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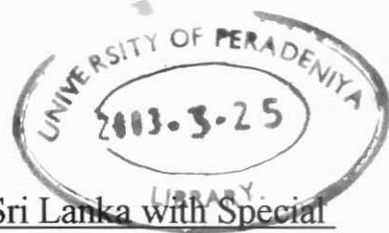
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Resume:



A Historical Study of the Worship of the God Vishnu in Sri Lanka with Special Reference to the 17th & 18th Centuries A.D.

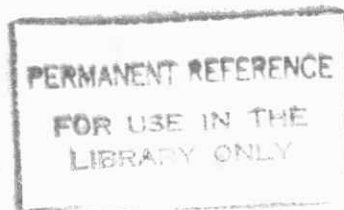
Sri Lanka is a country with a long history of Buddhism in the Theravada tradition dating back to the 3rd century B.C. According to the present figures, the majority of the population are Buddhists. The other in descending order consists of Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Although the Buddhist tradition is deeply-rooted in Sri Lanka, Buddhists still pay homage to deities, which belong to Hindu, Mahayana, and local traditions, especially the god Vishnu. The Sinhalese Buddhist regards the god Vishnu as a protector of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Therefore, in many Buddhist monasteries there can be seen a shrine room dedicated to Vishnu. Some monasteries became well-known for their shrine to Vishnu. If there is no separate shrine, the statue of Vishnu may be situated in the Buddha's shrine room in a prominent position. When they finish their religious duties, the monks transfer merit to god Vishnu and request him to protect Buddhism.

The cult of Vishnu in Sri Lanka developed parallel to its development in South India. Vishnu was not regarded as a powerful god in Pre-Christian era and was known only by name. During that period the archaeological records show that the cult of *Vasudeva* developed. This is known as the first period of Vaishnavism. Next the god called *Narayana* was absorbed by Vaishnavism and finally was transformed into the god Vishnu.

1st Chapter

Vaishnavism spread and developed in India during the period of Gupta, especially in the 4th and 5th Centuries. From the 9th century A.D. onwards in South India the devotional aspects of the cult became prominent. The leaders of this devotional movement were known by the name *Nayanar* in the Saiva tradition and *Alvar* in the Vaishnava tradition. The most famous saint of this Vaishnava tradition was *Ramanuja*, the philosopher of Vaishnavavada who introduced "a qualified monism" or "*visista advaitavada*", lived in South India in Sri Rangam in the 12th century A.D. This period was one of vigorous revival of Hinduism and the influence of this revival was felt as far away as Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka the first evidence of the cult of *Vasudeva* and *Narayana* can be found in the archaeological records before the Christian era. The Buddhism became established in Sri Lanka during this same period. In the 5th century, in the Pali commentaries, there can be seen a kind of view against the Vaishnavavada and Saivevada. However, a slab inscription belonging to the 10th Century has given a



simile. A monk called *Mahademi* lived in the Dhamma like the god Vishnu lived with his consort, Lakshmi, in the coil of "*Ananta naga*". In the 11th and 12th centuries, during the period of Polonnaruwa, there have been discoveries of shrines as well as statues of Vishnu. The ancient Mahiyangana stupa, there was a painting in the chamber which portrays the seated Buddha, like on the occasion of his Enlightenment, and the god Vishnu has been there with a basket of flowers which are going to be offered to the Buddha. On another sculpture in *Vijjadara Guha* in Polonnaruwa, Vishnu has come to the Buddha's shrine and pays homage to the Buddha with two hands and with another two hands holds a wheel and a conch. Similar evidence of the subordinate position of Vishnu to the Buddha is also found in literature dating from this time. Actually, god Siva is also shown with Vishnu in the above figures, the same as Vishnu.

Between the 13th and 16th Centuries A.D. the cult of Vishnu was one of several Hindu cults in Sri Lanka. In the 16th Century the importance of Hinduism increased because of the political, commercial and cultural influence of South India. At this time there is evidence from several Buddhist viharas, like Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya, that sculptures of several Hindu gods, including Vishnu, were used to adorn and decorate a Buddha statue with the purpose of watching over and protecting him.

2nd Chapter

When the Vishnu and other Hindu cults started to spread among Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the monks reacted in two ways. One way was to criticize the Hindu cults, pointing out the path of the Buddha as the right way to be followed. The second way was to show support for the national deities of Sri Lanka in preference to and instead of the imported Hindu deities. the main Sinhalese Buddhist national deity was the god Upulvan, who was considered to be the protector not only of the island in general, but of Buddhism in particular. Upulvan was highly regarded by the Buddhists, both monks and laity, in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. The second chapter is allocated to examine the characteristic of god Upulvan and to re-examine the previous opinions of several scholars. Upulvan was not a Vedic Hindu or Mahayana deity, but a local Sri Lankan deity.

3rd Chapter

During the 17th and 18th centuries the situation changed. The seat of the kings of Sri Lanka was moved from Kotte to Kandy, and close relations developed between the Kandyan kingdom and South India in various ways, such as political, commercial, cultural and social. Most of the latter Kandyan

kings brought their chief consorts from royal South India who settled down in Sri Lanka, together with many high-ranking aristocrats who came along with them from time to time and also settled down in Kandy. Eventually the crown itself passed down to a dynasty which came from South India. Trade relations between the two countries became highly developed. As part of all these new contacts, the influence of Hinduism on the religious practice of Sri Lanka became more and more widespread. During the first part of the Kenyan period Buddhism decayed due to many reasons. As educated monks became rare, practice of some Hindu rituals became accepted. Throughout this period the worship of god Vishnu increased in influence on Sri Lankan society and eventually became established in a dominant position. People identified Vishnu as the god Upulvan and the position of god Upulvan as a protector of Buddhism and the island was transferred to Vishnu. This image of god Vishnu, as conceived in Sri Lanka, was no longer that of a pure Vishnu as conceived by Hindus. As for India, the Buddha became an avatar (incarnation) of god Vishnu. In Sri Lanka, the god Vishnu was converted into a Bodhisattva. As a mark of Vishnu's increasing influence, two or three local deities assumed the position of his servants.

4th Chapter

In the fourth chapter the objects of this research were the cults of Dedimunda and Suniyam. During the period of Sithawaka and Kandyan, the political position of the island was very confused. In the same period can be seen rise of the Dedimunda deity. The collapse of the kingdoms, the moving of the kingdoms, the fights among the kingdoms and the invasion of the Europeans took place in the political arena. In 1815 the British conquered the Kandyan kingdom, and this marked the start of the colonial period. The Portuguese attacked the main shrine of god Upulvan at Devundara in 1588, and the statue of god Upulvan was moved from there and placed in the shrine of Upulvan at Aluthnuwara temporarily. This indirectly affected the development of the Dedimunda deity. Dedimunda was considered as the prime minister of the god Upulvan and later he became the prime minister of god Vishnu. When the statue of Upulvan was moved to Kandy, the prime minister, Dedimunda, became dominant in Aluthnuwara. Dedimunda is called by another name, which is Devata Bandara. Devata Bandara was a local deity in Aluthnuwara, and later amalgamated with Dedimunda. The god Suniyam was worshipped as a black magic deity, and was also considered to be a messenger of god Vishnu. Therefore there can be seen a complex of three shrines connecting these three deities - Vishnu, Dedimunda and Suniyam in Kandyan Kingdom.

5th Chapter

Many new legends with a Buddhist theme developed around the character of Vishnu. Then Vishnu's statue came to be positioned in some Buddhist viharas and was treated with respect. Gradually some of these statues of Vishnu were incorporated into the shrine rooms and, in some cases, special shrines were built to Vishnu inside the vihara buildings. In the fifth chapter research has been done into the five Vishnu Devalas in the Kandyan kingdom. They are in Kandy, Hanguranketa, Dambulla, Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya. The first two Devalas are part of a complex of four guardian gods - Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama and the goddess Pattini. Dambulla, Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya Devalas had been founded in the vihara buildings. Originally these statues were dedicated to god Upulvan as a protector of Buddhism, but after the transformation of Upulvan into Vishnu, the statues were also converted to Vishnu. In the later part of the Kandyan kingdom around these Vishnu statues, the Devalas were erected as they are in their present form.

6th Chapter

During the Kandyan kingdom, the Devalas became a well-organised institute. According to the land tenure system, Devalas were offered a lot of land by the kings and other aristocrats. These provided the temples with a source of maintenance. Having organized the religious services, the Devalas provided a piece of land for the support of their officials. The Devalas needed two types of services. The first and foremost is the daily cycles of rituals, which are performed by inner staff (*atul kattale*), and secondly there are the annual ceremonies performed by outer staff (*pita kattale*) with the help of inner staff. They all depended on the land which was given by the Devala. So many families became connected, such as priests, astrologists, musicians, artists, craftsmen, cooks, watchmen, etc., etc.

7th Chapter

Finally, I have observed the rituals and customs in the Devala, focusing on the Kandy Vishnu Devala. Among the rituals, there are cycles which take place daily, weekly and annually. Among these rituals, the annual festival of the Kandy *Esala Perahera* (procession) is still very prominent.

The vihara as well as the Devala catered for the religious aspects of life for the Sinhalese Buddhist people in Sri Lanka. The deep vision of life was built up according to the Buddhist teaching and through the vihara they got blessings from the monks, and all necessary religious functions. In addition, they needed a blessing from the deities in order to overcome the problems of their secular lives. Hence Devalas provided blessing for their day-to-day lives, problems, difficulties and challenges. This is the summary of the theme covered in this thesis. It represents a deep analysis of Sri Lanka culture during the late Kandyan period.

