

## Ritual and Harmony: The Role of the Kandy Esala Perahera in Promoting Social Unity

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The Perahera (Procession), which plays a key role in attracting diverse groups and fostering public cooperation, is a distinctive feature of Sri Lankan Buddhist history. This study analyzes the social harmony represented by the annual Esala Perahera festival at the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth Relic) in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Incorporating multicultural elements, the festival plays an important role in promoting social cohesion among Sri Lankans of all ethnic backgrounds, including Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, and Malay communities. The research explores how the Esala Perahera fosters unity among different ethnic and religious groups by encouraging shared experiences, collective participation, and mutual respect. Through its vibrant processions, traditional rituals, and the participation of diverse communities, the festival serves as a powerful platform for nurturing unity and understanding in a multicultural society. The study highlights the festival's contribution to inter-ethnic dialogue, the strengthening of communal bonds, and the reinforcement of national identity, all of which enhance the country's social fabric. The research sample consisted of 50 participants: 20 who took part in the procession and 30 who attended as spectators. A purposive sampling method was employed, and the study adopted a qualitative research approach involving semi-structured interviews, key informant discussions, and participant observation. Findings reveal that people from various races, religions, ages, castes, genders, and social statuses, both lay and clergy, come together as spectators, setting aside social inequalities. The inclusion of diverse religious beliefs within the Perahera contributes to unity among people despite these differences. During the festival, businesses of all faiths, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Catholic, close in solidarity before the procession, reflecting a shared sense of purpose. Business owners also build mutual relationships by decorating the city, making religious offerings, and arranging seating for spectators. The multicultural character of the Kandy Esala Perahera, while preserving its Buddhist heritage, has played a significant role in promoting social unity and strengthening the sense of togetherness in Sri Lankan society.

**Keywords:** Temple of the Tooth Relic, Esala Perahera, Multiculturalism, Social Unity, Buddhist Heritage