

DEITY WORSHIP AND SINHALA –TAMIL RELATIONS IN POST WAR SRI LANKA

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The cult of worshipping Gods and Goddesses is a common practice among both Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindu communities in Sri Lanka. This study explores how this practice influences Sinhala-Tamil relationship in the post-war society. The study was conducted in Vavuniya district in the Northern Province. The study population was identified through purposive and snowball sampling methods. Qualitative methods were used and data were collected through key informant interviews, direct observations, group discussions and visual data. The objectives of the study are to find out the religious significance of God and Goddess cult for Hindus and Buddhists, to identify the specific religious needs of the devotees from both the communities and to understand the scope for promoting inter-religious dialog, multiculturalism and mutual understanding between the two ethnic communities that practice the worship. The findings revealed that there were different Gods and Goddesses to whom the people turned for meeting their religious needs. God Pulleyar is mainly related to farming cycle. God Aiyanar and Murugan are seen as multi-purpose deities who can help laymen in any matters. Goddess Nagapusini Amman and Palaadi Amman are appealed for curing illnesses and redressing family problems primarily experienced by women. Goddess Muththumari Amman and Kannai Amman are appealed for protection from insecurity, especially mothers of both communities. The invocation of Goddess Baddrakali Amman is for seeking divine intervention, particularly when the victims feel justice being denied by secular authorities. According to the specific roles of the God or Goddess, both Sinhala and Tamil people meet in the shrines and share their experiences; sometimes in sign language as they do not necessarily speak each other's languages. The conclusion is that even though there was a three decades of protracted war between the two communities, there is a core of religious beliefs shared by Tamil Hindus and Sinhala Buddhists. Therefore, contrary to the views of Sinhalese and Tamils nationalists that tend to treat Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus as discreet and mutually exclusive ethnic communities, the religious beliefs and practices in these "border areas" are mixed and characterized by shared heredity, which can be further promoted for establishing ethnic reconciliation and harmony in the country.

Keywords: Deities, Worship, Multiculturalism, Devotees, Border areas