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**An investigation on the origin of the concept of “God Natha” in Sri Lanka**Anuruddhika Dilhani<sup>1</sup>

The main distinction between the Mahayana and the Theravadi Buddhism is the homage paid to Bodhisattva veneration by the devotees of the Mahayana Buddhism. According to the Theravadi Buddhist traditions, there had been seven Bodhisattvas namely, Vipassi, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusanda, Konagama, Kassapa and Gauthama in the past. In the beliefs of the Mahayana Buddhism, there are numerous Bodhisattvas out of whom, Avaloketheeshwara Bodhisattva is revered the most. The most common Bodhisattva in the Mahayana and the Theravadi religion sectors is Maithree Bodhisattva. But the Mahayana Buddhist devotees offer more preference to Avaloketheeshwara Bodhisattva than to Maithree Bodhisattva in their veneration. There are eight morphological figures in Avaloketheeshwara Bodhisattva and the suffix “Natha” is added to the endings of the names.

It is believed by the present day society that the suffix “Natha” is a substitution attributed to Maithree Bodhisattva. It is also denoted in many sources that god “Natha” will be enlightened as Lord Buddha in the future.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to investigate into the factual sources in order to ascertain the identity of “God Natha” and as to how the concept of “God Natha” was deep rooted in Sri Lanka, by way of associating primary and secondary sources and analyzing the data comparatively.

Although, a number of images of Avaloketheeshwara Bohisatva were recovered from various parts of Sri Lanka since the Anuradhapura era, the conception of “God Natha” came to light the most commencing from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The concept of ‘God Natha’ which developed during the period of Gampola Kingdom was declined in the Kotte period and re-emerged within the Kandyan regime uprising up to the present times, transforming Avaloketheeshwara Bodhisattva as a “God of wish” in the name of ‘Natha’ venerating with royal attribution.

**Key words:** *Theravadi Buddhism, Mahayana Biddhism, Avaloketheeshwara Bodhisattva, God Natha*