



## An Investigative Study of Modern Social Attitudes towards the Current Status of Religious Beliefs Associated with the Concept of Shiva (A Study of Selected Major Shiva Temples in Sri Lanka)

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### ABSTRACT

*Folktales can be recognized as an Ancient Intangible Heritage of the entire Human race. Since time immemorial, man has become a pyramid of collective wisdom built through the practice of systematic thinking. Folk religion, which is a major part of folk culture, can be identified as a set of beliefs and beliefs that are born in each culture and passed down from generation to generation. Also, this concept was a great opportunity to showcase the culture of the common people of society with various religious beliefs and practices centered on Lord Shiva. The primary problem of this research is to study what the modern social attitudes are towards the current status of religious beliefs related to the concept of Shiva. The primary objective of this study is to identify the behavior and religious beliefs associated with Shiva temples in the context of current social changes. As a research method, data was collected using the participatory observation method under the Qualitative Research method. Also, statistically based Quantitative data was used to identify the number of Shiva temples Established in Sri Lanka and their distribution. This study was conducted in connection with some selected major Shiva temples in Sri Lanka. Due to the strong attraction that developed in the human mind towards God in cultural integration, various social trends related to God were created. Lord Shiva, who occupies a prominent position in Hinduism as 'Mahadeva', takes precedence in Linga worship. Expectation of children can be identified as one of the main purposes of Shiva worship in local worship systems. The study revealed that the worship of Lord Shiva, which belongs to the rural religion, has been alienated from the common people. As a Maheshakya deity in the Hindu trinity, Shiva is supreme in his power and respectability. Thus, the overall research results revealed that the worship of Lord Shiva has moved away from the usual beliefs and worship.*

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## 1. Introduction

Folktales can be recognized as an ancient intangible heritage of the entire human race. Since time immemorial, man has become a pyramid of collective wisdom built through the practice of systematic thinking. Folk religion, which is a major part of folk culture, can be recognized as a set of beliefs born in each culture and passed down from Generation to Generation. Local deity worship is represented under the popular "**Chula Tradition**" of today's society. It can be recognized as a great opportunity to showcase the culture of ordinary people. Belief in God, an invisible force, dates back to a distant stage of human history. Such is the love and religious faith towards Lord Shiva among the guardian deities of this country. There are various religious beliefs and practices centered on Lord Shiva in society. A religious belief is a system of beliefs and practices found in every society that influences social action. It can be recognized that there are many religions built on the belief in invisible forces that create and control the world and all living and non-living things in it. Among them, "**Hinduism**" which is called "**Sanatana Dharma**", which originated in India, can be recognized as a polytheistic religious concept. Belief in God is a central feature of Indian religious consciousness. It can also be identified as the concept of "**Trimurti**", in which the creation of the world (Sarga) is assigned to Lord Brahma, the protection and control to Lord Vishnu and the power of destruction (Pralaya) to Lord Shiva. However, later on, three main streams of Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shakti were created based on the concept of Uka. Sir Monier Williams opined that there were five main streams, namely Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, Ganapatya and Surya, and then another Anushakha called "**Pashupati**" arose in the Hindu period (Williams 1883, p. 59).

Similarly, the belief in Shiva or Ishwara as the main deity or sole deity and other deities as minor aspects of the deity is called "**Saivism**"

(Basham, 1995, p. 394). It seems to have its roots in the prehistoric context. According to Sir John Marshall, Shaivism is the oldest living religious belief in the world today. The earliest instance of the concept of Shiva can be traced back to the Indus Valley or Indian Harappa civilization. Researchers are of the opinion that the overall religious situation of the Indus Valley Civilization is very similar to the post-Hindu period. Sir John Marshall has pointed out that the horned deity accompanied by animals found at Mohenjo-Daro is the prototype of Shiva (Marshall, 1931, p. 52). However, the deity with the epithet Shiva is found in the Hindu period, the 'post-Vedic period'. Sir Charles Eliot, who was engaged in an analysis of the Hindu period, points out that

"The main reason for the difference between the period known as the Vedic and Brahmanical religion and the later period is the prominence of the two important gods Shiva and Vishnu and the sectarian worship associated with them, as well as the personal devotion to a special god" (Eliot 1967 p. 148)

Some of the deities worshiped by the Aryans in the Vedic period are also worshiped in the modern Hindu period, but Shiva, who is raised to the status of Trimurti in the Hindu period, is not found in the Rig Vedic religious literature of the same name. Under the Vedic religion, which is considered the religious institution of the Aryan civilization, Lord Shiva is identified as a deity called "**Rudra**" (Basham 1995 p. 382). The evolution of the god Rudra can be traced throughout the Vedic period, with the Swetasvatara Upanishad period as its peak (Nadaraja, 1993 p. 20). Until then, the god Rudra was called "**Ishvara**" or a synonym in the Swetasvatara Upanishad. The post-Vedic era or the Hindu era can also be identified as an era in which Shiva, Vishnu, etc., developed a sense of theism. Here Lord Shiva no longer appears in the form of a minor deity as in the Vedic period. In the Hindu era, Lord Shiva is constructed as a benevolent god who bestows goodness and mercy on the creatures and as

a dangerous god with anti-destructive power. This is confirmed by the Purana texts, epics and texts belonging to Dravidian religious literature. *Lord Ishvara, known as Shiva, Hara, Mahadeva, Neelakanta, Maheswara etc.*, represents the anti-world force in the concept of "**Trimurti**". According to Hindu teachings, death is a transition from one place to another with a new life. According to that doctrine, the destroyer is actually the generator, the creator as well (Iyengar, 1998, p. 60). Thus, through the interpretation of the antidote attributed to Lord Shiva as a generative power, it is confirmed that the feeling that Lord Shiva is the lord of the whole world is merely a religious belief among the devotees.

According to Hindu religious literature, Lord Shiva was a great yogi. Shaivism teaches that the world exists because of the Samadhi power of Lord Shiva, who lays a tiger skin on the slope of Kailasakuta in the Himalayas (Basham, 1995, p.392). Shiva linga represents formless energy from the duality of form and formless energy of Lord Shiva (Tirumantiram, p. 1991). That is, there is no form. Known as the Shiva Linga Murthy, this is a pillar used to embody Lord Shiva. Parvati is known as '**Shiva**' or '**Uma**'. As shown in the Uma Samhita of the Shiva Purana (Part 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 45, Verse 3), Parvati is widely worshipped in Shaivism as Mother Jagan or Mother of the Universe. According to concepts, Goddess is the energy of God. Lord **Ganesha** and **Skanda Kumara** are the **children of Shiva and Parvati** (Basham, 1995, p. 382). Brahma and Vishnu, who have the generative and transformative qualities of the Hindu trinity, always come to the devotees in a good form, but Lord Shiva does not always come to the devotees in a good form. He approaches the devotee in the form of extreme grace and mercy as well as in the form of fierce anger. Due to the divine power attributed to Shiva in Hindu religious literature, Lord Shiva has become one of the most important deities in Hinduism. Hinduism was not limited to India and spread to several nearby states and, under the socio-

cultural conditions of each country, it can be recognized that the religious features of this concept of God have spread among the devotees with diversity. Shiva worship seems to have been an active religious belief in ancient Sri Lankan society as well. However, over time, various Hindu belief systems spread and, due to the social and cultural factors that prevailed in each era, people's attitudes and beliefs about the Gods have undergone many changes. Although much research has been done on Sri Lankan ways of worshiping God in today's society, the data analysis revealed that local researchers have not studied the modern social status of Shiva as a Hindu. Accordingly, religious tradition, current behavior and religious beliefs associated with the concept of Shiva are studied here.

### 1.1 Research Problem

The primary problem of this research was to study the modern social attitudes towards the current behavior pattern and religious beliefs related to the concept of Shiva and to identify the behavior and religious beliefs related to Shiva temples in the context of current social changes.

### 1.2 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study was to identify the modern folk consciousness of Shiva worship. Accordingly, it was possible to uncover general social attitudes based on the distribution of major Shiva temples established in the province, religious background, current activities, expectations and beliefs associated with Shiva worship. Although Lakdiva is the highest deity in the hierarchy of Lord Shiva according to the Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy of the popular era, it can be identified as an individual form of worship away from socialization and ordinary people's life. However, still, Shiva worship is at a high level among Hindu devotees in Hindu society. '**Maha Shiva Ratri**' '**Thiruvempavai**' etc. are the best examples. Thus, the primary objective of this research

study was to study modern social attitudes towards the current state of religious beliefs associated with the concept of Shiva.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

All the physical and immaterial conditions associated with humans in a particular cultural context are observations of social phenomena based on experience. Human behavior and thoughts-desires as well as the physical objects produced through it are considered to be directly expressed in the social spread of a worship system belonging to a certain religion. Interpreted through methods approached with a fundamentalist approach to the world, this can be described as anthropological research. Although the quantitative study method was used to identify the numerical distribution of Shiva temples all over the island, the interpretation and measurement of the religious consciousness expressed through the numerical distribution was done under the qualitative research method based on interpretive knowledge. Prior academic literature related to this research was used in exploring the historical and theoretical data on the Hindu religious context and its expression of Shiva worship. The field study was conducted with a subjectivist approach to uncover religious behavior and religious consciousness, and observation, participant observation, and interview methods were used to collect data. In relation to the worship of Lord Shiva, the main Shiva temples and temples of the island were studied. In order to consider the distribution of the total number of Shiva temples on the island, all Hindu temples that are statistically available were included in the survey. But because religious beliefs and the attitudes followed by individuals are dynamic according to each cultural context, twelve (12) active Shiva temples established in the main cities of the island were included in the sample for the field study.

Also, the preliminary research and observations made by studying the source

literature helped a lot in identifying these temples. Four (04) Shiva temples with historical and religious value, folklore, legends and myths were included in the study sample. They are Chilaw Munneswaram Temple, Trincomalee Koneswaram Temple, Manaveriya Ramalingeswara Temple in Puttalam District and 'Kokkattichholai Thaanthondri Iswarar Temple' in Batticaloa. In addition, Kandy Pillair Shiva Temple, Sellakataragama Ishwara Temple, Kataragama Ishwara Temple, and Trincomalee Shiva Temple were studied. Quantitative data was used only in identifying the number and distribution of popular temples and Shiva temples on the island, and for that the statistics published by the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs were used. The main methods of data collection were direct and indirect observation, participant observation and interview methods. Also, priests of Shiva temples, temple officials and devotees were data contributors. As the religious behavior of devotees varies depending on the religious importance of special religious festivals related to Shiva worship, only non-religious festivals were used on Thursdays and Fridays to collect data from the selected sample units. Based on the observed religious behavior and the data revealed through the interviews, the identification of the modern social attitudes towards the current state of behavior and religious beliefs related to the concept of Shiva was done through this research study.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

Literary, archeological and folklore factors reveal that Sri Lanka has been influenced by Hinduism since ancient times due to cultural relations with India. There are five Ishwara temples believed to have existed in the country since the prehistoric era or the Vijaya kingdom. Koneswaram, Thiruketeeswaram, Munneswaram, Naguleswaram and Shanthirasekaran are the five main Iswara temples (Peiris and Litt, 1917, p. 17; Navaratnam, 1964, p. 2). Sources such as the Yapa Pathuna Vamsa Sagaya or Yalapana

Vaipavamalaya, Puratana Jaffna, Thirukkonasala, Dakshina Kailasa Purana, Shiva Purana, Skanda Purana include legendary religious information related to these temples, but it seems that local sources have not presented facts that can prove them. Although the Mahavamsa shows that King Mahasen destroyed **'heretical'** religious centers during the Anuradhapura period, Lakdiva does not record what form they took at that time. It is mentioned in the Mahavamsa that King Pandukabhaya built a **'Civic Hall'**. (Mahavamsaya: 10.96-103 stanzas). Although there are different opinions about its meaning, it is Senarath Paranavithana's opinion that it is 'a place where the Shiva linga was located' (Paranavithana, 1929 p. 326). It was not until about ten years after the establishment of the Sinhalese Kingdom of Anuradhapura that the focus was on Upulvan, Saman Devi and Kanda Kumara. Their analysis does not mention Shiva worship as a popular deity worship in the Anuradhapura period. But there is literary and archeological evidence that the worship of Shiva was more popular in this country during the Polonnaru period and later periods than during the Anuradhapura period. Most of the temples built during the Tad period are Shiva temples, as confirmed by the archaeological remains of temples built by the Chola and Pandya rulers of the Polonnaru period and their associated inscriptions. The Ganesha or Skandha temple and Vishnu temple belonging to the Shaiva tradition were united and because the temple was complex, the worship of Shiva and Vishnu may have taken place in the Polonnaru era without sectarian differences. According to Padmanathan (Padmanathan, 1999), inscriptions such as Palamottai also bear witness to the fact that Saiva worship was well-spread under Chola rule during the Polonnaru period (Paranavithana, 1943, p. 195; Nicholas, 1972, p. 413).

Also, the Hindu religious organization that started with the Chola rulers was further established due to the religious movements carried out by the Arya Chakravarti rulers in

the North-eastern regions. Since the Chola rulers were Shaivas, the belief in Shiva became more popular among Hindu religious beliefs, and the Shiva symbol was often used as a symbol of kingship by the Chola and other Dravidian rulers. There is a lot of evidence that Ishvara Bhakti, which was more popular during the Polonnaru period, was not only limited to Hindu society but absorbed into Sinhala Buddhist culture. Examples include Buddhist literary works such as the Budhugunalankaraya (Budugunalankaraya, poems 159-173) and Sita's Rajasingha Rajya Yuga (Mandaram Pura Puvata, poems 61. 64), which recounts Shiva's ascension under the patronage of the state. The Upcountry Kingdom is also an important period in Shivaism. Vachissara Thero of Kotagama says that all the Nayakkar kings who came to Udarata and embraced Buddhism did not leave Shaivagam but believed in God and smeared ashes on their foreheads. Thus, history confirms that Shiva worship had a prominent place during the Hindu era that developed over time in Sri Lanka.

Also, the current Lakwasi Dravidian people fall under two main ethnic groups. They are Indian Dravidian and Sri Lankan Dravidian. According to ancient records, the majority of the Dravidian population living in this country are Shaivism (Sathasivam, 1985, p. 174; Gunawardene, 2003, p. 283). Among the sects of the Shaiva tradition that consider Lord Shiva as the only and main deity, the **'Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy'** is popular in Sri Lanka (Satashivam, 1985). This is a very deep and complex philosophy. Under it, four paths of liberation are taught as behavioral paths, action paths, yoga paths and knowledge paths. In the Hindu Trimurti concept, Ishvara is assigned only the anti-world power. But according to the Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy, the authority of the three actions of creation, existence and destruction of the world have been assigned to Lord Shiva. The poem **'Tirumanthiram'** written by **'Thirumular'** is a major religious text which expounds the **'Shaiva philosophy'**. One of the basic principles is

that '**God is love**'. This book expounds the philosophy of Shaiva Siddhanta and expresses the utmost devotion to a deity, transcending the destructive power of Lord Shiva. Shiva is not only one of the three Gods, but also the all-powerful, all-pervading, all-pervading power underlying the trinity (Tirumantiram, 1991, p. vii). It can be recognized that the Hindus of Lakwasi consider Lord Shiva to be higher than the two main gods, Vishnu and Brahma, and there are many forms of worship associated with them in Sri Lankan society. E. L. Manavin agrees with Basham's interpretation of the Hindu period. Divinity is a diamond with many facets. The two most beautiful large aspects are Shiva and Vishnu. On the other hand, the gods who have always been worshipped among humans are shown. Some aspects appear brighter than others, but devotees of all sects worshipped the perfect diamond (Basham, 1995, p. 395).

The special feature of Sri Lankan deity worship is that the Dravidian people as well as the Sinhalese Buddhists take refuge in Hindu gods as well as many other gods. According to local research, it appears that various deities in each era gain more mass appeal and become popular over time. According to Shaivism, "**Lord Shiva**" belongs to the highest level of the hierarchy of Gods, but among the Sri Lankan worship systems, deities belonging to the Shaiva tradition and other deities outside of it have become popular over time. **Sir Charles Eliot** stated that the worship of Shiva and Vishnu as special deities emerged in the post-Vedic period. According to that statement, Hindu devotees choose a deity of their personal liking as the "**True Deity**" for their worship (Griswold, 1912; The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, 1997). Thus, it seems that the worship of God is done according to the personal taste and attraction of a particular devotee. If a particular deity is chosen and worshipped widely for worldly pursuits and seeking help, then that deity becomes the devotee's personal deity. According to the temple data records registered in the

Department of Hindu Religious Affairs of Sri Lanka, the total number of Hindu temples in use in Sri Lanka is about 7066 (Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, 2023). Apart from the Northern Province, there are 4271 temples in other provinces, but Shiva temples are less than 2% of them. Accordingly, a numerical deficiency in the distribution of Shiva temples can be clearly identified in relation to all the popular Hindu temples on the island. Compared to that, goddesses such as **Kali, Durga, Pattini Amman, Mari Amman, Vinayagar or Pillar of God and Murugan or Subramanya are also widely worshiped under the offerings of female goddesses** (Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, 2023).

### 3.1 Behaviors and Religious Beliefs Associated with Shiva Worship

In this research study, a lot of unique information was revealed in the study of the behavior and religious beliefs associated with the worship of Lord Shiva. In any religion in society, there is a philosophical party and a practice related to religious belief. The special feature of Hinduism is that all Hindus do not perform Puja-Puja rituals with the same religious beliefs. As a result, individual sacrifices and religious features are prominent in Hinduism, which complicates worship practices. Shiva worship has been popular since ancient times, mainly as a form of Linga worship. Linga worship among the Aranya peoples of the Harappan period is thought to have been incorporated into Hinduism in the early AD Shiva sculptures like "**Ardhanarishwara**", "**Shiva Kalyana Sundara**", and "**Uma-Maheswara**" are recognizable as other religious expressions of male-female relationship. The main religious feature associated with a Shiva temple was the '**Shiva Linga**'. It is located in the '**Garbha Griha**', which is the main sacred place in a Shiva temple. Offering to the Shiva linga murti is a major form of worship in the Kriya Marga Pratipada of the Shaivite tradition (Sivapadasundaram, 2003, p. 39).

The restoration of a Shiva linga sculpture, offerings and rituals and related auspicious times and places are described in the Shiva Purana *Vidyeshvara* Samhita (Shiva Purana, 1st Group, 1st Samhita, Chapter 11, Shlokas 1-69). Because the *Shiva linga* is the highest religious feature that symbolizes Lord Shiva, there is a rule that the rituals to be held should be done in the same manner as prescribed in *Shaivagam*. In the Shiva Purana, there are sixteen times that a Shiva Linga statue should be shown. Among them are the ritualistic worship, the imposition of seats, the offering of bread, the washing of the feet, the washing of the mouth, the washing of oil, the offering of clothes, the offering of scents, the garlands, the incense, the lamp, the offering of food, the offering of light, the offering of Bilva leaves, the worship and the discharge or the end (According to Siva Purana part 1) the service of a *Brahmin Kurakkal* skilled in mantra recitation is essential to perform these pujas. The Shiva Purana also prescribes home rituals, but an average Hindu uses the Shiva **linga murti** at home for personal worship. Shiva linga sculpture is usually seen near many Hindu devotees in Sri Lanka. We can see Shiva Linga sculptures not only in the main womb house (GARBAGRAHAM), but out of the *Garbagraham* too. *Kaarainagar Shivan kovil in Munneswaram*, we can find a shiva Linga sculpture near the *'Thakshanamoorthi' statue*, faced to the WEST.

Likewise, the main purpose of pilgrimages to Shiva temples in Sri Lanka today is to seek fertility. The concept of fertility associated with Linga worship is based on it. A. L. Basham mentioned that Lord Shiva is known as the *Ishta* deity of procreation. The study also revealed that it is a special expectation of Hindus, Buddhists and non-religious people who worship Shiva. Trincomalee Koneswaram Temple and Polonnaruwa Shiva Temple are special Shiva temples where devotees who are expecting children visit. In Trincomalee Koneswaram Temple, on the left side of the temple, close to the ocean, where the small wooden cradles hang from a tree on

the temple boundary, is a specially arranged place for tying offerings for children. Apart from the expectation of children, devotees take refuge in Lord Shiva for daily life expectations such as prosperity and success in exams. But never do devotees perform revenge and curses in front of Lord Shiva. Goddess Parvati, who joins Lord Shiva in the creation of the world, is worshipped in the Shaivite tradition as well as Lord Shiva. Parvati is usually worshipped in the house to the left of the main womb house in a temple. But in the Sri Lankan religious context, it was observed that Goddess Kali, the terrifying form of Parvati, is widely worshipped in the form of single deity worship.

Also, it is very rare to find Lord Shiva in a linga murthy in a Kali temple. This is a specialty of most Shiva temples on the island. Many deities in the Hindu tradition receive offerings at a Shivalaya. When the Shiva linga is installed in the Garbha Griha, the Ganesha statue is placed on the right and the Skanda Kumara statue on the left. The god houses set up inside a Shiva temple prove how the gods "**Pullair**" and "**Murugan**", who are shown in the religious literature as the children of Lord Shiva, attract more devotees than Lord Shiva during the sacrifices. There are those who believe that whatever one worships, the end result is reaching Lord Shiva, as well as those who believe that there are single deity concepts abstracted from each other. Apart from the Shiva Linga sculpture, there are many other forms of sculpture that embody Lord Shiva. There are many sculptures, such as Nateswara, Chandrasekhara, Pashupati, Uma Samhita, Uma Maheswara, Bhikshatana, as well as Bhairava, Vatuka Bhairava, Mahakala, Dashabhuj Aghora, but Shiva Linga is worshipped abundantly in Sri Lankan temples. Sculpture. However, Shiva linga sculpture is not offered in Ishwara Temples Established in connection with Buddhist temples. Sculpture. However, Shiva linga sculpture is not offered in Ishwara Temples Established in connection with Buddhist temples. Ardhanarishwara Lila is also worshipped in Buddhist temple premises. It

is also a unique situation that Lord Shiva is popular among Buddhists not by the name Shiva but by the name **"Ishwara"**.

Besides the worshipping of Lord Shiva, a well-known sculpture of Lord **'Nataraja'**, was done in temples as well as on private occasions by exceptional people who were associated with the art of dance without any caste or religious distinction. Kotahena Ponnambalavaaneshwaram Shiva Temple was identified as an important place. There are several reasons for lack of Shiva temples in Sri Lanka. The main reason is 'Funding'. Constructing huge temples is costly. The huge temples in Sri Lanka were constructed by Kings except Ponnambalavaaneshwaram'. Ponnambalavaaneshwaram is not a historical temple. The land for the temple was offered by the person who is Ponnambalam Mudaliyar. So, the name of the Temple is named after the individual. The other important thing is, Sri Lanka is a small country. So, it is not necessary to construct huge temples again and again. But in India we can see lots of giant temples constructed by the ancient kings. In India also temples are not constructed newly. These are the real facts for the lack of huge temples. But in ancient times, Hindus generally considered Nataraja as the special deity for dancing. However, the study revealed that the Buddhist devotees did not know that **'Nataraja'** is a special manifestation of Lord **'Shiva'** or **'Ishwara'**. Nritya, which was an essential part of the Vedas, was created by *Bharatamuni*, created by Lord Brahma, and is shown in *Natya Shastra* as a creation of *Maheshwara*.

Also, in the Indian religious literature, Lord Shiva's dance movements and dance leela are widely shown, and Shiva is important in the **'Sapta Tandava concept'**. Also, Shiva **performed 108 Tandava**. Shiva is always credited as the god who first introduced the basic essence and principles of dance to the world. But locally, such a belief is not evident among the Sinhalese devotees who worship Hindu gods. **"Goddess Saraswati"** is

recognized as the ruler of art in Sinhala culture. According to the Shaivite tradition, Lord Shiva, who is worshipped as the Great God, is the only and supreme deity. However, in Sri Lankan religious society, there are many other forms of worship associated with the worship of Shiva. Lord Shiva is at the top of the hierarchy of Shaiva gods, but he is a **"Personal Deity"** or **"Real Deity"** who chooses to worship according to his own taste and belief." In this way, several factors were revealed that influenced the removal of the Hindu triune God from the personal worship of ordinary devotees. Chief among them is the fact that Shiva has a sense of reverence and respect more than other gods worshipped in Hinduism. God **"Ishvara"** has dual characteristics. Sometimes he is considered as a great *tausaka* and other times he is considered to be accompanied by inhumans and devils wearing skull necklaces and hanging around in inauspicious places like battlefields, graveyards and road junctions. According to the concept of Trimurti, the idea that exists in society that it is **"the slayer of God"** is also behind it. Sri Lankans believe that **"Ishvara Vinshatiya"** is an unlucky period and it has the ability to nullify even the auspicious results of the previous era. The study also identified the belief among some that Sri Lankans suffered a lot during the Ishwara Vinshathi and the transition from the Ishwara Vinshathi to the Brahma Vinshathi.

There is an opinion among the common people that since Shiva is the great God, worship should be done properly and that God will punish any wrongdoing. A certain city dweller, who leads a busy life, thought that he would not have time to perform the Shiva Puja according to the prescribed methods. Shiva pujas are performed at the main level in Sri Lanka. Devotees also participate in those offerings. The best example is **'Maha Sivaratriya'** which is celebrated on a grand scale in Sri Lanka. Hinduism is an open religion. Hindus have enough freedom to worship God as they like. Lord Shiva does not give, but if he gives he does not take. This is usually their belief in



God. To please Lord Shiva, principles must be fulfilled very well. Devotees believe that if God shines on those who take refuge in this God, life will be prosperous. That is why it is said that something given is not taken back. The fact that Lord Shiva is seen as a god who can bring about spiritual development rather than a god who bestows worldly blessings has also led to a shift away from personal worship of Shiva. According to the anthropological interpretation of Robert Redfield's **"Great Tradition"**, Lord Shiva represents the great traditional religious features of Sri Lankan Hindu society and belongs to the highest level of the hierarchy of gods. While Shiva and Vishnu are considered supreme, devotees believe that minor deities are directly related to daily expectations, such as life-saving progress, wealth-gain, growth of plants and crops, relief from epidemics, agricultural prosperity, and educational advancement. A study of the village deities of South India also reveals that the village deities stand for the happiness and worldly comfort of the people in their personal lives. Among the deities who seek refuge in worldly welfare, especially welfare, family preservation, pestilence and suffering, are **"Ganesha"** and **"Skandha Kumara"** as well as **"Pillayar"** and **"Murugan"** among Sri Lankan villagers. Female deities like Parvati, **"Kali"**, **"Bhadrakali"**, **"Durga Amman"**, and **"Mari Amman"** are also present together. The truth is only one god is worshiped in different forms in Hinduism. It has the enough freedom to worship the God. They maintain their devotion to Lord Shiva himself, feeling that Lord Shiva is incomparable. Devotees are engaged in strict religious practices in the form of ritual sacrifices. They worship Linga. They live their lives especially according to the teachings of Shaivism. Shiva worship is more common among such people who want to move towards Moksha through a meditative lifestyle. But such devotees are abundant in rural society.

Thus, it was identified from the study sample that the common devotee belonging to the current Sri Lankan society chooses a special

god as his **"personal god"** based on his own beliefs and experiences, so that it is easy for him to believe. They rarely approach Lord Shiva for help, especially with simple problems of worldly life. The association of both the gods Shiva and Vishnu with universalism, and the association of village deities with rural common human interests, has been recognized as a common phenomenon in deity worship. According to the current religious beliefs and worship practices of the study sample, it seems that Lord Shiva has become a universal deity and has gone beyond the role of a personal deity or real deity and is far removed from daily religious practices and beliefs.

### 3.2 How Modern Social Practice Relates to the Ancient Concept of Shiva Temples?

Some of the established Hindu shrines in Sri Lanka are religiously and historically linked with myths and legends, while other shrines have been built based on contemporary social and religious needs. Kovil in the Dravidian language means the place where God resides. A peculiarity of the expressions **"temple"** and **"devalaya"** was identified especially in relation to the study samples. The religious places associated with mythology and with historical development and also commonly attended by Sinhalese and Tamil devotees are called **"Devalaya"** and later religious places established for the purpose of the Dravidian people are known as **"Temples"**.

The main temples of Koneswaram and Munneswaram belonging to this research study sample belongs to the category of Purana Iswara temple. Although it has been shown in various sources that these have religious legends and belong to the prehistoric period, the confirmation of the antiquity of those temples has been proposed for archaeological and historical studies. Due to the legends associated with the prehistoric era, the Shiva temple, which has become a special place of worship for the devotees, remains a very active Shaivite religious shrine even today. Its specialty is that Hindus

as well as Sinhala Buddhists tend to worship this temple. Myths associated with the temple have been popularized and socialized, and the ancient Shiva Linga sculptures set up in the temples have added religious value to them. According to local folklore, the Koneswaram temple is a temple of ancient value associated with legends related to King Ravana. It is popularly believed that this was the place of worship of Ravana's royal family. In the Koti Rudra Samhita of Shiva Purana, a Hindu religious book, it is stated that the temple with Shiva linga at the place called Gokanna was built by King Ravana (Siva Purana III).

Also, the Munneswaram temple located in the western coastal Chilaw area, which is considered as the other ancient Ishwara temple belonging to this research study sample, is a temple that has been presented to Valmiki Ramayana, a great epic poem of India and its written records and folkloric factors. Its folklore is mostly formed in connection with the prince Rama who appears in the Ramayana poem. C.S. said that the *Shiva linga* sculpture in the Munneswaram temple is larger than the usual *linga sculptures*, which is a factor in the antiquity of the temple. Navaratnam indicates that Hindu devotees from all over the country participate in the annual pujas at these temples. The temple guardians were of the opinion that sometimes Indian devotees also participate in these pujas. This ancient Ishwara temple and the Thiruketeswaram and Naguleshwaram temples in the Northern Province, which were not part of the study sample, are still active today as the centers of Shiva worship in Sri Lanka. Manaveriya Ramalingeswara temple located in Manaveriya village of Puttalam district, Mamankeswaram temple belonging to Batticaloa district and Thanronreeswarar temple located in Kokkadicholai are also temples associated with religious legends. But compared to the ancient temples of Koneswaram and Munneswaram, due to the fact that these myths were not socialized, there was no public participation related to the entire island. One theory is that the Shiva linga

brought by Hanuman for the purpose of offering sacrifices to the departing Rama after the Rama-Ravana war is in the Manaveriya Ramalingeswara Temple (Bastin, 2002). Although the temple authorities claim that Hindu devotees who visit the Chilaw Munneswaram temple must also visit the Ramalingeshwara temple, it does not have a large crowd or popularity compared to the Munneswaram temple. The 'Mamankeswaram' temple belonging to the Batticaloa district is also popularized as having been built by Rama. Even today, the water pool of this temple is considered as a sacred place as it is said that it is a tirtha from which Lord Rama took water for Shiva Linga Abhishek. The second ancient Shiva temple in Batticaloa is the '**Thanronreeswarar**' temple in Kokkadicholai. With the reign of Kalinga Magha, who conquered Polonnaruwa, it became a religious center belonging to the Veera Shaiva sect, and it functions like a Hindu temple belonging to that sect. Thanronreeswarar Temple is the oldest Shiva temple in Sri Lanka. This is considered as a temple where a Swambhu Linga was established, according to the legend that a Shiva Linga emerged from a tree.

Also, among the existing Ishwara temples on the island, the temple associated with historical legends as well as the temples with archaeological values built in Polonnaruwa and later were also included in the study sample. The temple built in that era is currently functioning as the local temple. According to Padmanathan, there are 7 Shiva temples in Polonnaruwa area alone. These are considered to be temples built shortly after the Cholas came to power in the country. The temples built in this country are not that colossal when compared to the temples built in India at the same time. The Shiva temple located near Polonnaruwa and Kantale areas is good proof that Shiva worship was at a stronger place in this era. According to the Palamottai Dravidian inscription, which is an important source that reveals the worship of Shiva in Kantale in the past, a Tamil widow named Nagaichchani gave gifts of gold and

money for the rituals and maintenance of the temple in memory of her husband. It is also clear that religious rites were conducted in the same inscription; it is further stated that dances and songs were performed for the temple ceremonies and the objects offered to the temple were handed over to the Velaikkarayans to be taken care of.

Similarly, Polonnaruwa No. 02 Shiva Temple and Kantale Soleswaran Temple fulfill the religious needs of Hindu devotees in these areas even now, but their function is very different from the past. It also differs from the functioning of a typical Hindu temple. These temples are not as visited by devotees as the ancient temples like Koneswaram or Munneswaram. The reason may be the absence of religious legends built around them. Brahmin clans are not employed as priests in these temples. The reason for this, the temple officials said, was that the temple did not have enough assets to hire a *Brahmin-born Kurukkal*. Only on Tuesdays and Fridays in Polonnaruwa No. 2 Shiva Temple, a special kapu mahatka comes for teava and the service of a *Brahmin Kurukkal* is only available to the temple once a year for the temple puja. Some days a Sinhalese woman performs the pooja here. The rituals and pujas performed in a normal Shiva temple are not performed here. Since tourists visit this place, considering it an archeological place, the devotees do not follow the proper rituals such as washing their feet before entering the temple. However, there are also Buddhist and Hindu devotees who visit this temple from distant places, considering it as a place of special auspiciousness. In an area like Polonnaruwa, where the Dravidian population is minimal, this kind of worship related to Shiva is done on the archaeological basis of the temple. These are called Kovilas, which are maintained for the purpose of Dravidian devotees. At the same time, the field studies conducted in connection with the said temple revealed that the participation of the people in this Shiva temple is low compared to the deities such as Mari Amman, Murugan, Pillar, Kali or

Bhadrakali Amman, which are held nearby in the established areas of Shiva temples.

Also, in this research, identifying the regional distribution of Shiva temples and interpreting modern social attitudes through it, a lot of unique information was revealed. The study samples revealed that the ancient Ishwara temple maintained its functionality in relation to the entire country, but the social tendency to build the modern Shiva temple is at a minimum level. According to the statistics of registered temples of the Department of Hindu Religious Affairs, apart from the northern province of the island, the Shiva temple is mostly located in the eastern province. It accounts for approximately 25-30 out of the total number of registered Hindu temples of approximately 1500. The Central area has 1164 Hindu temples but only 04 registered Shiva temples. Sabaragamu and Uva provinces have 561 and 452 in terms of Hindu temple distribution. But there are only 02 and 03 Shiva temples in both the provinces respectively. Among them, the Ishwara Temples associated with Kataragama Puda Bima, representing Uva Province, are not registered with the Hindu Religious Department. Out of the total 336 Hindu temples, the percentage of Shiva temples belonging to the Western Province is almost 3 percent. 114 temples are also established in the North-West Province, but only the Munneswaram temple and the Ramalingeswaran temple, which belonged to the study sample, are Shiva temples. South and North Central Provinces are the two provinces with the least number of Hindu temples on the island. There are 68 and 31 temples respectively, but only 01 Shiva temple exists (Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, 2023).

According to the above research data reports, it is clear that the spread of Shiva temples in the island is quantitatively minimal. The fact that the total number of registered Shiva temples is less than 10 is a good indicator of the modern spread of Shiva worship, especially in Central and Uva provinces

where there is a large representation of Hindu people. Especially in the Eastern Province, the construction of Shiva temples is relatively high compared to other provinces, but it is also very low compared to the total number of temples. Compared to the registered Shiva temples, Vishnu temples in the Eastern Province are also quantitatively more valuable (Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, 2023). It is a matter to be noted that the spread of Shiva temples in a country where a religious institution has been established in which the philosophy of Shaiva philosophy has been practiced since the past among the Dravidian people is at a low level. Especially compared to other temples around the same place, the presence of people's participation in the daily worship activities is at a minimum. According to the temple elders and priests, these are some of the main factors that are based on such a background. Generally, religious shrines where a deity resides fall under two categories; religious and non-religious temples. A temple of the religious category should be maintained by the Brahmin priests themselves and Shiva temples are taken under it. Temples run by Shaivite priests called "**Pandarams**" which do not require the services of Brahmin clansmen themselves are considered non-religious temples. The field study revealed that most of the popular temples in Sri Lanka belong to this second category. The construction of a Shiva temple belonging to the religious category and the restoration of the statue should be done in accordance with the architectural arts.

Likewise, the doors of the temple are opened between 4-5 in the morning and at 5.30 in the morning, 7.30 in the morning, 12 in the afternoon, 5-6 in the evening, 7.30 in the night and 9-12 in the night by reciting Shiva mantras, Pratima Abhishekaya, Rudraksha Mala Pooja, Aarti Pooja, performing daily rituals such as *prasada pooja*, *beli patra pooja*, etc. is also a rather complicated process. Due to the need for properly trained priests to perform the puja rituals, the complexity of the temple worship practices was identified as a

factor for the reduction in the construction of Shiva temples. Although there is a rule that the person working in a Shiva temple must be a *Brahmin Kurukkal*, it was also revealed that due to the shortage of *Brahmin Kurukkals*, some Shiva temples under study do not have Brahmin priests. Building a temporary temple near a highway or in some other small area and offering sacrifices to the deities is the tendency of people to believe in God in rural areas. The temple built for "**God Amman**" as well as the small temples built for gods such as "**Murugan**" and "**Pillayar**" with different names spread all over the island are examples of this. In particular, the temple built for the village deities or the deities who are considered to be the guardian deity of that area is limited to a deity statue installed in a very simple building. Thus, permission for the private worship of the devotees in any place was done in connection with a Shiva temple. The temple guardians believe that it is not possible. It is a challenge to build a temple using physical and material resources properly. The personal beliefs of the temple designer and the needs of the devotees are also decisive factors in the construction of Hindu temples. Generally, the construction of Hindu temples is done through private donations. There is a low tendency to build Shiva temples due to the decision to create temples based on personal tastes and social needs. The field study also confirmed how some old Shiva temples were later renamed according to popular deity concepts in those areas and came into use among the public.

Also, it is significant that the installation of Shiva temples in Sri Lanka is mostly centered on the urban environment. It shows that the urban people are more flexible towards Shiva worship than the rural people. The Gayatri temple established in the city of Nuwara Eliya, which belongs to the Central Province, was also revealed to be a place frequented by urban people and a place where the participation of the rural community was low. In the other provinces of the island, the greater participation of the urban population is evident in the Shiva temples established in

urban areas. There are very few Shiva temples established in the plantation culture of Central and Uva provinces (Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, 2023). Out of the total 1313 temples belonging to the Central Province, the temples built for "**Goddess Amman**" account for about 50%. In India in the 19th and 20th centuries as well, goddesses were the most common objects of worship among rural Hindus. "**Amman**" means "**Mother Goddess**" or Honorable Woman. "**Maryamman**" is a goddess of rain and pestilence, especially smallpox. "**God Amman**" is worshiped by South Indians as their "**Mother Goddess**". Among the people of South Indian origin who work in the plantations of Uva and Central Provinces, Shaivism is not known mainly because of this "**worship of Amman**".

The concept of what Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra called "**Folk Religion**" is also evident from the Hindu Religious Corporation of Sri Lanka. The field studies revealed that the religion practiced by the Dravidian village community includes not only worship that can be called Hindu, but also many other rituals. The "**Amman faith**" is also a local and rural Chola traditional faith that has been incorporated into the Hindu tradition. Although Thundeniya and Dharmadasa stated that there is a rise of the Shakta tradition in Sri Lanka, surpassing the Shaiva tradition, some devout Shaivas do not accept it. According to Shaiva theory, Ganesha, Uma, and Skanda Kumara are various incarnations or incarnations of Lord Shiva himself. Accordingly, they believe that whoever worships these devotees who come with different natures, the ultimate result is to approach Lord Shiva. In relation to Shiva worship, the gods "**Murugan**" and "**Pillayar**" are worshiped in addition to Shakta worship in Vatu culture and other parts of the island. In the rural society of parts of India, like Tamil Nadu, there are temples built for deities like "**Muniswaran**", "**Mari Amman**", "**Ayanar**", "**Murugan**" in every village, but there is not even a single temple dedicated to them.

In consideration of the overall distribution of Hindu temples and shrines on the island, the North Central and Southern provinces are the provinces with the least number of temples. The book "**Yalpana Vaipavamalaya**" and Paul E. Peirce's reports mention that there was a temple named "**Santirasegaram**" or "**Thondeswaram**" belonging to the southern province in the past, but an Upulvan temple is currently established in that area. (Pieris and Litt, 1917, p. 17; Yapa Pathuna Genealogy, 2006, p. 3) Munneswaram, Naguleswaram, Koneswaram and Thiruketheeswaram temples mentioned in the legends as other ancient Ishwara temples were established as Ishwara temples in the later renovations and are still active today. At that time, Ishvara Bhakti was not expressed in any way. On the right side of the Ganeshwara Temple, established on the grounds of Deundara Upulavan Temple, there is a "**Nandi Bull Statue**" which is considered to be the vehicle of Lord Shiva, but there is no worship of Shiva. It seems that there is no motivation for Shiva worship not only among the Dravidian people, but also among the Sinhala Buddhists who worship the Hindu God, due to the growth of the worship of Kataragama centered on the Kataragama Pooja city and the worship of Upulvan and Vishnu centered on the Deundara Upulvan temple. Also, there is an Ishvara temple in the Kataragama Pooja area as well as Sellakataragama in relation to the Uva province, demarcating the southern province. Among them, Kataragama Puda Bima was identified as a place with Sinhala and Dravidian people's participation and Kataragama Ishvara Temple was identified as a place with very little public participation in comparison with other temples in Kataragama Puda Bima.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Thus through this research study we can confirm that the true philosophy of Hinduism is that there is one God and He is represented in various forms. It can be pointed out that Shiva is the greatest deity according to

traditional Shaivite religious teachings. This research study conducted in connection with several major Shiva temples established in Sri Lanka revealed that the worship of Shiva, which was a strong religious belief in the past, remains somewhat distant in modern religious practices. It can be pointed out as a unique situation that is known among the modern forms of deity worship in Sri Lankan Hindu society that the residual gods and goddesses are widely worshiped among the devotees compared to the worship of Shiva. The research results revealed several factors underlying such social distance. Shiva worship is established as a great traditional belief within the Hindu religious body. Due to this, it seems that there is more flexibility in this deity's refuge for the transcendental aspirations of the devotees. One of the main factors that prevented Shiva worship from being socialized as a personal form of worship was the fact that it was considered a religious belief to be believed by the seekers of param Nishtava, rather than a generator of worldly improvement. Due to Lord Shiva becoming special as a universal deity who governs the doctrines and principles of world creationism taught in the Hindu period, there is a belief among the devotees in another residual deity who is believed to fulfill the worldly aspirations of the devotees. There is a tendency to resort to other deities belonging to the Saivite tradition as well as outside it belonging to village religion. The popularization of a deity dedicated by devotees to simpler daily life expectations and bara-hara and beliefs in those deities with simpler and easier physical factors have primarily led to the departure of Shiva worship from daily worship in the home.

The popularity of Lord Shiva is far from the common people and the rural community because many local deity worship systems that believe in the fulfillment of daily worldly expectations of the religious devotees were created as Chula traditional beliefs belonging to the village religion. It was clear from the study sample that on the subject of personal

worship conducted with the aim of attaining worldly expectations, many people consider a certain deity as a "**Real Deity**" according to their beliefs based on their own desire and preference, but the tendency of that deity to be "**Shiva**" is low. This was confirmed by the Shiva temples spread all over the island as well as the religious behavior of the devotees. Overall, the study sample revealed that Shiva worship is far from common folk practices, and this situation is more pronounced in rural social contexts than in urban society. Another factor that influenced Lord Shiva to distance himself from the common religious practices is the visual image of this god built in the minds of people as a god of destruction. Because of this, the general devotion to Lord Shiva is a feeling of fear. Shiva means 'love' in Hinduism. Love means 'Shiva'. There is no difference between the concept of Shiva and love. Expectation of children is identified as one of the main worldly desires associated with the worship of Lord Shiva, which is practiced among common folk practices. As a concept of fertility associated with Linga worship, it seems that the worship of Shiva is still among the people's belief in the expectation of children. Among the religious practices of modern society, many people seem to be attracted to the religious beliefs held for the purposes of 'Kalu Abhichara'. Here it is important to identify the Abhichara Concept first. The "Concept of Abhichara" is the belief in people in transcendental situations. And Abhichara means subduing the supernatural forces in some way. Also, these behaviors can be divided into two basic categories; "Sudu Abhichara and Kalu Abhichara". Sudu Abhichara is done for the good of people and Sudu Abhichara helps to get rid of diseases and sufferings. Examples include visiting villages, Bodhi Puja, Pirith chanting etc. What is done to harm people is called black behavior. In this way, one anticipates the evils and diseases of others, and performs related actions to get rid of them. Examples of Kalu Abhichara include witchcraft, flags, revenge, poison poetry, edicts, etc. In studying modern religious

beliefs, this research study found that Shiva worship is never used for such black behavior expectations, even if the existing religious beliefs are more attractive. Among the Hindus living in Sri Lanka as well as the Buddhist devotees, this divinity and linked religious features that have existed since the past have become folk practices of Sri Lankan society in different ways. Accordingly, it was revealed through the overall research results that the worship of Shiva has become distant in the modern consciousness of people due to the socialization of deities belonging to rural religions and various social and religious factors.

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