

Westernized Buddhism and Sinhala Buddhism

I found [this article](#) by Sharmini Serasingha, named as *Mahavamsa: An Insult to Buddha*, (appeared in the *Colombo Telegraph*) which is the leitmotiv is despising the cultural practices considered as essential to follow Buddhism by traditional Buddhists as a deviation from true Buddhism, and abasing the rural Buddhists who involve in them for turning the philosophy into a religion. Any person who has read the discourses of the Buddha will see how contradict the views of the Sharmini to that of the Buddha and will be convinced that she has never studied the authoritative sources of the religion her article is dealing about.

Sharmini's article is filled with glaring errors, betraying to the canonical literature. Despite her abasement of rural Buddhists, and despite her depiction as them being deviating to original teachings of the Buddha, it's she herself is the one who distorts the original teachings of the Buddha, rather than it's done by the people whom she derogatorily names as the Mahavamsa Buddhists.

Here we are going to show how sincere is the Buddhist version she is criticizing (naming it derogatorily as "Mahavamsa Buddhism") with the teachings of Thripitaka. Note that all the emphasizes in bold in any quotation are by mine.

Before that it should be mentioned that I agree totally with her criticism of Mahavamsa being a book which promotes racial supremacist ideology and with her suggestion that "comparative religion" must be taught in schools in order to give the younger generations a chance to understand each other's religions to know that no religion is above the other.

Worshipping Buddha Statues and Paying Reverence

But her criticism of Buddhist practices is not consistent with what Buddha has said in Tripitaka. For example, she writes;

*However, it does not matter, if the tooth is over-sized, belonged to the Buddha or not, because he **the 'wise one' asserted, that his followers must not revere, nor worship, any part of his physical self, nor idolize him. Had the Buddha wanted otherwise, he would have left not just a tooth, but his entire skeleton, for his followers to worship.***

She does not mention in which discourse Buddha has asserted that Buddhists must not worship any part of him. And it's not only a tooth survived as remains of the Buddha, but there are many such relics. Relic of frontal-lobe-bone, relic of collar-bone and relic of jaw-bone of the Blessed One are among them and fact that some of them have been enshrined in *Stupathas* of Sri Lanka also is a known fact. Regarding whether Buddha wanted or not to worship body relics of him, there's a reference in

“The Discourse of Great Demise [Maha Parinibbana Sutta]” in the section of “Long Discourses [Deega Nikaya]” to that matter. Ven: Ananda inquired Buddha about how should be performed regarding the body of the Blessed One, after his demise. Buddha replied that *Do not bother about honoring the body of the Thatagatha and concentrate on gain your spiritual goal, Nirvana, And There are many wise Brahmins, kings and laities and they will honor the body of the Thathagatha.* When, then Ananda there asked, how should *they* act respecting the body of the Thathagatha, Buddha replies that “as the same manner towards a body of a universal monarch.” Then Ananda there asks how should be acted respecting the body of a universal monarch, and Buddha replies as follows;

"The body of a universal monarch, Ananda, is first wrapped round with new linen, and then with teased cotton wool, and so it is done up to five hundred layers of linen and five hundred of cotton wool. When that is done, the body of the universal monarch is placed in an iron oil vessel, which is enclosed in another iron vessel, a funeral pyre is built of all kinds of perfumed woods, and so the body of the universal monarch is burned; and at a crossroads a stupa is raised for the universal monarch. So it is done, Ananda, with the body of a universal monarch. And even, Ananda, as with the body of a universal monarch, so should it be done with the body of the Tathagata; and **at a crossroads also a stupa should be raised for the Tathagata. And whosoever shall bring to that place garlands or incense or sandalpaste, or pay reverence, and whose mind becomes calm there — it will be to his well being and happiness for a long time.**

From the [translation by Sister Wajira and Francis Story](#)

This is the basis of the Buddhist practice of worshiping Buddha statues or offering flowers etc to them as a reverence. The reason for this has explained in the same discourse, as follows, in the own words of the blessed one.

"And why, Ananda, is a Tathagata, an Arahant, a Fully Enlightened One worthy of a stupa? Because, Ananda, at the thought: 'This is the stupa of that Blessed One, Arahant, Fully Enlightened One!' the hearts of many people will be calmed and made happy; and so calmed and with their minds established in faith therein, at the breaking up of the body, after death, they will be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness.

Though Buddha did not want people to pay these reverences for him, his reverence has clearly stated that this may advance the spiritual benefits people gain. I know that there are many who argue that these may be later additions, but however, we have to reject this argument as a trash, since the majority of the western scholars on Buddhism, Pali language and Indology who have studied the Tipitaka, agree that

Tipitaka wasn't changed and oral tradition that existed in India is highly reliable. And there are many internal evidences to prove so, as explained by Bikkhu Sujato and Bikkhu Brahmali in their study '[Authenticity of the Tipitaka](#).' Anyone who has doubts regarding authenticity of the Tipitaka will be convinced on this, after reading these evidences.

Sharmini writes again that;

They offer flowers, to clay and stone images of the Buddha, and light oil lamps, as it is an idée reçue; believing by doing so, one earns enormous merit. Little do they understand the significance, of such customs; they fail to connect the similarity of flowers and the oil lamp, with their impermanent life – ‘anicca’.

This interpretation, that flowers offered to Buddha and the flame of the oil lamp lighted for revering him, symbolize the impermanence of our lives, that one day our physical bodies too will be decomposed in the same manner as the flower withers or we will be dead in a flash, as a flame vanishes by the wind suddenly, is popular even among the devout/rural Sinhala Buddhists. But I have never seen a reference for it in the Tipitaka. According to what Buddha has said in the 'Discourse of Great Demise', what we can say that this interpretation is wrong. So THIS must be a later addition, since no reference for this can be found in Tipitaka.

Foundation of Buddhist Funeral Rite of Transferring Merits to Dead Relatives

Then Sharmini goes on criticizing the funeral rites followed by Buddhists. She attributes origin of them to the social and cultural conditions of the ancient villages, that in those times temple was a center of social gathering activities of the village, and it was the common practice to engage all of the village, including the monks with the funeral, who visited the *bereaved family, to console them*, and it was the tradition to offer meals to all who gathered, by the bereaved family. She writes that “*This, over the years, became part and parcel, and a ‘religious ceremony’, of the Sinhala-Buddhist ‘religion’*”. She also claims that;

“it’s recorded nowhere that Buddha having said, that alms must be offered to monks, in one’s home or at a temple, seven-days, three-months and one-year after a death, in one’s family”

.... With time, the Buddhist clergy, introduced a sense of ‘guilt’, to the Buddhist laity, that if such ‘alms-giving ceremonies’, were not held, the departed will be reborn, in ‘hell’. So once again, ‘debunking’ the Buddha’s theory, of ‘karma’ ([unavoidable results, of our intentional actions](#)), the monks carved a path of convenience, and reverence, for themselves.

...And our foolish laity, continue to believe, that the more you feed and spoil these 'people', the more 'merit' they, and their dearly departed, would receive!

If she has read the “Discourse of Hungry Apparitions behind the Wall” [Thirodudda sutta], from the Khudhdhakapata of the “Section of Minor Discourses” [Kudhdhaka Nikaya], she would have known that it gives a foundation to transferring merits to the dead relatives, and hence the origin of Buddhist funeral rites can't be attributed to such social conditions.

According to the background story of the Thirodudda sutta, in one of his past lives, King Bimbisara involved in an alms-giving for the Kassapa Buddha and the Sangha. Some of the relatives involved in the distributing alms, kept the gifts intended for the Sangha for themselves, and because of that sin they became apparitions and suffered a long time. On the Gauthama Buddha's second day at Rajagaha, they made noises and disturbed the King Bimbisara at night. When asked about it from the Gauthama Buddha, the Buddha revealed this past story and advised the king to make an alms giving for the Sangha and to transfer the merits to these apparitions, so that they will get rid of their wretched existence. Having being invited to the alms giving with his retinue, Buddha invoked blessings to the dead relatives, reciting Thirodudda sutta. Following are two extracts from the discourse.

“As water raining on a hill
flows down to the valley,
even so does what is given here
benefit the dead.
As rivers full of water
fill the ocean full,
even so does what is given here
benefit the dead....

.....But when this offering is given,
well-placed in the Sangha,
it works for their long-term benefit
and they profit immediately.

**In this way the proper duty
to relatives has been shown,
great honour has been done to the dead,
and monks have been given strength:
The merit you have acquired
Is not small.”**

[\(Thirodudda Suththa - translated by Thanissaro Thero\)](#)

Merit of Offering Alms and Gifts to the Sangha

Since, from above quotation of Sharmini's article, it can also be seen that, it's her opinion that giving alms to Monks for gaining merit, is something invented by monks for selfish reasons and not something taught by Buddha, further examination on this also should be done. It's a known fact that Buddhist monks should be avoided from living as lay people, and the expected way for their dependence is, accepting what is offered to them. As one can see from the canonical literature, Buddha himself involved in the alms round, with the Sangha. Anyway, we can prove that not only Buddha approved the alms givings to the Sangha as a meritorious act, but encouraged it also. In the Ajañña sutta of the "Section of Discourses ordered in Numericals" [Anguththara Nikaya], Buddha lists eight qualities which makes a *monk worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world*. And it's not necessary to be Arhats or any other Spiritually gained ones to be treated so, as it seems from the sutta, since the qualities mentioned are so simple virtues which any willing person can follow without any super mental achievements .

[1] "There is the case where a monk is virtuous. He dwells restrained in accordance with the Patimokkha, consummate in his behavior & sphere of activity. He trains himself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.

[2] "When given food, whether coarse or refined, he eats it carefully, without complaining.

[3] "He feels disgust at bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, mental misconduct, at the development of evil, unskillful [mental] qualities.

[4] "He is composed & easy to live with, and doesn't harass the other monks.

[5] "Whatever tricks or deceits or wiles or subterfuges he has, he shows them as they actually are to the Teacher or to his knowledgeable companions in the holy life, so that the Teacher or his knowledgeable companions in the holy life can try to straighten them out.

[6] "When in training he gives rise to the thought, 'Whether the other monks want to train or not, *I'll* train here.'

[7] "When going, he goes the straight path; here the straight path is this: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

[8] "He dwells with his persistence aroused, [thinking,] 'Gladly would I let the flesh & blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through human steadfastness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.'"

"Endowed with these eight qualities, a monk is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world."

— [Ajañña Sutta](#)

Nature of the Karma and Doing Merits in Trying Times

Sharmini also shows how she is ignorant about the complex nature of the Karma too. She writes:

....During trying times, unable to accept their 'karma', they once again flood the 'Bo tree', expecting deliverance from their misery.

In another point she writes also;

....So, according to Sinhala/Mahavamsa-Buddhism, even a murderer, rapist, child molester, and others as such, could circumvent their bad 'karma' and be reborn in 'heaven', courtesy alms and gifts, offered to Buddhist monks.

Though she has made these two claims in two different contexts, (that should be mentioned, so that putting these together may not lead to a wrong perception of her view and thus to avoid any injustice to her article, inadvertently done by my way of quoting her) in the same article, I would like to examine this issue in a single address, since such an arrangement is for the convenience of writing.

Karma is not only the results of past acts, even the acts done in this very moment too becomes 'Karma.' So the act of doing 'Bodhi Pooja' too becomes a Karma, which has its own result. And perhaps, that result can be experienced in this life, in that very trying time too. And bad Karmas and good Karmas act competitively against each other, to become the first to be give its effect. So if a meritorious deed done at a time when a bad Karmas are repeatedly giving their results, the good Karma, which done at the time may give its effects also, perhaps undermining (not circumventing) the results of the bad Karma.

Rohini's story which comes in the "Annotation of the Dhammapadha commentary" [දම්මපාය අටුලා ගැටපදය] which reveals the story behind the verse 221 (first verse of the Section on Anger [Krodha Wagga]) of the Dhammapadha, is a proof for this. Princess Rohini, who was a sister of Arhat Anuruddha thero, refused to be present before the Anuruddha thero, when he visited his family, since she was suffering from a horrible

skin disease. When the Anuruddha thero, knew this, he advised her to construct a refectory for Buddha and the Sangha, by selling some of her jewelries. Under the supervision of the Anuruddha thero, her relatives managed to construct it. Then Anuruddha thero instructed her to do all the things, like serving the foods to the monks, cleaning the hall etc., by herself, so that she will get the merit. As the monks began to come there, and being served by her, then her disease began to recover, though slowly. And after a time, Buddha was invited to there to partake the meals, and after the alms, Buddha asked the Rohini, that she knew the reason for affliction. When she replied that she don't know, Buddha revealed that it was due to a cruel act she did in a past life of her. Once in her past lives, she was a queen and being jealous with a king's dancer, she made the dancer to be suffered by applying an itching powder to her bed and clothes. It was due to that bad karma, she had to suffer from a shameful skin disease. And due to the merit she earned by donating an alms hall and serving the Sangha, her disease began to cure. In other words, the power of the bad karma in her past life, was defeated by the power of the good karma she did in this life. So It's not being unable to accept the 'Karma', people do 'Bodhi Pooja'. It's because of the very understanding of the complex nature of the 'Karma' they have, than the Sharmini.

There is a category of Karma also, which is called as 'defunct' [අනන්ත කර්ම] since they got no time to give its results, when the person attains Nibbana and thus ends his/her cycle of rebirth. That was the case of Arhant Angulimāla thero, who as a layperson committed crimes as many as killing one less than a thousand of people, but achieved Arhathship at the very same birth, after came to the right path. Arhath Angulimāla too had to face the results of his bad Karma, but greatly reduced in effect than they intended. Following is from the Angulimāla Sutta of the section of Middle Length Discourses" [Majjima Nikaya].

... And thus Ven. Angulimala became another one of the arahants.

Then Ven. Angulimala, early in the morning, having put on his robes and carrying his outer robe & bowl, went into Savatthi for alms. Now at that time a clod thrown by one person hit Ven. Angulimala on the body, a stone thrown by another person hit him on the body, and a potsherd thrown by still another person hit him on the body. So Ven. Angulimala — his head broken open and dripping with blood, his bowl broken, and his outer robe ripped to shreds — went to the Blessed One. **The Blessed One saw him coming from afar and on seeing him said to him: "Bear with it, brahman! Bear with it! The fruit of the kamma that would have burned you in hell for many years, many hundreds of years, many thousands of years, you are now experiencing in the here-&-now!"**

- '[Angulimala Sutta: About Angulimala](#)' translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

True Meaning of Kalama Suththa

In relation to her criticism of Buddhist funeral rites, Sharmini quotes the following passage from the Kalama Suththa;

*“Believe nothing, in the faith of traditions,
even though, they have been held in honor,
for many generations, and in diverse places.*

*Do not believe, a thing, because many people speak of it.
Do not believe, in the faith, of the sages of the past.
Do not believe, what you yourself have imagined,
persuading yourself, that a God inspires you.*

*Believe nothing, on the sole authority, of your masters and priests.
After examination, believe what you yourself, have tested
and found, to be reasonable, and conform your conduct thereto.”*

She does not give the reference for this translation, or does not mention whether this is her own translation to the Pali text or by whom if did by another. But anyway this translation differs from versions of all the reliable and respectable translators (like [Thanissaro thero](#), [Soma thero](#)) we have. If someone compared this with such a translation, he/she may find that entire sentences have been missing in this translation, radically altering the meaning intended by the original paragraph. Following is the English translation of the Thanissaro Bikkhu, to the Pali text. I would like to ask the reader to pay her attention to the highlighted texts and to consider whether she can see phrases similar in meaning to them within the translation Sharmini quoted.

"Of course you are uncertain, Kalamas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, **by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability,** or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, **'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering'** — then you should abandon them....

Of course, we couldn't find them in the translation Sharmini quotes. And the loss of meaning and misunderstanding adds by this mistake (let's assume that Sharmini, herself may not responsible for the translation, and hence this blame can be put on the translator) is not “so little”. It totally deviates us from the true teaching of Kalama

Sutta. In fact popular misconception that Kalama Sutta gives a *carte blanche* to Buddhists, have arisen from this sort of cherry pickings from the advice given to Kalama's by the Buddha. But if someone read above quote (Thanissarao translation) carefully, she may understand that Kalama Sutta does not only advise to, not to accept on sole authority of religious teacher or scripture and tradition, but it also advises not to accept something since it fits one's personal view ("don't go by agreement through pondering views") and not to accept going by arguments ("don't go by logical conjecture") or not to accept "going by inference" and even "going by probability." And it's not the criteria to accept or reject something, when "we have ourselves know a belief is true" as the Sharmini quotation says. The criteria mentioned is "When we ourselves know that **These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering'** ." So the Kalama sutta does not say that we should follow our own sense, but to check whether these are accepted as good or bad. Those who argue that Kalama sutta advocates for a following our own views or opinions, that it can be used as a foundation to reject scriptures or traditions just because they are not appealing to them, with no doubt have misread the Kalama sutta or have not read it at all!

The above interpretation of Kalama sutta is confirmed by the blessed one, in the same Sutta, by giving few examples on how to apply the above advice. Here's how to apply it, in the Buddha's own words.

.... "And this deluded person, overcome by delusion, his mind possessed by delusion, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering."

"Yes, lord."

"So what do you think, Kalamas: Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?"

"Unskillful, lord."

"Blameworthy or blameless?"

"Blameworthy, lord."

"Criticized by the wise or praised by the wise?"

"Criticized by the wise, lord."

"When adopted & carried out, do they lead to harm & to suffering, or not?"

"When adopted & carried out, they lead to harm & to suffering. That is how it appears to us."

"So, as I said, Kalamas: 'Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement

through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering" — then you should abandon them.' **Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.**

So to reject something based on Kalama Sutta, they Must have to show that, these qualities (in this case Buddhist funeral rites) leads to suffering and that they are harmful and unskillful deeds. In our knowledge of basic Buddhist concepts of Karma and rebirth, we can't see any lead to suffering (in the cycle of Rebirth [Samsara]) by the Buddhist funeral rites (giving alms to Sangha and transferring the merit gained, to the dead relatives as a gratitude) Sharmini is criticizing. On the contrary, in a Buddhist sense, these may help to short the time we and our dead relatives would be wandering in the Samsara. What is so harmful in being grateful to one's relatives and trying to help for their spiritual attainments according to our religious beliefs?

And it's important to note that Buddha gave this advice to Kalamas when they asked how to choose which one to follow, when every religious leader/teacher is telling, only his faith is the true one. What we can say based on this fact is that, the advice of the Kalama Sutta must only be applied in similar contexts, i.e., when we are in a state whom religion must be taken as true by us. So, as a group of people who have complete faith in Buddha and his teachings, Buddhists are not supposed to use this criteria. Both Thanissaro thero and Bikkubodhi thero have expressed somewhat similar views on Kalama sutta. See [Lost in Quotation](#) and [A Look at the Kalama Sutta](#) respectively.

Is Buddhism a Philosophy Only and is not a Religion ?

I would like to examine one last claim of her article, which is the expression of most popular misconception on the Buddhism, that Buddhism is not a religion and only a philosophy. It's this cliché which is popular even among the rural Buddhists, is the ground for many for their rejection of Buddhist religious rites.

A religion is a teaching of a path which can be gained a spiritual benefit (salvation) by following it. Buddhism teaches how to gain such a spiritual benefit; Nirvana. In other words, how to end suffering of rebirth by eradicating the impurities from the mind through the Enlightenment meditation. So Buddhism too is a religion. It may be different significantly from Abrahamic religions, especially for there's no obligatory prayers, rituals and have no rules governing worldly affairs. But that fact won't affect as it's states as a religion. In their book 'බුදුදහම සහ ජාති ප්‍රශ්නය [Buddhism and Problem of Race]' professor G. P. Malalasekara and professor K. M. Silva writes that "*Some say that Buddhism is a philosophy, and not a religion. But the spiritual path expected to be followed by Buddhists and philosophy taught by the Buddha are intertwined with each other so that one can not separate from the other.*"

Westernized Buddhism, It's Origins and Political Usage

In fact, the version of Buddhism Sharmini represents in her arguments, is a, creation of orientalist (theosophists) who were attracted to Indian philosophies with the sole intention of filling a spiritual void in the west, and reform-minded Buddhists of the English speaking elite class that emerged in the colonial era, who needed a Buddhism that was compatible with their newly adopted western views and lifestyles.

As Professor [Bernard Faure](#) writes in his book 'Unmasking Buddhism', even the modern day western attraction to Buddhism is not coming from a genuine religious interest.

....It may be that the Western attraction to Buddhism represents a surge in the popularity of spirituality rather than a return to religion, with Buddhist spirituality offering a credible response to the anxieties of the modern world.

Unmasking Buddhism, Bernard Faure, p. 139

Furthermore, he writes:

The many Buddhist communities which have sprung up everywhere tend to emphasize the practice of contemplation. **This reflects a preoccupation with an "authentic" Buddhism which may only ever have existed in the Western imagination.** This infatuation with one of the great "Oriental" religions conceals a great many "Orientalist" prejudices. **The tendency to emphasize the aesthetic and "spiritual" aspects of Buddhism and to focus exclusively upon superior or internal realities prevents certain followers from appreciating the profound vitality of Buddhism** and the wide range of problems it faces. A full understanding of this Buddhism and its recognition as an intellectual, religious, and spiritual resource can only be achieved through knowledge of its history and of the non-Western societies in which it developed and, in many cases, continues to prosper.

Unmasking Buddhism, Bernard Faure, p. 141

It's in this Orientalist Buddhism, Sharmini and most English speaking elites and educated middle class so-called-rational-Buddhists are trapped in.

From the 19th century onward, there was a great tendency in the west to rediscover the ancient eastern philosophies. Most of the intellectuals who were on this quest to find the "oriental holy grail" were motivated by alienation and displeasure with the western Christian lifestyle and worldview. They were displeased with the lack of spirituality and philosophical quest for understanding our existence and resolving its

problems in Abrahamic religions, especially from the prohibition of free inquiry in Abrahamic religions.

That approach led them to adopt and admire only the parts that seemed relevant to solving their anxieties about life, like the Buddhist/Hindu philosophy, and to de-emphasize or to reject the rest – like rituals, which seemed irrelevant to their goal and reminded them of the priesthood of Christianity. They embraced these new concepts with an orientalist thrill and popularized them.

The influence of these orientalists led to English speaking upper-class elites who used to rely on westerners for anything (as a result of their colonial mentality) considering only the part of Buddhism that attracted the western orientalists as the true Buddhism and the rest as later additions. The English speaking elite class that emerged as a result of colonial policies adopted this version of Buddhism to serve their class interests, i. e. show that they are superior to Sinhala speaking rural Buddhists even in the domain of religious observance (that is to say, they are following a ‘much-more’ philosophical Buddhism than they). Adopting this castrated version of Buddhism, which differed greatly from the Buddhism of the rural Sinhala community and from the Buddhism preached by the Buddha, provided them with a dual opportunity to challenge the negative stereotype of them as renegades and to play a new role as saviors of the nation. Later in time, this "Westernized Buddhism" became a political tool in the hands of the Colombo based NGO circles since it perfectly fitted for their purposes. In particular, this kind of Buddhism may be useful when justifying extremist acts by other religious communities and shunning Buddhists when they come with these concerns. For example, if Buddhism was portrayed as a mere philosophy and spirituality without any material culture, it could be used as a response to Buddhists' concern about the vanishing of Buddhism as a result of the rise of Islamism, for it's not possible to vanish a Buddhism which only exists in the "Mind" as a result of tangible acts like encroaching temples etc. In a time I too was a die-hard multiculturalist even to the extent of tolerating the fundamentalist acts of minorities, (as the most so-called civil activists today.), when a friend raised a question relating to Muslims encroaching on a Buddhist temple, I told him, "make it the object of your contemplation of impermanence!" Though I knew that's not a valid argument, I used it to conceal my lack of strength to openly criticize those racist acts of minorities. (almost all civil activists are still using this trick)

Anyway I'm going to sum up this response. Sharmini writes that in childhood she had to get involved in the practice of alms giving, and her family was patrons of the Sangha. But mine was the total opposite of her journey. My father was a westernized Buddhist, and from that influence, I refused to worship Buddha statues as a primary-school student. But later, when I referred to Thripitaka and found that it was less

possible to alter it when it came in oral tradition, I came to know that teachings and practices I considered as later additions were in fact original teachings. In other words, what Sharmini has adopted as an adult is the views I rejected as a youth. This connection reminds me of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's reply to Erasmus Darwin.

Dr Darwin possesses, perhaps, a greater range of knowledge than any other man in Europe, and is the most inventive of philosophical men. He thinks in a new tram on all subjects except religion. He bantered me on the subject of religion. **I heard all his arguments, and told him that it was infinitely consoling to me, to find that the arguments which so great a man adduced against the existence of a God and the evidences of revealed religion were such as had startled me at fifteen, but had become the objects of my smile at twenty.**

99 Letter to Josiah wade. *Collected Letters Of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed: Earl Leslie Griggs. Vol. I, p. 177

- Sachintha Madhushan