

## SOCIAL AND RITUAL SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF "HAIR" IN SINHALA CULTURE

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*Hair* is a very important and a fascinating feature of the human body. Although it is a physical feature, it has a series of symbolic meanings in a Sinhala cultural context.

The objective of this study is to examine the symbolic meanings and significance of *hair*. *Hair* symbolism is, to my knowledge, a theme that has not hitherto been investigated. The rituals, customs, hair practices, folktales, folk poems and literary texts refer to a complex of social and ritual symbolism. Except for some references in Gananath Obeyesekere's *Medusa's Hair*, which deals with *matted hair* ascetics, there is not much research done on this subject relating to Sinhala culture.

This research shows references to hair in Sinhala culture, which could be investigated under the following.

1. Social symbols
2. Ritual symbols

*Hair* is used as a symbol to communicate social status and demarcate the boundaries of personal behavior in the society. Ritual symbols depend on the superstitious beliefs concerning head and *hair*. Such powers are culturally definable. Anthropologists say that *hair* symbolism displays its own 'grammar' concerning its cultural identity.

This research is being carried out according to the following steps:

- i. Historical information: the study of rituals, magic, customs and practices on *hair* as found in ancient and modern Sinhala culture and literature.
- ii. Interpretive exegesis of the above material on its own symbolic 'grammar', with reference to the particular analysis mentioned above.
- iii. Examination of the importance of the symbolic meanings of *hair* in the present social context.

It can be safely concluded that the substance called "Hair" is regarded as either repulsive or impure or aesthetic or sacred or sexual in the Sinhala culture based on the context in which it is used.