

The Role of Group Communication in Establishing the Concept of God in Sri Lankan Society

(With special reference to *Dedimunda Deviyo* in *Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya* in Kegalle District)

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Abstract

The belief that there is an invisible force that can manipulate and control human life is the wonderful acceptance that was seen in every society of that time. When questioned as to how the concept of God entered the beliefs and faith of man, it is clear that it goes back to his earliest days. Although it is impossible to come to a firm conclusion about the sacrificial methods that existed at that time, the feeling of God must have been established since the day when the belief that there is an invisible force that can manipulate oneself, began. The abundant harvest was considered a gift from God for the happy life of the people. Likewise, humans believed that diseases and natural hazards were caused by God's anger. It is possible to study how this strong feeling which has been firmly established over millions of years, has been continuously strengthened from generation to generation through certain communication strategies. It is necessary to study what causes an invisible force to have such a strong influence on human thoughts and what effect communication has had on it. Accordingly, this study examined the effect of group communication on the establishment of the concept of God in Sri Lankan society. The research problem to be studied is how group communication affects the establishment of the concept of God in Sri Lankan society. It has been specifically investigated for the *Dedimunda Deviyo* in *Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya* in

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Kegalle District. Data required for the study was obtained through the survey method. The sample was randomly selected and limited to two hundred. Data was collected from them through questionnaires and interviews. In addition to that, further data was collected from the chief priest in charge of the *Thewa* of the *Deewalaya* through the interview method. Also, the required data was collected under the observation method. The collected data were analyzed in a mixed method using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It was concluded through this research that group communication has traditionally played a strong role in order to establish the concept of God Dedimunda in society.

Keywords: Dedimunda Deviyo, Beliefs and faith, Group communication, Sri Lankan societ

Introduction

Group communication is a speech, discussion, or lecture in which one person addresses a group. Communication in which more people participate than in interpersonal communication is called group communication, according to its participation examples of discussions, conferences, etc. The size of the team members may vary, but the minimum number of members is around three. The number of team members varies according to its objectives and goals so that it can be divided into two parts. Accordingly, a small group comprises three to 25 members, while groups with more than 25 are known as large groups.

In group communication, being public rather than private, as in interpersonal communication, is a prominent feature (Perera, 1998). Considering the definitions presented regarding group communication, its general idea can be constructed as follows.

Any collection of people in physical contact

A group of people with similar characteristics

An organized collection of people with repeated patterns of interaction

A group of equal consciousness in membership and interaction
(Rajapaksha, 1998)

Since man cannot fulfill his basic needs alone, he has worked together in groups since ancient times. In this primitive stage, there was no need to identify the needs of man separately because there was no difference in the needs of many people. However, as this ape-man gradually became civilized, his life changed remarkably. The kinship relations between the various families that arose then and the other activities paved the way for various social customs later. Therefore, when we ask how the concept of God entered the faith and beliefs of man, it is clear that it goes back to his earliest days. Although it is impossible to come to a firm conclusion about the sacrificial methods that existed at that time, the feeling of God must have been established since the day when the belief that an invisible force could manipulate oneself was formed. So, they began to believe that happiness was a gift from God and that hardships resulted from God's wrath. Studying how this strong sense of culture has been established today despite the passage of millions of years is possible. Were it not for the power of inter-communication between men, they would not have so much faith in such mysterious unseen forces.

If this is related to their religion, it can be seen how people are disciplined even harsher.

Amarasekara, D. (1988) believes that religion can be identified as an element linked with human activities since the beginning of culture. Anthropologists believe that religion originates from Latin, meaning to celebrate, care for, and preserve. Based on the feeling of religion, the people of every culture have built certain beliefs and have engaged in various actions through it. Religion has to be considered a broad social convention when all these beliefs and creeds are generally examined. This respectable agreement maintained by religion with society as a means of expressing values and attitudes developed in society is common to all societies. Not only that, but religion is also one of the most important social institutions in society. Functionalist social anthropologists also accept that it is born from society and is a functional logic that feeds itself.

In building the concept of faith with religion, they have also been motivated to build different symbols and signs based on different beliefs and worship them. Therefore, for the emotional well-being of human beings, they have built up invisible forces through various signs and symbols, added a religious face to it, and started offering sacrifices. Hence, they used to rely on these invisible forces without hesitation to find answers to the emotional traumas of human beings. Accordingly, many practices were adopted to seek help from demons, deities, etc., and to please them. There, ritualistic features such as offering sacrifices, chanting mantras, practicing *gurukam*, etc., have gradually become the practice of ordinary people's lives. According to this belief, the deities were built in different areas and offerings were made to them in the belief that the person would be able to deal with them more efficiently and with more interest. Individuals were motivated to believe in constructing local Gods because they could confirm their sense of belonging locally.

Thus, it is possible to observe how these groups are used to worshipping the lord God of each area or worshipping a God specifically to them for generations. Whichever the God is thus worshipped, this God is regarded as the Almighty who has power over all aspects of their lives, both physical and spiritual. It can be explained by studying relationships built on kinship that the factor of the kinship of individuals has a strong impact. In particular, this belief in God is not built by a single person. As mentioned above, it is possible to observe how these beliefs occur based on kinship or other factors related to a collection of many people. Based on this assumption, this research is carried out to experimentally explore the impact of group communication on confirming the concept of God concerning God *Dedimunda* in *Aluth Nuwara Dewalaya*.

Literature review

While discussing the issue of God *Dedimunda* and group communication, it was evident that there is very little empirical research related to it. However, the study was able to reveal that only a few other research topics have been carried out related to God *Dedimunda*. Ovitagedra, S., (2001) conducted research on *Aluthnuwara Devalaya* and God *Dedimunda* from a sociological and anthropological perspective. She primarily focused on the beliefs and practices related to God *Dedimunda* and the architectural features of the buildings found there. In her discussion of the rituals, she explored how the concept of God *Dedimunda* has been established in Sri Lankan society over time. However, the role of communication was not addressed in her research. While Ovitagedra's study provides insights into the historical and physical aspects related to the social and anthropological context, it does not mention the role of communication.

Suraweera, N., (2008) conducted an experimental study on the rituals performed towards *Dedimunda Devi* in *Aluth Nuwara Devalaya* in the Sabaragamuwa District, Sri Lanka. This research focused on the origin of *Dadimunda Dewatha Bandara* and the *Devalaya*, as well as the rituals performed by the devotees. Secondary data, direct observation methods, and interviews were used as primary data sources. The research problem investigated how the concept of God *Dedimunda* influences the creation of collective consciousness among individuals. The study concluded that the concept of God has had a strong influence on the formation of collective consciousness as the center of public culture.

Malimage, A., (1996), in his book “*Watha Dunu Dew*,” focused on the history and rituals of the *Devalaya*. Malimage’s interest in the *Devalaya* stemmed from witnessing many miracles during his visit with a friend, which inspired him to write the book. The literature review revealed that no experimental study has yet been conducted on the concept of God and group communication performance based on this research. Therefore, while there is some literature on the sociological, anthropological, and ritualistic aspects of God *Dedimunda*, there is a significant gap in the research regarding the role of communication and group dynamics in this context.

Data Analysis

The survey was conducted by randomly selecting two hundred visitors to the *Dedimunda Devalaya* in *Aluth Nuwara*. While some questions in the research papers remained unanswered, the participants were eager to complete and return the research papers. A unique feature of the randomly selected sample was the high percentage of female participants. It appeared that women in the group were more willing to respond.

Additionally, self-observation confirmed the high percentage of female participation in the *Devalaya* rituals.

One hundred and twenty-eight (128) of the people who participated in the survey were women, and seventy-two (72) were men. Even though an equal percentage of gender participation can be observed on the *Deewalaya* premises, it is clear that women in the family get a prominent place there.

Age	Percentage (%)
Over 50 years old	86
Between 20-50 years old	80
Under 20 years old	34
Total	200

Table 1: Age gap

According to the table above, people over 50 years of age represented a high percentage of 86%. Eighty per cent of the people were young and middle-aged. Thirty-four per cent of the people being 20 years of age were teenagers. This group had come to the *Devalaya* together and with the guidance of the elders. It was revealed here that the group over 50 years of age is more represented in the belief in God. It can be concluded that the reason for this is the experience gained by this elderly community and the traditional maintenance of the belief coming down from generation to generation. Also, those in the younger age groups can be identified as representing the group that will continue to carry the faith of this elderly community to future generations. The devotees who visit the *Deewalaya* have an unwavering devotion to God *Dedimunda*. They firmly believe that God helped them in every way and will help them in every situation. Also, in any auspicious family activity, they remember the *Dedimunda* God.

Although less than three per cent (3%) of this group said that they do not have faith in God, it is not only specific to this God but also a disbelief in the entire divine community. Also, only 8% of the people who came forward to give a proper answer were noted. The devotees gave various reasons for coming here, seeking God's help and protection.

Reasons like buying a new vehicle, bringing a newborn baby to God for the first time in 3 months, winning a case in court, having an event such as an examination or interview, getting rid of planetary evil, and receiving God's care were particular amongst them. It was a remarkable feature that devotees came to seek God's blessings for many new activities in their personal lives. For example, if an individual buys a new vehicle, they would come to the *Dedimunda* God to protect them from other people's evil eyes and mouths. They hope it will be suitable for the vehicle. There, along with the *pooja watti* (containing flowers, incense, fresh fruits, and sweets), the key of the vehicle and three limes tied together are handed over to the conductor of rituals, and blessings are received from the *Dedimunda Deviyo*. Also, a coin wrapped in a clean cloth and tied is handed over as a symbol of promise. In Sinhalese society, it is known as "*Pandura*". After the —*Yatika*— is over, it is customary to take the *pandura*, tie it to the vehicle, and hang the "*Malma-laya*" (A garland made of red, yellow, blue, and white colours) inside the vehicle. The three limes tied together are also hung in the lower front of the vehicle.

It is a common sight at *Aluth Nuwara Deewalaya* every Wednesday and Saturday (being *Kemmura* days) that devotees come from all parts of Sri Lanka to seek the protection of God *Dedimunda* for various activities. The percentage of people who believed that God had helped them in every way in every case of calamity was one hundred and eighty-seven (187%). A unique feature of this faith is that 158 per

cent of the people who came to the *Devalaya* were motivated to believe in *Dedimunda* God because it was the common belief of their family. Therefore, every time they visited the *Deewalaya*, they witnessed how they came as a group with great devotion. When the family's first generation is set as the foundation of belief in *Dedimunda* God, it can be observed that it continues from generation to generation.

It is said that even in families where elders take ablutions in a Buddhist society, their children, i.e. grandchildren, should be taken first to the *Dedimunda Devalaya*. Thus, the newborn baby is taken to the *Devalaya* and entrusted to the protection of God *Dedimunda*. This tradition has existed since the ancient times of *Satara Korale* in *Sabaragamuwa* Province, Sri Lanka. 20% of people are motivated to believe in God *Dedimunda* based on the information or opinions of different people in society or the village. Moreover, 12 per cent are inclined to believe in a *Dedimunda* God because of friends. This is often caused by interpersonal communication between them. However, in this case, what stood out was how the firm belief in God has become a faith inherited from the family.

Reasons	Percentage
On the basis of my own confidence	10
Because it is the main belief of the family	158
On the guidance of the villagers and various other people	20
On the comments of friends	12
Total	200

Table 2: Reasons to believe in the God *Dedimunda*

The following question was crucial in investigating how the concept of *Dedimunda* God works in group communication.

How	Percentage (%)
Alone	04
With another person	44
As a group with family and friends (The group is more than 3 or 4)	144
With friends	08
Total	200

Table 3: How Devotees Visit the *Devalaya*

The above question was intended to determine whether people are motivated to believe in God as a group in general. A tiny percentage would come to the temple alone. It was a percentage of 4%—44 per cent of the people who come to the *Devalaya* with another person. Here, two persons mean a close friend or the husband and the wife. According to the relevant research, it was possible to find that 144 per cent of the devotees who come to the *Devalaya* come with their relatives. The group included more than three people. There, the definition given about small group communication, which is one division of group communication, should be recalled. Small group communication is between three and 25 people (Piyadasa, 1996). If so, this 144 per cent belongs to small group communication, of which group communication is a sub-part. Another distinguishing feature was that this small group was a group of close relatives of the same family.

In addition to this research, one can identify the various poems written for the God of *Dedimunda* as examples of how the generations performed the worship of *Dedimunda* together.

This is stated in the manuscript of the Karunaratne generation, one of the two main —*Kapu*” (ritual conductor) generations of the *Aluthnuwara Deevalaya*. The “*Dedimunda Divya Raaja Warnawa*” and “*Siri Dedimunda Siritha*”, manuscripts of a generation’s belief in the God *Dedimunda*, have been mentioned in writing. *Dedimunda Divya Raaja Warnawa* consists of 41 poems. It was composed by a person named *Kuda Bandara* of *Weragoda*.

Walter Sirimanna, a Sri Lankan journalist, wrote the other. Its specialty is that it was written based on the generation of Wijayawardena, one of the most famous elite families in Sri Lanka. It is mentioned at the end that this has been written with the primary objective of giving *Seth Shantiya* (blessing) to the Wijayawardena family led by Mr. Wijayawardena, as they were the owners of a major media company.

Mr. Damsiri Karunaratne, who is in charge of the *Devalaya*’s main *Tewa* (ritual), said that this Wijayawardena generation had been coming to *Aluthnuwara Devalaya* even before he was born. He further stated that his father, Raja Karunaratne, had told him that the Wijewardene family and several other elite families in Sri Lanka had come to the *Aluthnuwara Devaalaya* in costly vehicles at that time. Empirical facts and these examples also imply that a family based on the factor of kinship unites as a group and worships God *Dedimunda*.

Accordingly, the two main facts that influenced the socialization of the hard-liner belief in God can be summarized as follows.

- The spread of the belief in the God *Dedimunda* based on hereditary kinship
- The spread of the belief in *Dedimunda* God based on kinship built up through marriage

Taking into consideration of the family socialization, from a young age, children are influenced by their parents and other family members. The family unit serves as the primary socialization agent, where beliefs, values, and practices are passed down from one generation to the next. Especially when a child is born belonging to *Sathara Korala*, after three months, the first ritual or obligation is to take the baby to God *Dedimunda*. To receiving blessings in many religions in Sri Lanka, religious teachings are an integral part of upbringing, where children learn about God, religious rituals, and moral frameworks through daily interactions and observances within the family.

In cultural transmission, Religion and belief in God are embedded within the cultural practices and traditions of a family. Celebrations, rituals, and ceremonies often have religious significance and are performed collectively by family members. These shared experiences reinforce the belief system and ensure its continuity across generations. For example, attending religious services together, celebrating religious holidays, and observing rites of passage (such as tying mats to God *Dedimunda*, praying for God's blessings in every auspicious activity, giving thanks to God) help instill religious beliefs and values.

The emotional bonds and trust inherent in kinship relationships make transmitting beliefs more effective. Children tend to trust and believe in the teachings of their parents and grandparents. The emotional connection fosters a receptive environment for religious education and acceptance. This trust also extends to stories, myths, and doctrines about God, which are often narrated by elder family members. For example, the grandparents of a family take their daughter's baby to God after three months, even if it takes generations, the members of the family never stop coming to the temple to perform the ritual.

A strong family influence is also a strong influence which is gained through regular practice. Believing or disbelieving is based on authority, and respect is a key feature that can be seen in a culturally dominant country like Sri Lanka. In many societies, respect for elders and authority figures is a key cultural value. Elders, who are often viewed as custodians of tradition and wisdom, play a pivotal role in imparting religious knowledge and beliefs. Their authority and the respect they command within the family make it more likely for younger members to adopt and uphold these beliefs. Also, regular participation in religious activities and observances within the family reinforces belief in God. This includes prayers, reading religious texts, participating in religious community events, and adhering to religious dietary laws and dress codes. These practices create a routine that normalizes the belief system and integrates it into everyday life.

Especially the intergenerational influence is another factor that affects the inclination towards the belief in God. The influence of extended family members, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins, also plays a role. Family gatherings and events often become venues for religious reinforcement, where collective practices and shared beliefs are evident. The larger family network acts as a supportive system that upholds and perpetuates religious faith. Also, when individuals from similar religious backgrounds marry, they often continue the practice of transmitting religious beliefs to their children. The formation of new family units typically involves integrating the religious practices and beliefs of both partners, thereby sustaining the belief system across new generations. Accordingly, religion often forms a significant part of an individual's social identity, which is closely tied to family identity. Belonging to a family with a strong religious identity encourages individuals to maintain and promote these beliefs as part of their own identity.

For example, consider a family where belief in God and religious practices have been part of their heritage for generations. Parents teach their children prayers, take them to places of worship, and explain religious stories and teachings. Grandparents share their own experiences and reinforce the importance of faith. Over time, these children grow up with a deep-seated belief in God, which they are likely to pass on to their children, thereby perpetuating the cycle of religious belief through hereditary kinship relationships.

Accordingly, the spread of belief in God through generational kinship relationships is a multifaceted process involving socialization, cultural transmission, emotional attachment, respect for authority, reinforcement through practice, and generational influence. This process ensures the continuity and resilience of religious beliefs across generations. In addition to the questionnaire conducted at the *Devalaya* grounds, observation and interviews revealed that people always visit the God *Dedimunda* in groups. This was confirmed by Ven. Damsiri Karunanayake, the Chief Priest in charge of the *Devalaya*. He stated that this grouping is particularly notable during the annual Perahera festival. Devotees do not come alone, even for personal purposes; they always bring one or more companions. Examining the function of the concept of God *Dedimunda* in communication, it is evident that group communication plays a powerful and significant role.

Conclusion

Examining the function of the concept of God *Dedimunda* in communication, it is possible to identify how group communication plays a decisive role. Based on the enduring nature of kinship from generation to generation, common beliefs are formed within family groups through oral communication.

For example, if the faith of the first generations of a family is in a particular God, the same belief will inevitably be passed down to subsequent generations. Due to the irrational fear of supernatural forces, humans do not dare to turn their backs on or challenge traditional beliefs and faiths. Accordingly, it is evident that new kinships formed through traditional kinship and marriage are based on these beliefs and faiths. Through the questionnaire, interviews, and self-observation, it was possible to conclude how these small groups, formed in this manner, come to the *Aluth Nuwara Dedimunda Devalaya* with a collective feeling and receive blessings from God.

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