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**AUTHENTICITY IN LIVING RELIGIOUS HERITAGE:
AN INVESTIGATION WITH REFERENCE TO DEVALA
OF RATNAPURA DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the authenticity of living religious heritage in the Devala of the Ratnapura District, focusing on how conservation interventions impact both tangible and intangible heritage. While such interventions are essential for sustaining religious sites, their effects on authenticity remain a critical concern. This research explores how these interventions influence religious heritage and identifies strategies for effective authenticity management. The study addresses three key aspects: defining authenticity in living religious heritage, understanding the interrelationship between tangible and intangible heritage, and developing strategies for authenticity management.

Through case studies of the Maha Saman Devalaya and Ugga Aluthnuwara Devalaya, the research identifies key values related to tangible and intangible heritage. A theoretical framework is developed to analyze different aspects of authenticity, including material, historical, place-based, spiritual, and aesthetic authenticity. The study highlights the significance of historical authenticity in encompassing both activity and physical authenticity. Physical authenticity includes material, historical, and aesthetic dimensions, while activity authenticity emphasizes historical, place-based, and spiritual aspects. Conservation interventions such as preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, reproduction, and reconstruction are examined for their impact on authenticity management.

The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Participants include experts, custodians, villagers, and devotees.

When defining authenticity in living religious heritage, findings reveal that for Maha Saman Devalaya, spiritual, material, and historical authenticity, whereas for Ugga Aluthnuwara Devalaya, spiritual, place-based, and historical authenticity hold greater importance. All these levels of intervention impact various aspects of physical authenticity, each to a different extent. Similarly, they influence aspects of activity authenticity to varying levels.

The study also highlights the strong interrelationship between tangible and intangible heritage. Cultural activities shape the significance of physical spaces, with the built environment designed to preserve intangible heritage.

When developing strategies for authenticity management, a critical aspect of authenticity management is balancing tangible and intangible conservation efforts. Strategies must align with local, national, and international criteria. Community participation is crucial, but the decline of skilled craftsmen threatens traditional practices. A Community Devala-based monitoring system is recommended to address this challenge.

The study proposes a Collective framework for authenticity management, aligning with heritage principles and sustainable conservation to preserve both tangible and intangible heritage of Devala in the Ratnapura District.

Keywords: Living religious heritage, Devala, Interventions, Authenticity

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