

## **Critical Analysis of the Uniqueness and Ancient Historical Value of “Alatti Bema”, a Special Ritual Practised in the Dalada Maligawa, Kandy**

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### **Introduction**

There are many ancient traditional practices performed in the “Dalada Maligawa”. Most of these practices had started in ancient periods and some of them belong to the pre – Kandian period. These practices have continued from generation to generation. The word “Alatti Bema” came from the Tamil word “Alatti” which gives the idea of “blessing”. Feudal system prevailed in the kandyan kingdom had a special duty for “blessing” the king every day. It was one of the many unique and a special ancient practices performed in the “Rajavasala”, royal palace. The persons who performed this duty were called as “Alatti bama mahaththaiyala”. There was an official wages system called “alatti Panguwa” paid in accordance with this system. This “Alatti bema mahaththaiyala” were belonged to a highest class like the other private officials of the king. Both males and females did this “Rajakariya”, i.e., compulsory service in the early period. This was done when the king woke up in the morning, and he cited to have meals, these persons blessed or praised the king by closing their face by hand. Later period, the king had advised to carry out the whole service to him as same as for the “Sathara Dewala” and to the Temple of the Tooth Relic. “Alatti Amma” (women who performed this practice) got official wages, “Nila Pangu” from the king’s Council. As a result, this practice comes to the Temple of the Tooth.

In the Temple of the Tooth Relic, the wages was called “Alatti Panguwa”. We can see this practice in the four main “Devala” in kandy, “Saman Devalaya” in Rathnapura and “Katharagama Maha Devalaya” in Katharagama, “Upulnuwan Devalaya” in Devinuwara, and “Pattini Devalaya”. The only Buddhist monastery which practices this special ritual in Sri Lanka is Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy.

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## **Objective**

The main objective here is to analyze the uniqueness and the historical value of the special ritual “Alatti Bema” in the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, to show the socio-cultural value of the practice and why it is important to the present. The secondary objective is to highlight the place of the women in a contemporary Buddhist society with this practice and how it becomes more significant with other rituals and practices.

## **Methodology**

Primary and secondary sources (written sources) were used for this research study, along with the method of observation and discussions with scholars to collect data. Field visits were made to the Temple of the Tooth Relic to gather more information.

## **Research Problem**

To critically analyze the uniqueness and historical value of the “Alatti Bema” special ritual practice in the Temple of the Tooth Relic.

## **Discussion**

“Alatti Bema” practiced in the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy is a unique blessing or praising ritual, performed by women carrying a special lamp on one hand. This was performed in the “Devala”, and the “Alatti Amma” (The women carried out this practice) in “Sathara Dewala” obtained wages. But in the Temple of the Tooth Relic, some ritual practice is performed in a slightly different manner. In the culture of Temple of the Tooth Relic, “Alatti Bema” this ritual or practice is performed after the “Nanumura Mangalya” on every Wednesday and Saturday and on Poya days. During the main “Peraheras” including the five “Kumbal” and Five “Randoli” and after finishing the perahera ceremony during “Perahera Gewadima”, when the holy tooth relic is placed in the inner palace (Athulu Malige), with other special rituals, this practice “Alatti Bema” is also performed. The “Alatti Amma” travels the entire “Randoli Perahera” at the end. After ending the perahera ceremony, a “Bali Yak Netuma” (Devil Dance) is organized by the “Vishnu Devalaya”. Here also, Alatti Amma performs their duties. For the post of “Alatti Amma” for the “Thevava” (Service), an old women who represent high cast, is selected. It is a significant selection.

There are two categories of people (Athul Kattale and Pita Kattale) for the service (Rajakariya) of the temple of Tooth Relic. (Alatti Amma represent Athul Kattale) There are some arguments about it. However, they belong to the category of “Udamahale Thewawa” (Service of Upstairs) After finishing the “Thevava” to the holy relic, flowers are offered by them, and the six lamp wicks of “Dolosmaha

Pahana” (a type of lamp) is given to them to perform their duty near the outer door, “Eliye Dorakada”. They are not permitted to enter the “Weda Sitina Malige”, the inner relic chamber. After offering flowers, they come out and worship the relic themselves. They receive free lands (Nindagam) for their service to the Temple of the Tooth Relic.

## Findings and Results

The most significant point here is “Alatti Amma” is the one and the only women, who represent both Athul Kattale and Pita Kattale, and she is the only woman who performs a special practice in the Temple of the Tooth Relic. Especially in Athul Maligawa, Sri Lankan Buddhist people consider this holy tooth relic some as the living Buddha. So, the “Alatti Amma” is the only female who gets the opportunity to worship and do her praying practices for the holy relic. She is the only woman who has the occasion to bless or praise the holy Tooth relic inside the inner Temple.

Another significant point is, even monks also change in every 6 month, both in Malwatta and Asgiriya temples respectively are doing services (Thewawa) and the “Diyawadana Nilame” is appointed by votes, and he has a regular period for his service. But the “Alaththi Amma” post does not have any written terms and conditions, though they perform in the inner place. They have to continue their practice until their end.

## Conclusion

According to the information obtained through interviews and observations, I conclude that this is one of the special practices or rituals performed for a long time. As this is not open to the public, the conditions remain the same to this day. Alatti Amma considers this practice as a compulsory service (Devakariya) to show honour and respect, as well as their loyalty to the holy Tooth relic and also to the kingship.

“Alatti Amma” is the one and only female representative who directly takes part in the “Thevava”. It is highly unique. Here, the researcher aims to show the uniqueness, significance and the importance of this secret activities and to display its religious and cultural importance and the historical significance as a Buddhist and intend to provide correct information about its cultural background and not to harm its secrecy. (the practice or the persons who practice)

It can be concluded that this practice performed is both Temple of the Tooth and Hindu Devala is common and identical to both Buddhist and Hindu traditions. As such, this paves the avenues for national and religious co - existence.

**Keywords:** Alatti Bema, Alatti Panguwa, Unique, Contemporary

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