

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENSHRINING RELICS AND ITS RITUALS IN THE MODERN WORLD

Bakaki Andrew¹

Introduction

Buddhism for so many years has established itself as a religion and a philosophy that has provided humankind with a remarkably indispensable solace. The story of enshrining the Buddha's relics goes back at the time of his cremation. It began with his own dispensation as evidence is unfolded throughout the *Suttas*, in particular, the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. In here, the Buddha explicitly authentically passes instructions in regards to the treatment and worshipping of his relics. The Buddha's relics were to remind his followers of his great teachings. In fact it would be a spur to assuage them of the spiritual status they would attain much as they followed the correct path. Today however, it is very absurd to note that the relics of the Buddha and his great followers have been turned into tourist attractions, a shift from spiritualistic to materialistic gains contradicting with the preliminary objective of enshrining the relics. People seem to have learned nothing and forgot nothing. Much as the Buddha allowed it, it is the responsibility of whosoever practices the Buddha's teachings to enshrine and perform its rituals in the world today in order to preserve his vision.

Procedure

This research uses three major qualitative processes of data collection – that helped to explore the unexpected trends and concealments of the relevance of enshrining relics and the performance of rituals. The first method involves searching for related materials in the *Pāli* literature as primary sources. Secondly, materials were collected from the post-canonical literature in analysis of the importance of enshrining relics and their rituals to

¹ Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy. bakakia23@gmail.com

the modern world. While the third method of data collection, was through interpersonal (interviews) with Buddhist monks and Buddhist scholars.

Results

The results of this research are expected to remind and whisper to all Buddhist adherents including non-Buddhist, of the essentiality of enshrining relics as well as performing its rituals. This is in light of protecting the founder's (Buddha) vision and memories.

Discussions

The current study has picked special interest in discussing five key areas as follows:

1. The two kinds of Buddha's relics to be enshrined and worshiped

This section concerns with the most important relics of the Buddha which were to be housed and worshipped in funerary Stūpas after his demise. Here, much of the materials will be directed to discuss; (1) the Buddha's bones and Dhamma and (2) the bones and beads.

2. Buddha's instructions on his relics and its relevance on modern world

The Buddha gave instructions on how his body would cremate and on the preservation of his relics. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* gives a detailed account and procedure of dealing with the Buddha's body after his death. The Buddha unanimously instructs his followers to erect Stūpas to enshrine his remains at the intersection of four great roads. In his conclusion, the Buddha says; "those who offer a garland, or scent or paint, or make a salutation, or feel serene joy in their heart, which will be to their benefit and well-being for a long time" this section will explore more concealments on the instructions given by the Buddha to his body while arrive and dead.

3. The arrival of Buddha's relics in Sri Lanka

The emperor Asoka III is said to have redistributed these relics and erected Stūpas which became famous as Buddhist pilgrimage. This

subtheme examines the arrival of the Buddha's relics in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, it deals with the movement and settlement of the Tooth Relic enshrined at the Temple of Sri Dalada Maligawa. Its rituals will not be magnified in this discussion. The rituals performed on the Buddha's relics today, were canonically established in Buddhism right from its inception days. Traditionally, the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* elucidates on this and states that the cremated remains of the Buddha were distributed equally among eight Indian tribes in response to a demand for his relics. Memorial heaps (stupas) were built over these relics, and the bowls which contained the ashes after his cremation. But one of the canines was spared and moved to Sri Lanka which will be our special attention in this study.

4. The importance of performing rituals on the Buddha's relics

The practice of enshrining relics in the midst of architectural or artistic style is a reminder of the Buddha's peaceful life story to his followers in times of hardness and distress. In light of this, I will discuss the rituals performed on the relics enshrined at the Temple of the Tooth relic in Kandy which has become a famous world Buddhist pilgrimage.

5. Critical view

It is very sad to note that the Buddha's relics have been tuned into tourist attraction for business (materialistic) goals. A case in a point, the relics housed at the Sri Dalada Maligawa. Anyone coming to see the Buddha's remains has to pay (especially foreigners) which in a critical point of view is control to the Buddha's initial idea. By simply one paying to see the relics cannot insinuate the argument and in still a feeling of the peaceful nature of the Buddha.

This section critically analyses the significance of relics and rituals to the modern world in light of spiritual attainment. Special courage will be reflected on the Buddha's qualities that one remembers and gives much joy.

Conclusions

The study concludes with a call to preserve the relics and perform its ritual in order to preserve the vision and the teachings of the founder of Buddhism. Moreover with a clear view that relics are very significant in the modern world because keeps in memories the greatest teachings of the greatest teachers.

Keywords: relics, rituals, significance, enshrining

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