

LOCAL INCARNATIONS OF VIRGIN MARY IN JAFFNA

X. Jasmine Carmella & P. Kirubalini, Department of Fine Arts, University of Jaffna

This paper probes the cultural significance and meaning of the local incarnation of the Holy Virgin Mary through icons such as Selai Matha (Saree-wearing mother), Kondhe Matha (Mother with coiled hair do) and Lanka Matha (Mother of Lanka), in Jaffna.

These local incarnations are an excellent instantiation of H.P. Gerhard's argument that though "Christian art and culture introduced a new spirit, a new conception of the universe and a whole new set of values, their development was linked temporally and geographically with existing civilization and cultural trends and characteristics."

The idolization of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ and the great heroine of Christianity was 'culturalized' in Jaffna to fit in with the Hindu religion and culture that predominated when Catholic and Christian missionaries arrived in this region. Missionaries adopted cultural components of the guest culture in order to better establish their religion in the new environment while endeavouring not to alienate themselves from the guest culture.