

## **BELIEF IN THE DEITY AIYIANA IN SRI LANKA**

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It appears that the deity called Aiyana by the Sinhalese speaking people is identical with the Aiyandar identified by the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka. A rural deity called Aiyandar is worshipped in many places by South Indians. Three primary forms of this deity can be identified according to the beliefs in various places. In addition, there seem to be other micro variations of the beliefs about this deity.

There is no information about this deity in the earliest available Sri Lankan historical sources. However, several books such as *Kadayim* and *Vitti Pot* compiled after 14<sup>th</sup> century AD or the purpose of identifying the boundaries of Sri Lanka mention him as a deity of foreign origin i.e. Java and Sumatra, because he is said to have sailed to Sri Lanka with princes born in the Malala country. In any case, archaeological evidence so far unearthed in the island does prove beyond reasonable doubt that the sculptures of this deity were in existence.

There are a variety of beliefs associated with this deity even among the Sinhala speaking people in Sri Lanka. People in the region of Vanni Hat Pattu have been worshipping this deity at least from the Pre-modern historic period. Some people who are accustomed to worship him seem to identify him as one of their ancestors. Further, in their own belief and understanding, he was upgraded to this divine position after the death of one of their leading ancestors.

Most Sri Lankan Buddhists, who believe in the existence of the deities, appear to associate the deity Aiyana as a Buddha to be. In contrast, however, in the opinion of the majority of Hindus, he is a son of the god Siva. This deity seems to be associated with some features of a primitive cult that had been in existence prior to the birth of both Buddhism and Hinduism.