



The Buddhist Visnu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture

John C. Holt

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John Holt's groundbreaking study examines the assimilation, transformation, and subordination of the Hindu deity Visnu within the contexts of Sri Lankan history and Sinhala Buddhist religious culture. Holt argues that political agendas and social forces, as much as doctrinal concerns, have shaped the shifting patterns of the veneration of Visnu in Sri Lanka.

Holt begins with a comparative look at the assimilation of the Buddha in Hinduism. He then explores the role and rationale of medieval Sinhala kings in assimilating Visnu into Sinhala Buddhism. Offering analyses of texts, many of which have never before been translated into English, Holt considers the development of Visnu in Buddhist literature and the changing practices of deity veneration. Shifting to the present, Holt describes the efforts of contemporary Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka to discourage the veneration of Visnu, suggesting that many are motivated by a reactionary fear that their culture and society will soon be overrun by the influences and practices of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.

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