

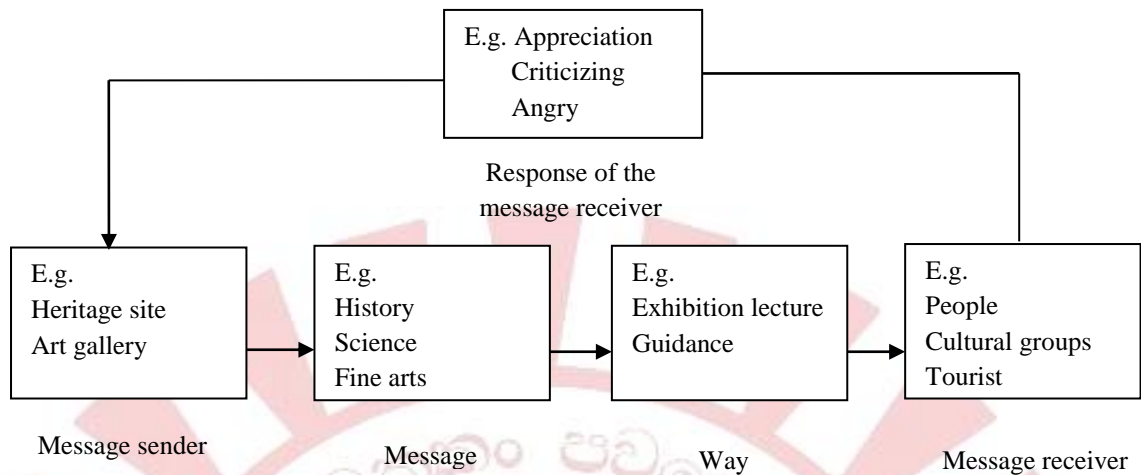
# **Physical religious heritage interpretation process for the harmony of post war period**

**(A case study about Trincommale within Sri Lankan context)**

## **Heritage & heritage interpretation**

Heritage is a broad concept. It is important to understand heritage base factors & an approach to the meaning of heritage than heritage interpretation. Heritage is always base on the factor of 'identification'. People identify their emotional, usage or cultural values as heritage (Fielder 2008. vii). Love, wonder, marvelous, identity, beauty, respect & spirit are some examples for emotional values. Used values mean functionalism, economic value, social value, educational value & political value. Document information, history, archaeology, consciousness knowledge, landscape & scientific values represent the cultural value. However, these all values or one of value guides to the identification something as a heritage. There are three methods to consolidate those identified heritage. They are generated, achievement & imputation. These heritages illustrates thing which became heritage from creation as generated heritage, institutional identification as achieved heritage & appreciations as imputation heritage (Byrne 2008.150) Though heritage depends on emotional, used or cultural values, most of them was the social cultural values. But we cannot forget that a heritage of some group might not be heritage for another group. Heritage is named as heritage due to only the favor of them. This feature is caused for creating conflicts. So, it is an important factor for making conflicts can be recognized with the broad consideration of heritage concept. Though heritage is crucially a socio political feature, it should be always without any forces. There are no any conflicts. But, conflicts have begun with heritage interpretation process. Conflicts powerfully activated due to the agenda which has been prepared according to socio political & other institutional situations. Some conflicts elongated to armed wars. But, heritage interpretation process should be implemented with well organized, academic approach which sensitive for responses & without misusages.

## Physical evidence of religious heritage



Religious heritage is a subdivision of cultural heritage. It is an identification of something which is respected by some personal or group of people. Religious leader, philosophy, books, clergy, rituals culture related history & material culture can be named as heritage sections. Though it seems that mostly heritage depends on emotional value, some has been 'identified' on used also cultural values. Most of religious features depend on emotional values. As an example, people are highly emotional with heritage which achieved or fulfilled as heritages on believes, spiritual, offering, respect related emotions. People vision emotional heritage as thing which they have responsibility to protect or establish its future. So, people acted to protect or establish the future of religious heritage which depend on emotional values. Also, they sometimes tend to respond in rough way with the facing of various threats to their religions. In present, this situation has become prime factor for some armed struggles.

Heritage has two divisions. They are tangible & intangible heritage or physical & non physical heritage. Both features can be recognized from religious heritage. Buddhist stūpa is a kind of physical heritage & intangible heritage of rituals. There are no unique differences between physical & nonphysical heritage. Specially, this is a very justifiable situation with religious heritage. Because, these two sections essentially connected with each other. We shall think about a Buddhist stūpa in a non Buddhist society as an example. There are no any religious activities. As a result of that, there is no intangible heritage. But, stūpa will be protected in that kind of non Buddhist society. So, sustain of a tangible heritage established without intangible heritage. In present world, religious monuments has protected through other identification than religious value. Egypt pyramids can be mentioned as examples. They are appreciated as

world heritage with historical & archaeological value also which were built on various emotional knowledge of various subjects not as a religious heritage.

So, we should remember that religious heritage always connects with intangible factors. There are various faces of physical religious heritage. It represents things from very tiny to macro level monument with any kind of size of any kind of factor such as antiqueness, value, simple or complex. Most important thing is that, recognizer of it as his own religious heritage. Sometimes, it might be an illogical so-called identification. But, any one will never approve of decrying, challenging or fault usage of interpretation for whatever identification.

There are many religions in secular world. Most of people are following any kind of religion. So, conflicts about religion & religion heritage are an expected situation. Decrying & threaten can be happened knowingly or unknowingly. Most of these threaten target tangible heritage than intangible heritage. People attract to physical heritage than religious activities. When we consider about Buddhist stūpa as an example, people are sensitive with physical heritage of the stūpa than its related religious activities. Also, people use their own physical religious heritage to attack other religious sectors. So, it is clear that physical religious heritage is the prime factor for these kinds of conflicts. We should remember that the way of heritage interpretation creates the basement for conflicts than heritage identification.

### **Local face**

Sri Lanka is a multi cultural country. Even there are chronological differences, every religion has clear historical sustain. So they have physical religious heritage in Sri Lanka. Various specific characteristics can be recognized according to geographical expansion and density of each group of people. There are various religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Islamic in Sri Lanka. Buddhism is the religion with highest followers. Also, Hindus and Muslim have been living in Sri Lanka since ancient times. There are many Buddhist physical religious heritages in Sri Lanka due to the high density of Buddhists. They spread all over the country. Most of Hindu and Islamic physical religious heritages spread in north and eastern Sri Lanka. It is the result of high density of Tamils and Muslims in these areas. There is high density of physical religious heritage of Tamil people in highland land areas due to high density of Indian Tamils in these areas.

There was high possibility to occur various religious conflicts due to the various religious sectors in one country. Mostly, they were the results of nationality, Nationalism concept, Nationalism folks and economic factors. Though there were not conflicts due to religious factors or physical religious heritage, they were always became crucial factors for religious heritage conflicts. Especially these kinds of conflicts expanded until armed wars.

When consider about 30 year war in Sri Lanka was the highest fulfillment of conflicts between various racial groups who represent as nations in Sri Lanka. It crucially affected to the institutional body of the country. Though religious factors was not directly affected for that religion was a factor which has been used by partners who involved with the war to demonstrate their identities. Because most of Sinhalese are Buddhists and most of Tamils are Hindus. Also religious related cultures connect with each of their illustrated identities.

So, partners who involved with the war have used religion directly for there fighting fulfillments. Due to that, physical religious heritage became targets to each others. Specially, Tamil terrorists converted these characteristics for their benefit and it used to create racialism problems and angry. Tamil terrorist attacked to the temple of tooth which is the unique heritage of Buddhists can be mentioned as example.

There are religious conflicts not only between Tamils and Sinhalese but also between Sinhalese and Muslims. Though there was not any war between them, there were various incidents like religious heritage damaging especially various attacks to Buddhist heritage by Islam followers can be recognized during the last period of time. But those conflicts had never elongated to a war. But most of conflicts between Sinhalese and Muslim depend on physical religious heritage. Default of heritage interpretation is the main cause of these conflicts.

Teachings of most religions create for the benefit of people and society. So we have to question that how physical religious heritage which connected with these teachings became causes for with create conflicts. But according to our opinion religious heritage can be used for harmony with well organized disciplinary interpretative manner. Especially research about heritage interpretation process is important for that. It is important to more consideration about heritage interpretation process in Sri Lanka under the post war condition. Heritage interpretation process in konesvaram site in Trincommale will be an accurate study in this research with the considering the best way of heritage interpretation process during post war period. Also, it will be concentrated to the make use of it for harmony and converted it in to a proposed model for sites with conflicts and other religions heritage sites.

## **Incidental Study in Konesvaram, Trincommale**

Konesvaram Hindu temple is located in part of the peninsula including Trincommale Mountain with Buddhist and Hindu heritage. There are residents and shops of Tamils and Muslims in this area which belong to Songavadi Grama Niladari division, Kadavan sectarian division Trincommale District with the influence of European. Feddrick fortress which was built by Dutch and developed by British & currently use as an armed force barrack. This is highly attracted place of local foreigners. Buddhist, Hindus also Muslims reach to this place is a specific thing.

## **Historic and Social Background**

According to *Mahavamsa*, this area was consisting of settlements since before Christ era, Because, Gokannatitta which was the earliest migrated neighbor is located in this area. *Mahavamsa* mentions that prince Rāma, brother of prince Bhaddakacchāhayana located Gokanna village. (Mahavamsa chapter 9, stanza 9). After that, *mahavamsa* again bring us to the mention about a Buddhist monastery which was built by destroying a building called '*tirtaka āla*' by king Mahasen (276 - 303 AD). '*Tirtaka āla*' means Tirkārāmaya. So, it might be a jain temple. (Mahavamsa stanzas 37, 40, 41). After that, King Aggabodhi v Sponsored to a *padhānghara* monastery in this area. *Padhānghara* was a monastic type which built for meditation monks.

Though there are not information about Hindus in literature recourses, folklores reveal that they have been continuing their religious activities since considerable period. It is believed that Trincomalee word emerged from the word of '*tirugonamalei*' or sacred '*gona*' mountain in Tamil version. There are clear archeological evidences with Buddhist and Hindu identities. Specially parts of Buddhist statues which can be belonged to medieval or late period of Anuradhapura era and sacred foot prints, seated stones which can be belonged to early period of Anuradhapura era found from the site. It provides evidences for being a Buddhist religious heritage since early period of Anuradhapura. Also there are archaeological evidences of Hindus in this site including stone pillars which can be assumed to be a Hindu temple in medieval period. Saint Francis records about the pagoda of this site (word of pagoda has been used for stūpa also Hindu temples). These stone pillars might belong to the temple. It can be assumed that Europeans removed it for the safe of the fortress. Light house which is

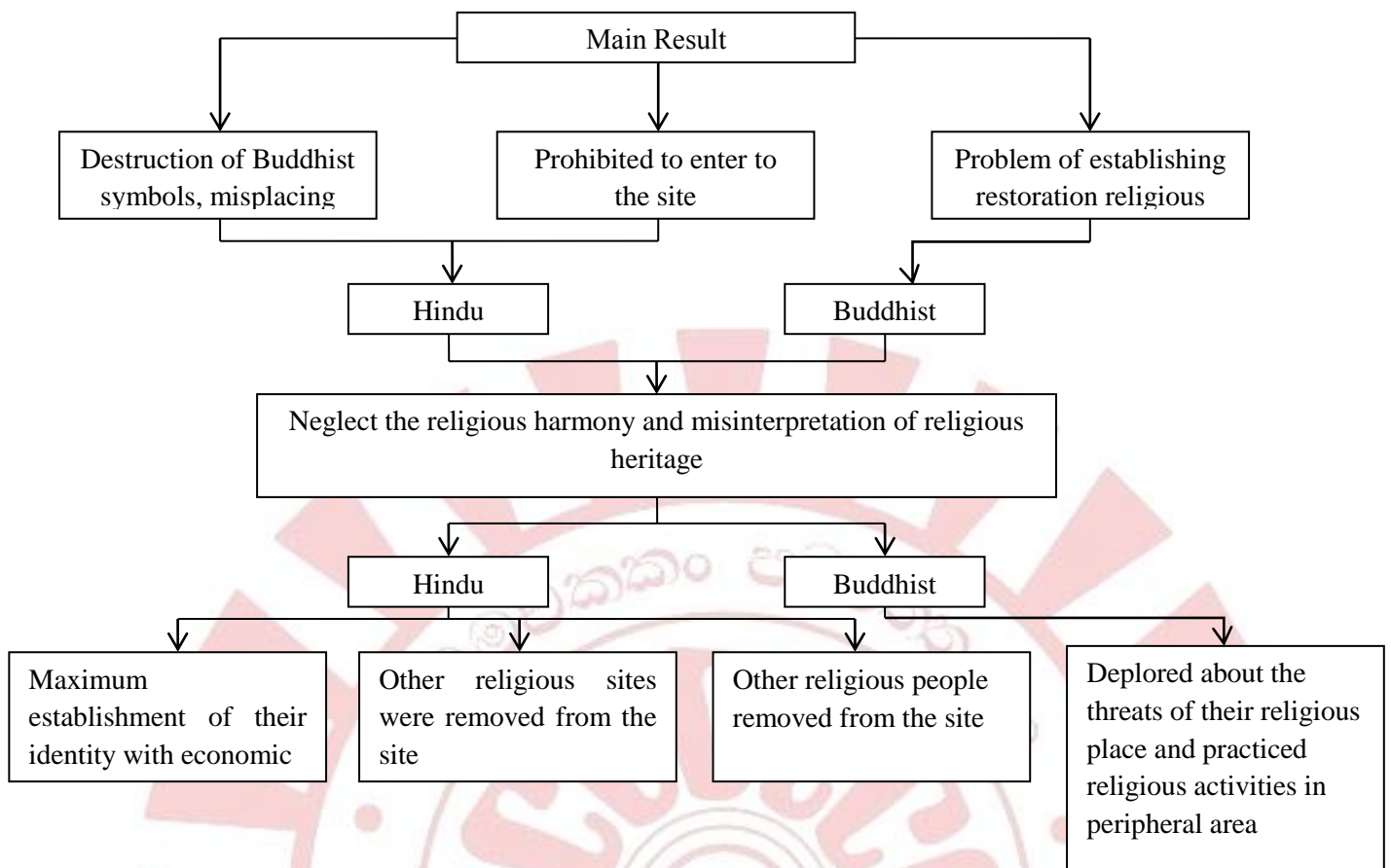
considered as a religious symbol appears on the surface of a rock crop in front of the Konesvaram temple could be a part of that ancient Hindu temple. Hindu people have practiced various religious activities before constructing the present Konesvaram temple. There are various Hindu images including Siva lingam which can be belonged more than 100 years.

Apart from material culture, there are many Hindu beliefs about Trincommale. Some of these folks have connected with myths & some of folks are the results of matching with later historical incidents. Trincommale is recognized as southern mountain peak. There are various rituals about beliefs that Gokanna got the vision of goddess Konesvara & her husband Guru. The site has been connected with Rama - Ravana story with the belief of the site as the battle field of Rama - Ravana war. It is believed that spaces between reefs are scars of that war. Hindus believe that residents of gods are located in this area & they practice various rituals for shaking them.

Today Konesvaram temple & many other Hindu temples can be seen in the area. These temples have been devoted for gods & historical heroes in myths. Also, there are various spaces for secular purposes mostly for votives. As an example, small cradles are tied in a tree which faces to the cemetery in front of the temple for the expectation of children by Buddhist & Hindu worshippers. Comparatively there is low attraction to the lower part of the site. It is little disjunctive from people due to the entrance through military barracks.

### **Pre & inter war period**

Though presently, there is a better situation in the Konesvaram temple area, but it was a specific conflict area for physical religious heritage during pre war period. Specially, Hindus destroyed sites with Buddhist identity & Buddhists tried to prevent from that & protect their heritage (see Sansoti commission report). Buddhists & Hindus worshipped this place during colonial period. They could be able establish, preserve & rebuilt their religious places in 1950. Thereafter, conflicts have begun before spending two years. Localize problems & conflicts in all over the country were main reasons for that. Due to the spreading of so-called Elam state concept, they tried to remove monuments with Sinhalese - Buddhist identity affected to this place. We accurately analyze the reason for this conflict in the site.



Later the conflict between Buddhists & Hindus has begun. That conflict exploded through the destruction of physical religious heritage in the site.

1. 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1964 - Cut the sacred bo tree near the temple.
2. Tamils tried to prevent the effort of laid up the Buddhist statue in peripheral area.
3. Buddhist did not participate to temple's preservation & appreciate their work.

(see Sansoni commission report)

This cold war was a good encouragement for racialists. It showed that TRO organization which expanded fast during 1970 in Trincommale played a vital role to these incidents into conflict. So, conflict connected with physical religious heritage indirectly led to the late war condition in Sri Lanka. Also, war partners directly intervened to the religious heritage related problems.

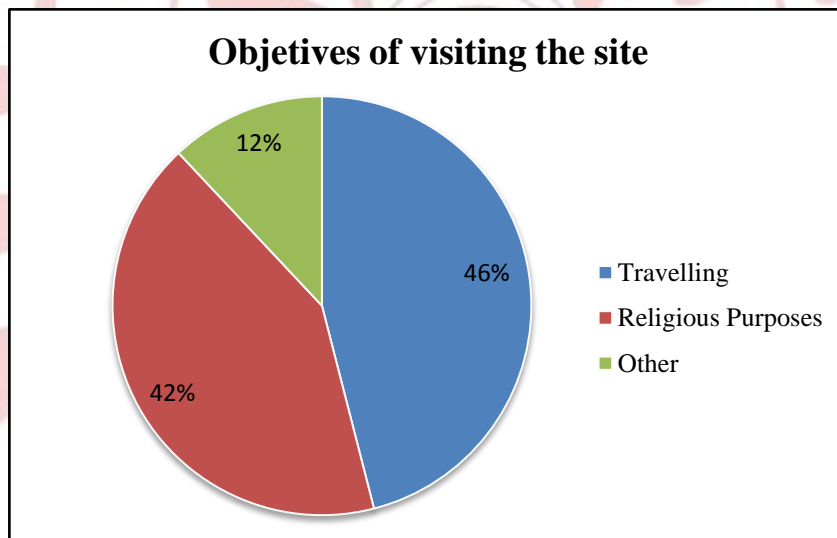
The site isolated during war period & several times it was named as a banded site due to security problems. But interest about the site never became less. Many Buddhist & Hindu

devotees reached to the site during armistice period in 2005. According to our research, the rating increased from 10% during that period.

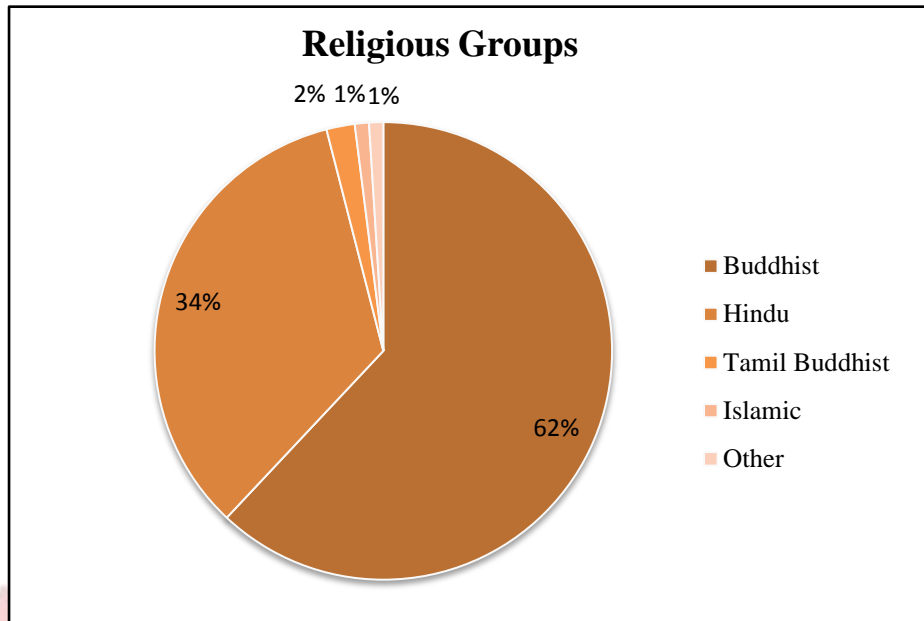
Conflicts in pre war period also implemented during later war period in the site. Specially, the protest campaign has launched against to the restoration of Gokanna vihāra. Whatever, military forces involved to solve those problems. In post war period, many devotees reached to the site than previous periods.

### **Post war period & heritage interpretation**

In the post war era, above religious heritage become more attractive area. But, most of them come to the site with the purpose of travelling. According to our research which was conducted during 09<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2014, 42% of 500 people come to the site for religious purposes.



When consider about their religious group, 62 Buddhists, 34 Hindus, 02 Tamil Buddhists, 01 Islamic & 01 other can be recognized.



Another question has been asked by targeting the ownership of the site. 32% of them refused to answer to the question. But, 28% Buddhists said that Hindus were the real owners of the site. 30% said that this was a heritage of both parties. 78% among Buddhists, 20% among Hindus & 2% among Tamil Buddhists also agreed with that answer.

These samples could be used to interpret past & present conditions of the site. Though it was a random survey, it highly illustrated about the religious heritage of the site. Even there are no any harmful activities for physical religious heritage, the conflict of heritage interpretation or scarify for their protection is still continuously implementing after the armed war. There is no establishment of one other's tradition in the site.

Even the site is with multi religious importance, that circumstance has not been accepted by most of people. According to those samples as a model for people's approaching for sites, 99% Buddhists reached to Konesvaram temple but only 14% Hindus visited Buddhist places. So, it seemed that there is no improvement of harmony between one another.

### **Physical religious heritage interpretation for the harmony**

According to our opinion, the ways of religious heritage interpretation in Trincommale should be changed. One shot activities such as awareness programs; legal actions & guidance are not

suitable actions for this site. Especially programs for targeting peace & harmony will be useless.

First people should be given a clear & good knowledge about religious teachings. As an example, non violence principle in Buddhism can be mentioned. Some of similar teachings are in other religions also. Naturally, religions have theories & qualities for the harmony. Specially, it is more popular among Buddhism & Hinduism. Religious identities are reasonably established & interpreted them as a common experience is the approach of physical religious heritage interpretation in Sri Lanka. Through that, every religious person who represents any race can be able to recognize & interpret physical religious heritage of their religious beliefs. As an example, stūpa is a common experience of every religious person which conserved heritage by chambering. Because of most religions believe about life after death. Archaeological & historical value should be improved parallel with religious value. Religious identity should be established. But it should not hurt others. Religious activities like *vel* festival, *murutān* offering should be practiced together with people of other religions. Also, religious centers should organize welfare activities with all religious people. As an example, various committees with multi cultural leaders & members. Knowledge about folklores should be improved. That kind of approach leads to religious harmony also solution for this conflict among religious groups.

### **Conclusion**

There are many sites with these types of conflicts in Sri Lanka. This research provides some kind of model of heritage interpretation process for the harmony between various religion groups. Specially, man has always attraction for his ancestors. It is common for every cultural group. So, there is a special attraction for artifacts. Emerging of that kind of attractions will cause to own identical attraction. As an example Buddhist monasteries with Buddhist religious identity will cause to make attraction among Hindu people. Recognition of Hindu temple architecture can be expected from Buddhists. There are similarities between cultural groups due to the nurture from eastern philosophy. Today various processes can be identified from various sites by various cultural groups. Correct interpretation will cause to the improvement of cultural understanding. It is a great opportunity to make relationships between ethnic groups who were involved into war. According to our opinion, this kind of heritage interpretation will guide for solve long term conflicts between religious groups.

## References

Byrne, Denis, 2010. Heritage as social action. *The heritage reader*.ed. Rodney Harrison and others. London: Ramtledhe Taylor and Francis group

Fielder, B. M. 2008. *Conservation of historic buildings*, Oxford: Architectural press

Mathew, C.C. 1983. *Sri Lanka, an appeal to UNESCO to safeguard and preserve the cultural property in Sri Lanka danger by racial prejudice unlawful occupation or willful destruction*, Colombo: Minister of industries & scientific affairs

Sirisena, P. L. 2009. *Sri Gonamale or Trincommale harbor*, Colombo: Dayawamsa Jayakody pvt Limited

