

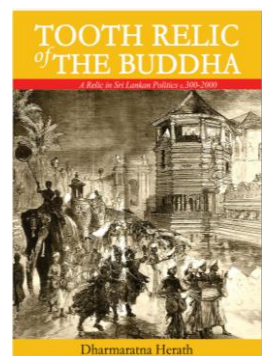
## A Book Review

## Tooth Relic of the Buddha: A Relic in Sri Lankan Politics c. 300-2000: A Review of the Book

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A temple for the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy was first built by King Vimaladharmasuriya, when he ascended the throne of the Kandyan kingdom in 1592 A. D. This was done to house the Sacred Tooth Relic of Gautama Buddha as a symbol of faith and sovereignty in accordance with the belief that its possession conferred on a king the legitimate right to the throne. This belief seems to have become established at Polonnaruwa in the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and continued though the Kandyan period and even after the capture of the Kandyan Kingdom and the Tooth Relic by the British in 1815. The Custodianship of the Sacred Tooth Relic held by the king was, however, considered important and prestigious even as far back as the Anuradhapura period when the Sacred Tooth Relic was brought to Sri Lanka in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

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Nearly four hundred years have elapsed since the beginning of the Kandyan kingdom. During this period a dozen kings have ruled the country from its capital in Kandy. When the capital city was moved to Colombo by the British, the Tooth Relic was left in its temple in Kandy as it was not necessary for the British to establish their sovereignty over the people by such means. Secondly, it was also not necessary for the British to arouse the envy and animosity of the Kandyan Buddhist majority by removing the Tooth Relic to Colombo which would be to their political disadvantage. Therefore no government in Sri Lanka,

even after the British rule, attempted to remove the Tooth Relic to the new capital as this would have provoked the Buddhists and created dissension and division. Hence the Temple of the Tooth Relic throughout its four hundred years of history in Kandy began to occupy the attention of the rulers of the Kandyan kingdom. It also became a special object of interest to successive rulers thereafter and of course to the Buddhist public to whom the Relic Temple became more accessible.

Very recently the book **Tooth Relic of the Buddha: A Relic in Sri Lankan Politics c. 300-2000** was written by

Dr. Dharmaratna Herath. He was an academic staff of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura where he completed his Bachelor's degree with honors and the University of London which conferred on him the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in History. The present work prepared during the Covid 19 epidemic at the age of 78, is a revised and enlarged version of his original Ph.D. thesis composed in 1974. It is testimony to his continuing interest in the academia.

This book has mainly contained nine chapters inclusion of conclusion. Those chapters have namely as Introduction and Sources, The Dāṭhāvaṃsa Tradition: Its Historicity, Sectarianism Impedes Significance, c. 300-1000, Dominant Force in the Realm, c. 1000-1500, Prominence amidst Misconceptions And Turbulence, c. 1500-2000, Validator of Sovereignty c. 300-2000, Property Treasures and Resources, Rituals, Festivals and Exhibitions, Custodians and Functionaries and Conclusion. Beside all main chapters Preface and Acknowledgements of the author, a very vital foreword from Professor Emeritus S. B. Hettiaratchi, Abbreviations, Diacritica and Note on Usage, Four Appendixes, Bibliography and Index are appeared in the book.

In his first chapter of the book, he emphasizes the literature survey of the Tooth Relic and comparing and limitation of content of the books written earlier. And he describes how does change his book than other scholarly works: i.e. Methodologies, clarification at the outset, examining the dāṭhādhātu and danthadāthu. Gradually he comes to the analyzing primary sources. He divides into three categories sources which were utilized by him. Those can be named as follows: Pali and Sinhala literary works written in Sri Lanka, Foreign literary works and notices and epigraphs both native and foreign as well as archaeological remains. Author has pointed out comparatively what are the inclusions of evidences in those sources specifically paying attention on literary, foreign records and archaeological remains. He has utilized the archaeological material only as a means of confirming the evidence furnished by other sources. Author has mentioned that the available materials are rich but it is necessary that a trained archaeologist should handle them in order to determine their identity and also to satisfactorily explain such details as the development of the structure of the Temples, their decorations and the like.

In the chapter two, Dharmarathna Herath explains that The Dāṭhāvaṃsa tradition and its historicity. From this chapter he has emphasized that what are the historical facts included in the Dāṭhāvaṃsa, one of major primary source on Tooth Relic of the Lord Buddha. And this is a comparative analyze paying attention with other literary sources and archaeological sources. In this chapter, finally he mentions how the Dāṭhāvaṃsa tradition took its present form. The historical basis of the tradition is confined to the transfer of the Tooth Relic to Sri Lanka from Dantapura in Kalinga by a Brahmin woman perhaps Hemamala accompanied by her husband – in the ninth regnal year of Siri Meghavanna.

From chapter three, author has significantly described the Tooth Relic in the course of time became and object of utmost religious importance. He has set an outline of its history during the Anuradhapura period (300-1000). He has studied these periods under two parts. One from Siri Meghavanna to Moggallana III (311-618) and the other from Sila Meghavanna to the downfall of the Anuradhapura Kingdom (619-1017). Describing many historical facts, finally he presents that importance of the Tooth Relic appear in direct contrast to the assigned to it in the Culavamsa suggesting that it received less than the other religious objects and places of worship throughout the Anuradhapura period. He further said that only explanation could be given to account for such a contradiction is that the relative importance of the different symbols depended on sectarian factors. For the Abhayagiri monks who were charged with the care of Relic, it was of the greatest importance which explains why they and the patrons of the Abhayagiri celebrated great festivals in its honor. To the Mahavihara monks, it was not of primary significance since according to the commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya, some even doubted the authenticity of the Tooth Relic probably on account on sectarian bias.

In the fourth chapter, author has paid attention to point the dominance of the Tooth Relic in religious and political spheres during five centuries from 1000-1500 AD. He has separately discussed under the subtopic of The Rise of Tooth Relic (c. 1000-1232), The Tooth Relic Pre-eminent (c. 1232-1326), The Relic in times of political instability (c. 1326-1500) and Reasons for the Relic to be an object of importance. According to the author's view, Tooth Relic had to face many difficulties and some had to be abandoned owing to the change of capitals but unlike the stationary

objects, the mobile character of the Relic helped its custodians to save it except on one occasion from all dangers which threatened its existence. Again, since it remained in the possession of the rulers as in the early centuries, it was always brought to new capitals whenever there was a change of the royal residence. Wherever it was taken, a new Relic Temple was built and the highest honors were paid because of its religious sanctity and political significance. Therefore, author has interestingly showed while many other religious institutions which had been prominent in the early centuries sank into oblivion, the Tooth Relic became the center of worship for the Sinhalese during the period under discussion.

Author examines in fifth chapter many significant features some of which are unprecedented. It starts with the arrival of the first European power, the Portuguese who within half a century succeeded in converting a Sri Lankan ruler to Christianity. Herath has described these facts under the phases of A period of Turbulence: c. 1500 to c. 1600, The fallacies of the destruction of the Tooth by the Portuguese and the second Tooth in Kandy, The Tooth in Kandy (c. 1600-1815), The Relic during the British Rule and After, (1815-2000). From the chapter six, Herath has devoted major characteristic (The Validator of Sovereignty c. 300-2000) of the Tooth Relic during the sixteen centuries since its arrival in the Island. Getting examples from the past Herath underlines two important factors. One is that the capture of the Relic placed the English on a firm footing to rule the country. The other is that the loss of the Relic was instrumental in the failure of the rebellion. These factors indicate the political significance of the Tooth Relic which is evident even at the present time when it plays no active role in politics. This is not a later development but continuation of a system which prevailed in earlier times. Therefore, the writer has paid attention for this chapter at the outset to the connection between the Order and the state in ancient Sri Lanka. By that sense king and monks protected the Tooth Relic from very ancient time to the present.

Chapters seven, eight and nine have been elaborated about property, treasures and resources; Rituals, festivals and exhibitions and Custodians and Functionaries. Those are very vital for a student of the studying social history of Sri Lanka. With regard to the seventh chapter, the Tooth Relic temple appears to have become an institution holding an enormous

wealth during the period under discussion. Its wealth, as revealed by our sources, ranged from property such as large extent of land including villages, forests or parks, homesteads, fields and land and treasures to money, service, slaves and animals such as cattle, buffaloes and elephants. In the eight chapter, Herath described rituals performed daily and weekly, New year and Karti Festivals, Annual festivals of the Tooth Relic, New Rise festival, Procession of the Tooth Relic. In the last chapter, he attempted to collate scattered information of the custodians, functionaries of the Tooth Relic throughout its history. That chapter has been emphasized under three phases. And four appendixes have been included to the book under the four themes as well as bibliography and index also. Illustrious cover page and other color pictures are historically very much necessary and appreciated. They are very rare pictures of the historical and picturesque world.

However, my major concern is the topic of this research book. Someone can think that it is emphasized from this research only a political view. But this is mainly directed religious phenomenon. Author has explained very significant way in his book widespread. Some full stops and commas have not kept proper places and no price of the book mentioned. Spelling mistakes can be seen some pages; i.e. Bhuvanekabhu II, 21 page and Dantakumra, 47 page. And some names of kings do not have mentioned diacritical marks. i.e. Siri Meghavanna 22, 24, 25, 35, 36, 47, 54. This might be corrected as Meghavañña. Some places have been included diacritical marks wrongly. i.e. Mugapakka Jātaka mentions as Mūgapakka Jātaka. Although these are not very dangerous errors, the writer is proposed that those errors should be corrected in a future printed version.

In the light of discussion, this valuable research is very vital for all people. Even though there are some minor errors in the book, the book's worthy is not deteriorated. Herath has used very unique

primary and secondary sources for this great research. This English version is suitable for literate people who are living both native and overseas. The writer is proposed to a Sinhala translation is greatly appreciated for the usage of Sinhala people spreaded in all over the world. Discussion of a great and grand assert of the Buddhist world, Dharmarathna Herath has remarked and showed interestingly his capable of academic and devote to the Buddhism as a layman of

Buddhism. I finish this review with a quotation of Prof. S. B. Hettiaratchi’s grand forward written to the Herath’s book. “This monograph illustrates the author’s qualifications for due fulfillment of the task he has set himself. He is patient, painstaking, accurate and impartial. His materials are ample and varied derived from very available source presented logically and coherently in systematically arranged themes in his chapters. A vast mass of lesser known information, the insertion of which would have encumbered the text, has been thrown judiciously into appendices yet all of them contribute to a splendid piece of research.”