

Customs in Sri Lankan Society

GENC-1001.2 – Sri Lankan Society and Buddhist Culture

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Objectives

- Giving a fundamental understanding of Customs.
- Identifying the general customs of Sri Lankan society.
- Identifying the customs of multi cultural background of Sri Lanka.

Introduction to SL Society

- Yaksha (*Wedda* - Hunters), Naga, (*Maniakkhitha, Chulodara*) Deva (*Sumana saman*) and Rāksha (*Rāvana*) tribes had been in Sri Lanka before the 6th BCE. These tribes are identified as *Siwhela*
- Sinhala people dated from prince Vijaya. (Indian Arya) – *Buddhists, Christians, Chatholics*
- Tamil people also descendent from South Indian Tamil (Sri Lankan/Indian). – *Hindus, Christians, Buddhists*
- Muslims came here as businessmen from India (*Yonaka*). - *Islam*
- Catholics and Christians came into being because of the influence of colonialism.
- Chinese, Malay, Sri Lankan African etc.

- Majority is Sinhala Buddhists and their culture and its culture.
- Now Sri Lanka is Multi ethnic, Multi religious and Multi language country. Therefore the culture of Sri Lanka has been influenced by many factors.
- Customs and rituals have been part and parcel of the Lankan society from ancient times. Most of these customs are connected with the day to day lives of the people in the social and religious spheres.

Customs

- A customs usually means to something which has been done for a long time by a whole society.
- A traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place or time.
- Customs are always positive and they should be observed (as Chāritra).
- Disagreeable behaviours are rejected by customs (as Wāritra) in society.

Types of Customs

- Personal Customs
- Communal Customs
- Customs related to clergy
- Customs that are got practiced by priests

General Customs

01. Greetings

– Sinhala - ‘Ayubovan’ (May you live long)

Replying the same

– Tamil – ‘Vanakkam’

Replying the same

– Islam - ‘Assalamu aleikum’

Reply ‘Wāleikum salam’

Now commonly used ‘Good morning’ etc.
regardless of the religion or traditions.

02. Respecting elders

- Youngsters respect their elders by bending down and worshiping with joined hands.
- Elders touch their heads and wish them 'Good luck', 'May the refuge of the Buddha'.
- When sitting with elders juniors usually sit either same position or lower position but never higher position.
- Worship the parents, elders and clergies

03. Visiting Known person

- When a visitor arrives the house-holder stands up and invites the visitor to in and asks him to take a seat and offers him to take a seat and offers him beverages (tea, coffee etc.).
- Usually do not say 'Thank you' but they show their gratitude by giving a broad smile or wish you merits (Pin sidu wewa).
- Shaking hands has become the most common form of greeting because of the western influence.

04. Astrology

- Sri Lankan customs practice a by Sinhala, Hindu people mainly depend on astrological theories.
- When they start a new activity, they do it an auspicious time. They avoid time of the dragon (Rāhukāla).
- Some people of all ethnic, religious groups believe astrology.

05. Starting Functions

- When inaugurating something some event, beating drums and lighting oil lamp with a symbol of rooster at the top have been the tradition. Then observe the precepts.
- Now the traditional symbol of rooster at the top the oil lamp has been replaced by Dharmachakra (Buddhist) Cross (Christian), Crescent moon and star (Islam).
- Observing the five precepts or Remembering the religious belief of their own still prevails.

06. Customs in Agriculture

- Taking the advice and service of astrologer and Kapurala in all aspects of cultivation and harvesting.
 - Start the works on paddy at auspicious times
 - Sowing feast is the starting day of farming
 - Abhimana devatawa was invoked by Kapurala to protect from evil eye and evil mouth (Eswaha-katawaha)

- Harvesting is followed by Alutsahal mangalaya, or " new rice festival. Before any of the new rice is used, a little amount paddi is pounded by the women, cooked, and then carried as an offering in the name of Buddha.