boys who are within the age limits of 15 to 24 years are generally referred to as <ñiais, kEiñ, .eáiaiS, (lass), b<kaßhd, kdind, .eghd, (lad) respectively. Generally, in Sri Lanka, a girl attains (reaches puberty) during the age limits of 13 to 14 years. Yet, this age limit varies depending on the nutritional conditions. In countries where consumption of meat is comparatively higher, the age of puberty is earlier than the above range. In addition, factors such as hereditary sicknesses, environmental conditions can also affect attaining puberty. There are many customs connected to attaining puberty. They can vary from area to area. This difference exists among various ethnic groups too.

Marriage life

Marriage is one of the important transitional stages in life. The marriage is referred to in Sinhala as 'Awaha' (wdjdy) 'Vivaha' (újdy). These words were derived from the Pali language. Awaha means 'to get a spinster for oneself for marriage' *Prliai mr l=;f;da Pßldh wdkhx* (Wimalakeerthi). The aforesaid Pali sentence stands for accompanying a woman to one's home to lead a married life. Vivaha means 'to get a spinster to a bachelor to be married'. The exact beginning of living man and woman together cannot be found in the history. Nevertheless, when observing various cultures there are evidences to prove that men and women lived together as husbands and wives by conforming to set of rules specific to their respective cultures. Rules and regulations are customs prevailing from the past. Ralph Pieris in his book titled '*Sinhalese Social Organizations*' states 'Indeed, the kinship system, and the associated institutions of private law, regarded the family rather than the individual as the unit of society.' And this key

conception of the family as the true unit of society was all the more remarkable among a people who held the matrimonial contract so little obligatory...' (Peiris, 1956) [12]. In ancient societies, rules and regulations were established based on entrenched traditions, with the family unit serving as the cornerstone of societal structure. According to Ariyapala (1997) [1] in his work "Society in Medieval Ceylon," the family's pivotal role necessitated stringent regulation of marriage in accordance with orthodox traditions. The paramount concern of every family was the perpetuation of its lineage across generations, prompting parents to take a keen interest in arranging marriages for their children.

There have been various categories in marriage. Some of them were approved by the society and some of them were considered as being anti-social. The Sanskrit book titled '*Manusmruithiya*' shows eight such good and bad systems of marriage.

*Brahmo daiwasthaiwarshah - praja
prathyasthathasurah
Gandharwo rakshashaiwacha - paisha
chaschastamodhamah* ⁵ (uditha thero, 1981, p. 153)
[19].

The eight methods of marriages as per the above book are as follows.

1. The Brahma Marriage - A daughter is allowed by her father to get married to an educated and decent youth.
2. The Daiva Marriage - A father allowing a Brahman to get married to his daughter, as some alms.
3. The Arsha Marriage -The parents allowing a youth to get married to their daughter, in lieu of a yoke of oxen.
4. The Prajapathi Marriage - Marriage between a bachelor and a spinster of their own free will, subject to the consent of the father of the spinster.
5. The Asura Marriage - The groom offering gratifications to the relations of the bride for getting married to her.
6. The Gandarwa Marriage - Marriage based on a love affair.
7. The Rakshasa Marriage - Abducting the spinster for getting married.
8. The Paishacha Marriage - Abducting a spinster in her sleep or in an unconscious state.

According to Hindu beliefs, among the various methods of marriage, the first and second methods are regarded as the most favorable, while the Rakshasa and Paischacha methods are deemed the least desirable. The remaining methods are generally considered acceptable.

In Hindu tradition, marriage serves three primary objectives: Firstly, to fulfill domestic needs, secondly, to establish lineage and thirdly, to satisfy sexual desires. (Ibid)

In Hindu culture, it is believed that a man and a woman are two halves of a complete life, and their union through marriage fulfills this completeness. Individuals who remain unmarried, whether bachelor or spinster, are often not esteemed by society as their lives are perceived to lack prosperity, rendering them less valuable to the community. Similarly, a woman who is unable to bear children after

⁵ බ්‍රහ්මො දෙවස්තවෙවාර්ශ්‍ය: ප්‍රජාප්‍රත්‍යස්තථාසුරා:
ගන්ධර්වො රාක්ෂදෙවච පෛශාචස්චස්තමොධමා:

marriage may also be deemed as lacking in societal contribution. Conversely, the birth of a male child is considered auspicious, symbolizing luck and serving as a vital resource for attending religious rites after the father. While not all aspects of these beliefs are universally accepted in Sri Lankan culture, some influences are evident in society. Across cultures, several qualities are highly regarded in the context of marriage, as outlined in a Sloka found in the renowned book "Panchatantraya," which enumerates seven such qualities.

*Kulancha sheelancha sanathanacha – widyancha
chiththancha waporwayashcha
Ethan gunan saptha wichithya deya – kanya budhah
sheshmachinthaneeyah* ⁶ (Ariyapala, 1997, p.293)^[1].

As per this sloka, 'The Panchathantra advises the wise to give their daughters to one endowed with seven qualities viz. Caste or family, character, protection, learning, wealth or power, beauty and health or youth.

There are various categories in Sri Lankan marriages. According to the book titled 'Sinhalese Social Organization', written by Ralf Peiris all such categories were available during the Kandyan era. They are named as i) *Deega Vivahaya*, ii) *Binna Vivahaya*, iii) *Avessa Vivahaya*, iv) *Bahu purusha Vivahaya* (polyandry) v) *Bahu Barya Vivahaya* (polygamy).

The *Deega Vivahaya* system represents a form of marriage where the wedded wife resides away from her own parents, commonly either with her husband separately or with her in-laws. This customary practice has been ingrained in eastern societies since antiquity. The Sinhala terms "Deega yanawa" or "Deega kanawa" encapsulate the essence of marriage, reflecting the tradition of establishing a new household distinct from the wife's parental home.

Binna Vivahaya refers to the system of marriage where the husband resides in the wife's home, a practice believed to undermine the traditional dominance of the husband. In this arrangement, the husband is bound by obligations to both his wife and her family, diminishing his authority. An ancient proverb advises the "binna husband" to keep a rush light and a palm leaf in the roof, symbolizing his readiness to depart his wife's home at a moment's notice, even in the dead of night or amidst inclement weather, entirely dependent on his wife's benevolence. The rush light serves to illuminate his path during nocturnal departures, while the palm leaf functions as makeshift shelter from the rain, emblematic of his precarious position under his wife's care.

Avessa Vivahaya, also known as cousin marriage, involves the union between a cousin brother (Massina) and cousin sister (Nena). This practice has its own set of taboos, with marriages between cross cousins historically permitted up to modern times. According to this tradition, marriage between the children of a brother and a sister is allowed, while those between two brothers or two sisters are considered taboo, a belief that persists even today.

Bahu Purusha Vivahaya, or polyandry, is another form of marriage known in Sri Lankan culture as "Ekagei kema." In this arrangement, a woman marries two or more brothers

from the same family, often motivated by the desire to prevent the division of property.

Bahu Barya Vivahaya or polygamy is the opposite of the above marriage system with slightly different aspects. In this system, a man gets married to two or many sisters of the same family. Sometimes, the women selected for this purpose can be from different families. This system was accepted by the villages as it is an ideal remedy for barrenness of a woman.

Meanwhile, two more additional methods of marriage within the Sinhala society can be found in a travel report of the world-famous author Leonard Wolf. He was an officer representing the British administration in Sri Lanka during 1904 to 1911. The Late Leonard Wolf functioned as the Government Agent in the Hambantota District from 1908 to 1911. The aforesaid two methods of marriage namely, '*Hen Vivahaya*' (Chena marriage) and '*Kamath Vivahaya*' (Threshing-floor marriage). (Beligalla, 1995)^[2]. Those two marriages were said to have practised legally by the people living around the villages in the Hambantota district, at the beginning of the 20th century.

Out of the two, the '*Hen Vivahaya*' took place by accompanying a bride to the newly cultivated chena by a youth. As per the custom, it was a prerequisite for a youth to cultivate a new chena in the event he desired to get married. He was supposed to cultivate cereals such as Finger Millet (Kurakkan) and Proso Millet (Meneri) and also various kinds of yams in his chena. Further, it was a must for him to construct a hut in the chena for dwelling. Youth possessing such a wealth invariably got themselves qualified for a marriage by being attracted to the village damsels. The youth fell for the lass who showed more concern about him. In this context, no concern was shown by the youth about the age of the fiancée. Sometimes the so-called partner was as young as twelve years. As such, the youth with his fiancée began to live together in the chena. Under that circumstance, the chena marriage was approved irrespective of the age of the female.

Kamath Vivahaya was a marriage custom observed among youths in rural villages, where young men who cultivated paddy would form relationships with village girls. These unions often began with couples spending time together on the threshing floor after harvesting, where they engaged in sexual intercourse. Subsequently, these couples would formalize their relationship through marriage, and this particular method of union was known as *Kamath Vivahaya*. It is salient from the above customs that the rules governing marriage during that time were of not as complicate as the ones exist today. The village heads during that time had exercised bureaucracy with the power vested in them. With their official powers most of them exploited the villages by many means. One such malpractice though not treated seriously by the ignorant villages was taking sexual bribes. Sometimes, the villages went into the extent of appeasing the high rankers in their village by providing them with the wives and young girls too. The very fact was emphasized by Robert Knox (2005)^[9] in his book titled '*An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon*'. It states as follows.

"In some cases the men will permit their wives and daughters to lay with other men. And that is, when intimate friends or great men chance to lodge at their houses, they commonly will send their wives or daughters to bear them company in their chamber. Neither do they reckon wives to

⁶ කුලංච ශීලංච සනාතනාව - විද්‍යාංච විත්තංච චජුර්වයශ්ච
ඒතාන් ගුණාන් සප්ත විචිතා ජේයා - කන්‍යා බුද්ධො
ශේෂමචින්තනීයා:

be whores for lying with them that are as good or better than themselves. They do not matter or regard whether their wives at the first marriage be maids or not and for a small reward the mother will bring her daughter being a maiden unto those that do desire her" (Knox, 2005) [9].

The death

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the death is 'A permanent cessation of all vital functions or the end of life.'

As per the teaching of Buddhism, there are four means by which death of a person can occur. They are i. *Ayukhaya* (ending of the life span), ii. *Kammakkhaya* (ending of karma), iii. *Ubhayakkhaya* (ending of the life span and karma), iv. *Upachchedhaka* (instant ending of life). The Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka depict these four types of deaths using the following story.

The life is considered as an oil lamp. Extinguishing the oil lamp is similarized to death. A lamp can be extinguished in one of the four means. The first method is due to running out of oil. It is similar to end up the life span of a being naturally. The second method is due to burning out the wick. It is similar to end up the karma of a being. The third method is due to ending the oil and burning out the wick. It is similar to end up the life span and the karma. The fourth method is due to an unexpected cause. It is similar to end up the life at ones, unexpectedly.

Death, regarded as one of the principal transitions in life, holds a significant place in Buddhist teachings, where it is perceived as a temporary cessation of existence. In the Buddhist belief system, all beings undergo the cycle of death and rebirth, traversing through the realms of Samsara, likened to a continuous journey from life to death. The notion that every being, upon birth, is destined to face death is encapsulated in the Buddhist literature's assertion, "Uppaththiya sahevedan maranan argathan sada." Within Buddhist philosophy, all phenomena, whether animate or inanimate, are encompassed by the concept of "Sanskara Dharma," with the understanding that these phenomena are impermanent, as elucidated in the Pali literature: "Sabbe sankara anichcha," signifying the ephemeral nature of all existence.

Death is a significant occurrence observed across all cultures, extending to both living beings and inanimate objects. In traditional Buddhist practices, various rituals and religious rites are dedicated to the process of death. In Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, it is customary for individuals to engage in meritorious acts during the latter stages of life, with the aim of improving their prospects in the next life. Another common practice is to offer alms and religious offerings to the Maha Sanga, who in turn chant pirieth and bestow blessings upon individuals nearing death.

The practice of reading the 'Pin Potha' was a longstanding tradition among ancient Buddhists in Sri Lanka, akin to maintaining a diary in modern times. This practice involved recording daily meritorious activities, which individuals would later refer to at their leisure, finding solace in reminiscing about their virtuous deeds. Notably, when a person approached death, their 'Pin Potha' held particular significance, with conscious individuals often requesting to have it read to them. The Thupawansaya recounts how even King Dutugamunu enjoyed listening to these accounts.

In Buddhist belief, it is held that the final thoughts of a dying individual influence their subsequent birth, with noble

thoughts leading to a favorable rebirth and malevolent thoughts to an unfavorable one. Consequently, efforts were made to prompt recollections of past good deeds, often involving the chanting of pirieth by monks or the presence of beautiful flowers by the bedside to inspire noble thoughts. These flowers, traditionally offered to the Buddha, were believed to assist the individual in contemplating the Buddha's teachings and achieving a positive state of mind. (Ariyapala, 1997, pp. 360-361) [11].

Conclusion

The beliefs, customs, myths, and religious practices prevalent in any society are often deeply rooted in its rural folk culture, providing valuable insights into the traditional communication patterns of its people. Life circle rituals, such as those surrounding birth, puberty, marriage, and death, hold significant cultural importance in Sinhalese culture in Sri Lanka, serving as traditional communication patterns that shape individual and societal progression and survival.

The influence of Indian cultural traditions, particularly on Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu cultures in Sri Lanka, is profound. In the Sri Lankan context, there exists a reciprocal exchange where Tamil Hindu culture impacts Sinhala Buddhist culture and vice versa. This cultural interconnection serves as a catalyst for cooperation among different ethnic groups. Religious centers, serving as bastions for cultural preservation and promotion, wield considerable influence over societal harmony, as the attitudes and behaviors of their custodians directly impact community cohesion.

It is evident that there is a religious underpinning to the rituals and traditional modes of communication observed during life transitions. Thus, life circle rituals should not be regarded solely as biological phenomena but should be subject to thorough sociological and anthropological examination to fully grasp their cultural significance and societal implications.

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