



# Hindu Temples in Sri Lanka



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## FOREWORD

By

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This booklet, printed and published by the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs of my Ministry, aims to introduce some of the outstanding Hindu Temples in Sri Lanka, especially to the outside world and to the pilgrims who come over to Sri Lanka in search of inner peace and self-realisation. The booklet also briefly outlines the significance of the presence of vast number of Hindu temples in Sri Lanka.

Most of these temples are very ancient, aging over 5000 years and have reference in Vedic Hymns, devotional songs and in Mythology and Puranas.

Another Tamil publication of the Department, which is now in print, carries a full list of these temples numbering over 1500. An English version will follow soon. In the meantime, this booklet presently brought out would serve as an introductory one.

I do hope that this booklet would be of interest and beneficial to everyone who is deeply concerned with the development and preservation of Hindu Religion and Hindu Culture.

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## HINDU TEMPLES OF SRI LANKA

Out of the living and practising religions of the World today, Hindu Religion is acknowledged by renowned researchers as the most ancient.

The Hindu Religion is called the "Sanadana Dharma" which according to unbiassed opinion is the fundamental concept that had spread all over the globe even before Vedic Hymns were formulated and codified by the Great Rishis and Munis of Bharat.

The Archaeological finds, ruins and monuments that had been spotted and identified by the experts in this field, established beyond doubt, that the fundamental religious thoughts and religious symbols expounded in the Sanadana Dharma had reached places like Central America, South America, Africa, Europe, East Asia including Indonesia and Australia, even before records of history were made.

It is the Sanadhana Dharma that ultimately blossomed into the present form of Hindu Religion, embodying within itself six divisions of worship, namely Ganapathya, Saiva, Vaishnava, Saktha, Kaumara and Sowra.

Deities representing these six divisions of Hindu Religion and their abodes called the Temples are found in abundance in the sub-continent of India which is called the Bharath Punniya Boomi.

The Hindu Temples found in India are numerous and they run into six figure numbers.

Next to India, the other two countries which identify themselves with Hinduism are the Kingdom of Nepal and the Republic of Sri Lanka.

Nepal is all-in-all a Hindu Kingdom, ruled by a dynasty of Hindu Monarchs. However, the number of Hindu temples in Nepal, are not so many in comparison to Sri Lanka.

Next to India it is Sri Lanka which has several hundreds of Hindu Temples located all over the country from Naguleswaram in the North to the Maha Vishnu Temple at Devendra Munai in the South, and Munneswaram in the west to Thirukoneswaram in the East. Hence, most fittingly Sri Lanka is called "Siva Boomi".

The claim that second to India, it is Sri Lanka that has more number of Hindu Temples which are still being adorned and worshipped by not only the Hindu population of Sri Lanka, but also by a large portion of Buddhist devotees is established by the fact that several thousands of Hindu devotees and Hindu tourists visit Sri Lanka to pay homage to Hindu temples such as Kataragama Murugan Temple, Thiruketheeswaram Siva Temple, Trincomalee Konesar Temple, Jaffna Nallur Murugan Temple, Thondamanaru Murugan Temple, Pt. Pedro Alvar Temple, Munneswaram Siva Temple, Matale Muthu Mariamman Temple, Batticaloa Mamangeswarar Temple, Mandur Murugan Temple, Colombo Kathiresan Temple and Ponnambalavaneswarar Temple of Colombo.

As matter of fact, the four accepted Hindu Saints of Saivism who had sung thousands of devotional hymns on Hindu Deities, have chosen to praise a few Eswara temples. Of these,

two temples namely Thiruketheeswaram and Thirukoneswaram are in Sri Lanka. Apart from these, there are other Eswara Temples of name and fame in Sri Lanka. They are Naguleswaram, Thanthontreeswaram and Munneswaram.

The six forms of ancient Hindu worship are still prevalent in Sri Lanka and one can find Siva Temples, Vaishnava Temples, Sakthi Temples, Ganapathy Temples, Muruga Temples and Nava Graha installations with Sun God as the main deity. These temples are found not in isolation but they are found all over the country, inter-mingled. This is a proof that ancient Hindu forms of worship have been very popular in Sri Lanka as was in the mainland of India.

Besides being the land of ancient glory and a country of Hindu Temples of significant records, Sri Lanka also enjoys the sole pride that it is only in Sri Lanka in the whole world that a separate Ministry to foster and propagate the Hindu Religion and Hindu Culture has been created. The credit is further glorified by the fact that the First Ever World Hindu Conference organised at the Governmental level too was held in Sri Lanka in April, 1982.

In pursuance with the resolution of the World Hindu Conference there has now been established in Colombo, a World Hindu Research Centre, under the auspices of the Ministry of Regional Development, Hindu Religion and Hindu Culture and Tamil Affairs of Sri Lanka.

With a well-based organisation as mentioned above it augurs well for a timely and sincere attention to be paid towards the preservation of our treasures, namely the Hindu Temples, the propagation of the Hindu Dharma, pursuance a systematic and well-planned programme of work to co-ordinate with the Hindu Bodies the World over and in allied matters.

The only constraint, we Hindus today are faced with is the lack of adequate funds to push through the work in order to translate our lofty thoughts and ideas into meaningful action for the purpose.

Hence this appeal is made with the fervent hope that you would give serious and sincere thought to our efforts by making generous contributions to make this venture a success.

A Hindu Cultural Fund to accommodate all donations and contributions has already been created by an Act of Parliament of Sri Lanka.

The schedule following, shows the particulars of a few of the important Hindu Temples in Sri Lanka.

**Particulars of temples in Sri Lanka (Province-wise)**

1. Northern Province	.. ..	1000 Temples
2. Eastern Province	.. ..	650 Temples
3. Southern Province	.. ..	15 Temples
4. Western Province	.. ..	30 Temples
5. Central Province	.. ..	26 Temples
6. North Western Province	.. ..	30 Temples
7. North Central Province	.. ..	20 Temples
8. Uva Province	.. ..	500 Temples
9. Sabaragamuwa	.. ..	35 Temples

**SOME IMPORTANT TEMPLES:**

***NAGULESWARAN:***

An ancient temple in the Jaffna District in the Northern Province, Naguleswaram was attributed this name as a Saint with the face of 'Nagula' (mongoose) worshipped this temple and had his Nagula face changed after an ocean-bath at the holy waters by this temple.

***MUNNESWARAM:***

Situated in the North West of Sri Lanka, this temple is said to have been installed by God Brahma himself. It is also said that Sri Rama worshipped at this temple to get his "Brahama hathi" sin washed off after the Rama-Ravana war.

***MAMANKESWARAM:***

Like Munneswaram, Mamankeswaram also is said to have been worshipped by Sri Rama. This is situated in the Batticaloa District of the East in Sri Lanka. There is a legend to say that a 'Lingam' brought for poojah by Sri Hanuman was dropped in the holy waters by this temple.

***THANTONTREESWARAMS:***

There are two Thantontreeswaram temples in Sri Lanka, one at Odduchuttan in the Vavuniya District and the other in Kokkatticholai in the Batticaloa District. The 'Lingams' at these temples are said to have originated by themselves and there are many stories or miracles around these shrines.

***THIRUKKONESWARAM:***

One of the most popular shrines in Sri Lanka, Thirukoneswaram is situated on a rock facing the sea in Trincomalee which has a natural harbour, in the East coast of Sri Lanka. The legend refers to the rock as a piece of it was shattered and thrown-off by Lord Vayu (wind). It is also called 'Thakshana Kailayam'. This temple is said to have been worshipped by King Rawana. One of the four great Hindu Saints, namely, Gnansambanthar, had sung devotional hymns on this temple.

***THIRUKKETEESWARAM:***

Like the Thirukoneswaram, Thirukketeeswaram enjoys the fame of having sung devotional songs on it by Saint Thirugnana-sampanthar and Saint Suntharamoorthy Nayanar. The Temple is situated on the Banks of Palavi near the city of Mannar in the Northern coast of Sri Lanka. The great night of Siva (Maha Siva Rathri) is celebrated on this temple on a great

**scale, when devotees carry the 'Theertham' in pots and are allowed to pour the 'holy water upon the 'Maha Lingam' themselves. (Abishekam).**

#### ***SRI PONNAMBALA VANESWARAR:***

Dedicated to God Siva, this ancient temple is situated in the heart of Colombo city.

#### ***DEVINUWARA VISHNU TEMPLE:***

Also known of Devendramunai Vishnu Temple, This on the South coast of Sri Lanka near Matara and dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Not only Hindus, large number of Sinhala devotees also flock to worship at this historic temple.

#### ***KATHIRKAMAM:***

A legend connect this most famous temple popularly known as Kataragama, to Lord Muruga who is said to have come to wed Valli. This temple is also in the Southern part of Sri Lanka and draws a large number of devotees irrespective of religion and race.

#### ***SELVA SANNATHI TEMPLE:***

This is called the 'Kataragama' of the North and devoted to Lord Muruga, having an ancient history. This too is one of the famous temples of the North.

#### ***NALLUR KANTHASAMY TEMPLE:***

An abode of Lord Skanda, this temple is situated in Jaffna in the North. Like the Selva Sannathi temple, the annual festival of this temple is also very famous, and attracts large gathering of devotees to the temple festivals.

