

Politicization of Buddhism and Electoral Politics in Sri Lanka*

A. R. M. Imtiyaz

[Abstract: This study examines the interaction between religion and politics in Sri Lanka. Existing scholarly studies on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict largely address the ethnic dimension of the conflict. Indeed, in the understanding of Sri Lanka's 25-year civil war, which has left 70,000 dead and displaced nearly a half-million people at its height generally, religion is rarely identified as having any role. But there is a point on the other side – what this study identifies as the religious factor.

In Sri Lanka, political elites and politicians often employ emotional symbols such as religion to win and consolidate their political position. This is a common political phenomenon among the Sinhalese (74% of population in 1981) and the mainly Hindu Tamils (12.6% of population in 1981) as well as the Muslims (over 7 % of the population). However, this study is confined to analyzing the behavior (*vis-à-vis* the use of religion) of Sinhala politicians and their political parties in their quest for political power.

The first section of the chapter would deal with the background of Sri Lanka's religious politics to help readers understand the complex interactions between religion and politics. The theoretical section of the chapter would employ theories of symbolic politics to understand how symbols are powerful in electoral politics. The final and key section of the chapter would be dedicated to analyzing Sri Lanka in the context of the use of religion in symbolic politics. This section would examine how the politicization of Buddhism helped Sinhala political elites and leaders in their quest for power, reinforcing religious and ethnic tensions. This paper would finally suggest some solution to de-religionize the state structure to help Sri Lanka enjoy the fruits of modernization and democracy.]

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The ethnic civil war that has ravaged post-independence Sri Lanka for decades is generally identified beyond the religious dimension, as one rooted in ethno-linguistic symbols and discrimination.¹ The enmity between the Sinhala majority and the minorities, particularly the ethnic Tamils originated not because most Tamils embrace Hinduism, indeed the degree of mutual tolerance and respect demonstrated by Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka is evident through long traditions of religious syncretism and cohabitation. On the other hand, it is also indisputably true that specific religious beliefs, texts, legends, and symbols whether Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim have been used by politicians and elites to initiate intolerance and promote violence against the other for electoral gain. This chapter focuses on how politicization of Buddhism by Sinhala politicians to gain and consolidate power has undone traditions of cohabitation and inspired extremism in Sri Lanka.

The chapter is divided into six sections. In the second section, some general remarks on the country as background to my subsequent arguments are presented. These remarks include the religious and ethnic combinations of the society, both of which are key elements in understanding the Sri Lanka's predicament. I also briefly discuss the major religio-political forces and pertinent information for a better appreciation of the complexity of the interplay of religion and politics in Sri Lanka, particularly since the independence. In the third section, I present the theoretical framework of this study. The framework is then employed in the section 4 to the Sri Lankan political history. The central point that I will make in this section is that the prominence of religious symbols in Sri Lankan politics is inherently related to the nature of the democratic practice in the country, not the absence of it. The democracy, particularly the electoral politics, and the

heightened use of Sinhala symbolism in the elections to gain support of the majority Sinhalese population, politicized Buddhism more than anything else. After discussing the various modes of instrumentalization of the religious symbols, I examine the sources of these symbols, or in other words, the roots of the political Buddhism and the central agenda of the political Buddhism. The concluding comments summarize my findings.

General Remarks on Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon until 1972) a small island in the Indian Ocean (approximately 65, 610 sq.km in area) is situated at the foot of the South Asian subcontinent. Colombo, the former capital of the country where still many government offices are located, was one of the key sea ports in the colonial Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka is about 400 kilometers (273 miles) in length and about 220 kilometers (137 miles) at its widest point. The center of the island is mountainous; its highest point, Mount Pidurutalagala, rises to 2,524 meters (8, 281 feet).

The main sector of the Sri Lankan economy historically has been wet rice (paddy) cultivation. The colonial British rulers (1796-1948) introduced free-market based commercial agriculture. Extensive coffee plantations were established in the mid-nineteenth century. Beginning in the early 1960s, post-independence governments have intervened directly in the largely free-market economy inherited from the colonial period. Imports and exports were tightly regulated, and the state sector was expanded, especially in manufacturing and transportation. The trend was reinforced between 1970 and 1977, when a center left coalition government led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) nationalized the larger plantations and imposed direct controls over internal trade. However, the United National Party (UNP) embarked on massive privatization in 1977

which also encouraged private enterprise, welcomed foreign investment and relaxed import controls. It shifted spending away from subsidies and social welfare to investment in the nation's infrastructure, most notably via a massive irrigation project, the Mahaweli Ganga Program, which was expected to make Sri Lanka self-reliant in rice and generate enough hydroelectric power to meet the nation's requirements. These policies resulted in higher rates of economic growth in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but they did not ease the economic difficulties of the poor. In short, Sri Lanka “remains a poor country.”² The flow of foreign aid from the United States, Western Europe, Japan, China and international organizations more recently have helped Sri Lanka to run the war-economy.³

Ethnicity and Languages

Sri Lanka is diverse in social composition, the heterogeneity being reflected in the varied ethnic groups, religious faiths, and languages spoken on the island. Sri Lanka's religious and ethnic diversity echoes the multiracial and pluralistic character of Sri Lankan society. However, contemporary political developments coupled with the emergence of extremist religious forces have radically changed the harmony of this plural society.

The Sinhalese people who are predominantly Buddhist are the major ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They constitute some 82 percent of the population⁴ and were originally migrants who arrived from North India as early as around 500BC. The Sinhalese identity in Sri Lanka derives from two factors (1) the Sinhala language, and (2) the Buddhist religion. These factors have in recent decades been enthusiastically promoted in the development of a Sinhalese Buddhist identity in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Tamils, who are mainly Hindus, are the largest ethnic minority in the country. They composed 12.7 percent of the population in 1981.⁵ Sri Lankan Tamils immigrated to the island from South India. The Tamil population in Sri Lanka was reinforced with the arrival of the Indian Tamils or up-country Tamils largely in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to work in the British-owned estates as workers: first for coffee and then later for tea and rubber estates in the highlands. By 1921, Indian Tamils comprised 13.4 per cent of the total Tamil population which in turn represented 24.8 per cent of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka.⁶ The Indian Tamils, however, as a result of Ceylon Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949, engineered by the UNP government led by D.S. Senanayake, lost their large share in the country's population charts. By 1981, Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka only accounted for 5.5 per cent of the total population.⁷ The rest of the Tamils were reclassified as non-citizens.

Muslims, most of whom speak Tamil, are another significant minority group in Sri Lanka. Muslims, who trace their ancestral roots to seafaring Arab merchants, prefer to be characterized by their religious and cultural identity.⁸ They constitute 7.9 percent of the island's total population in 2001.⁹ The Malay community, whose ancestors include laborers brought by the Dutch and British, as well as soldiers in the Dutch garrison, now constitute 0.3% of the population, and are generally allied with the larger Muslim population of the island.¹⁰ By and large, Muslims of Sri Lanka have tended to oppose the Tamil separatism, advanced by the Tamil nationalists, including the Tamil Tigers and to cooperate with the government dominated by the majority Sinhalese so as to claim a stake in Sri Lanka's deeply divided polity.¹¹

Finally, the Burgers, a small minority group, need to be discussed. Burgers, who are descendants of European settlers, appear to be western European in their physical appearance. At the time of independence in 1948, Burgers comprised 0.6 per cent of the total population. However, since independence, the Burger population in Sri Lanka has declined as a result of migration to Australia, Canada and United Kingdom. They now only account for 0.2 percent of the island's total population [in 2001].¹²

Sri Lanka is home to two major languages. They are the Sinhala language spoken by the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil language used both by the Tamils and Muslims. Although, Sinhala and Tamil are derived from different sources, they share some common features and have influenced each other's linguistic evolution.

While the origins of the Sinhala language are still debated, it is widely accepted that it is ultimately derived from one of two phases of development of the *Indo-Aryan* group of languages: *old Indo-Aryan* (C.2000-800 B.C.) represented by Sanskrit language and *a middle Indo-Aryan* (C.800 B.C-400 A.D.) represented by Pali, the language of Buddhist scriptures.¹³

The Tamil language belongs to the *Dravidian family* mostly spoken in the South Indian states and in Sri Lanka.¹⁴ Tamil played a key role in trade and business along the Indian and Sri Lankan coasts as it was a widely used form of communication in early Indian Ocean commerce. Arab traders from the Middle East used the Tamil language when they traded in the region.

Language is one of the most important elements in the creation of an ethno-national identity. In Sri Lanka, the issue of a 'national language' has been a dominant

theme in both religious and political spheres; it was a major bone of contention between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Religious Composition and the State

Seventy per cent of the Sinhalese are associated with (the Theravada school of) Buddhism, which was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 2nd century BCE by the Venerable Mahinda, the son of the Emperor Ashoka, during the reign of Sri Lanka's King Devanampiyatissa.¹⁵

Hinduism, the second largest religion in Sri Lanka, is predominantly the faith of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.¹⁶ Though ideological connections between Buddhism and Hinduism in a sense are very close, relations between Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka have not been cordial since the escalation of the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic civil war.

The Muslims in Sri Lanka are largely divided into three major groups: the Sri Lankan Moors, the Indian Muslims, and the Malays. The Sri Lankan Moors, who belong to Sunni sect, are the largest among these three groups. They trace their ancestry to Arabia as they are the descendents of the Arab traders who settled over a period of seven hundred years. Religion is key to the self identity of Sri Lankan Muslims who believe that Islam provides solutions not only to spiritual problems but also political, social, economic and scientific issues.¹⁷

The Christians who comprise 7.5 per cent of the population constitute the fourth main religious group in Sri Lanka. The majority are Roman Catholic, with Anglican, Calvinist, Methodist and Baptist minorities.

Buddhist *bhikkhus* or monks play a leading part in the socio-political life in Sri Lanka.¹⁸ They argue that anyone can live in Sri Lanka as long as Sinhala-Buddhists can

enjoy cultural, religious, economic, political, and linguistic hegemony.¹⁹ However, the diversity in religious composition of the society prompted that the state remains neutral in religious affairs.

In this background, in the early twentieth century, Sinhala-Buddhist organizations such as the All Ceylon Buddhist congress (ACBC) and Sinhala nationalist politicians pressed for the elevation of Buddhism to the status of state religion.²⁰ Neither the Ceylon National Congress, founded in 1919, to pressure the colonial rulers for “long-postponed constitutional reforms”²¹ nor, more importantly, the Ceylonese political elites, particularly D. S. Senanayake, expressed willingness at this stage to identify the island with the concept of a Sinhalese-Buddhist state. After independence, Sinhala nationalism based on Buddhism continued to impact upon Sri Lankan politics. The Sinhala Buddhist organizations continuously called for the state protection of Buddhism. Mr. Bandaranayake, in the mid 1950s, joined these forces for political gain and came to power in 1956.²²

Since 1956, successive Sri Lankan governments dominated by the Sinhalese have sought to protect and establish a link between state and religion. The promulgation of a Republican Constitution in 1972, included articles entrenching the foremost place and state patronage for Buddhism²³ and the current constitution which came into effect in 1978 granted a special place in the constitution for the Buddhist religion, while protecting the religions of the minorities (article 9 of the constitution) is a case in point.²⁴ All these moves, provided religion (precisely Buddhism) an important place within the state, directed at politicizing Buddhism, significantly transformed the nature of the secular state in Sri Lanka and paving the way for a Sinhala-Buddhist theocratic state.

The Sinhala-Buddhist Religio-Political Parties and Groups

Although Buddhist monks have enjoyed a prominent position with the society for long time and that the state policies were being eschewed towards Buddhism from the early days of independent Sri Lanka, political parties solely based on religious identity is a relative new phenomenon. To date, two major political parties can be *exclusively* categorized as political parties that employ Sinhala-Buddhist concerns and demands for electoral gains.. They are: the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU).

These groups share common goals: to uphold Buddhism and establish a link between the state and religion, and to advocate a violent solution to the Tamil question and oppose all form of devolution to the minorities, particularly the Tamils. The JHU and JVP are the key parties in this regard.²⁵The former was founded in 2004 and the latter in 1965.

The JVP, which mounted two failed rebellions against the Sri Lanka state in 1971 and 1987-89 in which an estimated 50,000 people were killed, vigorously resorts to Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism to win Sinhala-Buddhist votes. The JVP is exceptionally strong in its organization to mobilize underprivileged sections of the Sinhalese.

The JVP opposed the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, the separatist Tamil Organization commonly referred to as Tamil Tiger, established in 1976) and Tsunami Joint Mechanism (JM) otherwise known as Post Tsunami Operation Management (P-TOMS) signed in June

2005. Both agreements were signed with the LTTE. It also resisted the Norwegian-brokered peace process to ease ethnic tensions.²⁶

The pro-Sinhala approach considerably eased difficulties for the JVP to meet the challenges posed by the UNP and the SLFP in elections. The JVP, due to the existing proportional representative electoral system (PR) and its electoral alliance with the SLFP, has grown in strength: increasing its parliamentary seats from 10 in 2000 to 16 in 2001 and to 38 in the last general elections held in 2004.²⁷

The JVP had suffered an internal conflict in April 2008, between the Wimal Weerawansa, who resort to extreme form of pro-Sinhala-Buddhist policies and the party leadership.²⁸ Wimal Weerawansa suspended from all party activities from March 21, 2008, and he formed the Jathika Nidahas Peramuna (JNP).²⁹ The JNP began its activities on May 14, 2008 and vowed to seek an alternative to main political parties the UNP and SLFP. It rejects a political solution to the Tamil nation question and supported the government war against the LTTE.³⁰

The JHU was founded by Buddhist monks to promote the interests of the Sinhala-Buddhists and to make Buddhism a guiding principal of state affairs, as well as to wipe out Tamil violence by force. The JHU shuns non-violence as a means to seek political alternatives for the Tamil national question, and has been urging young Sinhala-Buddhists to sign up for the army.³¹ As a result, “as many as 30,000 Sinhalese young men have signed up for the army in the past few months.”³²

The JHU in its first parliamentary elections held on April 2, 2004 won 9 seats out of 225, or 6% of popular vote. The JHU on July 21, 2004 submitted a bill in Parliament seeking to outlaw religious conversions based on offers of cash or other incentives.³³ The

legislation which won the blessing of the government in Sri Lanka raised profound concerns especially among Christians, a small minority of the population.³⁴ In 2005, Mr. Rajapakshe sealed an electoral deal with the JHU.

The emotional symbolic agendas of the JHU and JVP, as well as the JNP favoring Sinhalese interests, are the biggest hurdle for the government of Sri Lanka to seek meaningful political initiatives to reform the state and its institutions as a means to engage with a political solution that seeks an irrevocable autonomy beyond the current unitary state structure. The government's decision to abrogate the CFA on January 16, 2008 confirms the influence, exerted by these extremists, on the ruling Sinhala political class.³⁵

A Framework for Analysis

There are three building blocks to the proposed theoretical framework; they are: democracy, elite mobilization and symbolic politics.

In democracy, the vote plays a key role. It cannot, in any society, exist without regular, free, and fair electoral competition between different political parties.³⁶ Politicians and leaders either as individuals or in teams, sometimes both, fiercely compete for votes. While some politicians promise social and economic benefits during the election period, nationalist politicians often resort to hostile -- or what political science strategically calls symbolic politics³⁷ -- to maximize votes or to outbid opponents.

Sri Lanka, which has been practicing democracy since 1931 (well before independence), now ranks as one of the poorest states in Asia and is notorious for the Tamil suicide bombers who are claim to be a revolutionary product of the country's

seven decades old democracy. In other words, the competent political outbidding of Sinhala politicians on Sinhala-Buddhist emotions and symbols against the minorities, particularly the Tamils eventually produced a state-seeking violent Tamil resistance movement, which erased the country's stunningly beautiful global image as a tropical paradise and made the country one of the most dangerous places on earth to live in.

Democracy in deeply divided societies can trigger dissonance and instability if politicians embrace irrationalized-emotional cards such as religion or religio-nationalism to win a political position. Religious symbols help create a resonant mythos that expresses the moral values of the society, the teachings of the religion create a sense of solidarity between religious adherents, or functions as a way to bring an adherent closer to their god or gods. On the other hand, these symbols have a profound influence among those who take religious sayings literally, particularly among economically and socially disadvantaged groups. Hence, when politicians employ religious symbols and myths, it is often with underlying political agendas, which serve to enable them to cling on to power without addressing other pressing socio-economic questions.

One influential study on civil involvement and democracy argues that exercise of the voting right can help to foster the socio-economic progress of the nation.³⁸ But when politicians of deeply divided societies manipulate the system, it is highly likely that democracy can serve to further reinforce religious and ethnic loyalty, and thus trigger instability. But the purpose of political parties is, in Anthony Downs's words, to win elections.³⁹ Therefore by and large, elites need to understand the mood of voters and formulate policies and promises to win votes. Thus, Schumpeter has defined democracy as the "competitive struggle for the people's vote."⁴⁰

Society consists of two important segments: the elites and the masses. The former constitutes the minority but nevertheless represents the dominant group which influences the government or directly rules while the majority is an insignificant group which according to elitists, wishes to be governed by elites.⁴¹

The following statement of Mosca attempts to generalize the elitist position:

‘In all societies two classes of people appear-a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first, in appearance at least, with material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essential to the volatility of the political organism’⁴²

In democracy the masses – in theory - enjoy sovereignty and elect a government they think best; thereby the masses have the ability to decide the fate of the regime or politicians. This proves the classical democratic political formula that government is of the people, by the people, and for the people. However, the tiny but intelligent minority is in a position to manipulate the electoral process for its own ends through all the available options, including employing emotional, religious and ethnic slogans through the skilled use of propaganda which eventually serve to inject disharmony between different groups.⁴³ These electoral manipulations largely influence the behavior of the voters who will choose their leaders from those acceptable to the elite. Elite tactics work well and lead voters to act according to their will.

The key aim of politics is to win power. To this end, elites employ what political science generally identifies as symbolic politics, which encourages political parties and politicians to employ symbols of groups such as a flag, emotions, myths, and a history to gain and hold power. Symbolic politics are particularly influential in ethnically or religiously deeply divided societies where elites and politicians are reasonably successful in triggering emotions and symbols to win support from the masses. In democratic societies, a symbolic strategy enables politicians to outbid their opponents on anti-minority or pro-majority policies.

In politics, as anthropologist Zdzislaw Mach observed, symbols are important. They are used to influence people; to appeal to values; to refer to ideas; to stir emotions and to stimulate action.⁴⁴ The symbols of the human community play significant role in politics to gain mass support. The central argument of symbolic politics is that emotional symbols such as religious texts, flag, national anthem, history of group, myth of motherland and fatherland can become tools in politics to influence the masses decisions for elite' purposes to win and hold the power.⁴⁵ That is to say, the more the political actors employ the symbols of groups for political gain, the greater the chances are to win the masses' support for their campaigns because the masses generally tend to give priority to their symbolic identities thus, they make decisions in favor of symbolic appeals when appeals are targeted to them through symbols. Rational choice theorist Samuel Popkin who studied voters' behavior demonstrates that emotions play a key role when the masses make political decisions. He notes that "data presented in an emotionally compelling way may be given greater consideration and more weight than data that is statistically more valid, but emotionally neutral."⁴⁶

To induce people to make choices, political actors make use of existing or primordial identities of targeted groups or they may construct new identities and give fresh explanations for that newly constructed identity. The identity of the groups always matters and is sensitive because shaping their decisions and existence.⁴⁷ Thus, it is likely that groups would respond positively to the needs of political actors when the latter sympathetically plays politics on the formers' identity. That is to say, the more the political actors manipulate the symbols, the more they win the sympathies of the masses.⁴⁸ This suggests that identity is a key element of mankind, and political actors score success if their appeals successfully manipulate symbols. Therefore, politicians and leaders strive to be hawks at election time to pass the message that they are really interested in the betterment of particular group. This, on the other hand, would induce the people to make choices based on the symbols they value. In point of fact, this is the bottom line of symbolic politics theory. The essence of this argument, therefore, in S.J Kaufman's words, is that "people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbols evoked."⁴⁹ Therefore, theoretically, we can define symbolic politics as a sort of political game by political elites and politicians on arousing emotions to win and hold a political power rather than educate the masses in a logical way to address the issues.

What we gather from preceding discussion is that in democracy elites compete to mobilize masses and garner their support, particularly at the time of election. To do so, the elites use symbols. The elite mobilization on strong religious and ethnic, or security symbols are what make hostile chauvinistic politics possible. All this eventually could destabilize the country and escalate the distrust between the different groups or among the masses. This ultimately may promote the violent mobilization, if affected groups lose the trust both in the state and its institutions.

I argue that Sri Lanka is an excellent, perhaps archetypical, example of this scenario. In the following pages I demonstrate how the Sinhalese political elites in Sri Lanka employ religio-ethnic symbols for the electoral gains.

Elections in Sri Lanka and Religious Symbolism

The introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1931 laid the foundation for a party system in Sri Lanka and has served as the point of departure of democratic practices.⁵⁰ The country has enjoyed uninterrupted democracy in the sense that the elections have been held in regular intervals. Since independence, the UNP and the SLFP have dominated the island's political system. These parties basically represent a secular political position, but have resorted to symbolic emotional agendas to outbid their opponents.

Elite mobilization manipulating symbols has been a major trend in electoral politics in Sri Lanka since independence. The emotional linguistic nationalism, the extremist Buddhist religious rhetoric,⁵¹ remembering ancient Buddhist heroes⁵² and generating fears are the key electoral instruments of the main Sinhala political parties in the island to win the Sinhalese vote. The UNP and the SLFP led the electoral competition with the assistance of their allies.⁵³

Though both parties enjoy some support from the minorities, they generally focus on the predicaments of the Sinhalese who comprise 74 percent of the population and 70 percent of the electorate. The Sinhalese, who think they are the Buddha's chosen people, and view the island of Sri Lanka as the Buddhist Promised land⁵⁴ predominantly live in the North and East. *Sri Lankan Tamils*⁵⁵ predominantly live in the North and East region and consider this area as their traditional homeland.⁵⁶ The Sinhalese increasingly feel that they are an economically disadvantaged and socially underprivileged group. This

helps the Sinhala political parties to focus on symbolic policies to win the votes of the majority Sinhalese.

Almost all elections in Sri Lanka, between 1948 (parliamentary election) and 2005 (Presidential election), have made use of religio-ethnic symbols. Although symbolic slogans were not clearly associated with the agendas of politicians to win the very first general elections, the ruling UNP elites enacted the Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 to deprive *Indian Tamils* of Sri Lanka of voting rights soon after the party came to power. These two bills decitizenised thousands of Plantation Tamils.⁵⁷ The bills fragmented the Tamil political parties, for example, the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), the major ethnic party of the Sri Lankan Tamils, supported the bills⁵⁸, while Samuel James Velupillai Chelvanayakam, one of the chief lieutenants of the ACTC, and a Christian Tamil from the Jaffna peninsula split from the party and formed the *Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi* (ITAK, literally, ‘Ceylon Tamil State Party’ commonly known as the Tamil Federal Party, FP).⁵⁹

The Sri Lankan Tamils considered that this act was ethnically motivated and directly contrary to the British- introduced constitution⁶⁰ that gave special protection under clause 29(2) to minorities.⁶¹ Tamil nationalists have argued “the Act was inspired by Adolph Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws of September 15, 1935, which provided: A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He cannot exercise the right to vote.”⁶²

At this time, the ACBC,⁶³ lobbied for stern measures to protect and promote the interests of the Buddhists and Buddhism. The ACBC also demanded a Commission of Inquiry to “report on the state of Buddhism.”⁶⁴ However, the UNP government led by

D.S. Senanayake resisted growing demands for special concessions to Buddhists.⁶⁵ It is important to point out that the Senanayake administration's decision to divorce the state from the religion (Buddhism) goaded the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists, to revolt against the leadership of the UNP, and S.W. R. D. Bandaranayake exploited the situation for his political gains.

1956: Religio-Linguistic Symbolism

The symbolic politics based on ethnic outbidding first appeared in the early 1950's with the formation of the SLFP, the main opposition party to the UNP in 1952 practiced by the British-educated Bandaranaike who was described by Manor as a 'complex, inconstant, visionary' leader of Sri Lanka. The SLFP, the splinter group of the UNP lost to the UNP in the 1952 general elections.⁶⁶ The defeat inherently pushed the SLFP to seek straightforward alternatives to win Sinhalese votes in the crucial 1956 general elections: Bandaranaike espoused competitive Sinhala chauvinism and economic nationalism to outbid his electoral enemies, particularly the liberal leaning ruling UNP. It is also important to note that the SLFP customarily relied upon the socially and politically influential groups including the Buddhist clergy or *bhikkus*, the *Sangha*⁶⁷ to carry its message to the Sinhalese villages where representative of the Sinhalese rural middle class, such as village teachers, indigenous physicians, and petty landowners play a major role in the political decisions of villagers. The economically disadvantaged Sinhalese, who believed Tamils enjoyed privileged positions and benefits under the British colonial administration, became an ardent audience of the SLFP's religio-ethnic symbolic sentiments, which promised to safeguard the interests of the Buddhists and offered egalitarian social reforms such as the introduction of the Sinhala-Only official language

policy, land reform measures and subsidized agricultural policies and social reforms to institutionalize equity for the rural sector. The significant point is that Bandaranayke vigorously attempted to prove that he was the only voice of the oppressed Sinhalese who would lose their rights and centuries-old Buddhist traditions if the UNP were elected to power. Thus, the SLFP found an easy passage to public office, and gave up Bandaranayke's early policy of language parity between Sinhala and Tamil. In fact, Bandaranayke's *only* aim was to exploit the social and cultural conditions of disadvantaged Sinhalese to win votes.

To win the general elections of 1956, he formed an electoral alliance with the pro-Sinhala nationalist parties. An election coalition called the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) or People's United Front was formed between Bandaranayke's SLFP, Philip Gunawardena's Viplavakari Lanka Samasamaja Party (VLSSP) or Revolutionary Equal Party, and W. Dahanayaka's newly formed Sinhala Bhasa Peramuna (SBP) or Sinhala Language Front. The election coalition manifesto declared "*Sinhala only within 24 hours*" with "*reasonable use of Tamil.*" The newly formed, monks-only party, the Eksath Bhikku Peramina (EBP) played a critical role in this election as a major political pressure group. The EBP, fiercely anti-UNP, anti-West and anti-Catholic, presented a ten-point agenda (the Dasa Panatha) to Bandaranayake, at a massive rally in Colombo. The ten-point agenda included making Sinhala the only official language and giving Buddhism its 'rightful' place.⁶⁸

Bandaranayke, with the total support of Sinhala-Buddhists, strongly campaigned in the villages of the South and West of the island, while his anti-West and anti-Catholic groups largely concentrated on the urban areas of the South and West with pro-Buddhism

voices. One of the EBP's slogans was "A vote for the UNP is a vote for the Catholics; a vote for the MEP is a vote for the Buddhists."⁶⁹ The EBP succeeded in organizing a strong structure that would provide a militant basis for the purpose of attracting disgruntled Sinhalese in urban areas.

The election results sent the message that Bandaranayke's religio-ethnic symbolic policies had swayed the Sinhalese, particularly the rural voters: the MEP polled 39.5% of the votes and won 51 of the 95 seats in Parliament and hence formed the government. The UNP, which campaigned on a secular platform, was decimated, gaining a mere eight seats although it polled 27% of the votes. Leftist parties, both the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) and Community Party (CP), opposed to the Sinhala-Only language agenda secured 14 and 3 seats, respectively. In the Tamil minority-dominated northeast, the Federal Party (FP), led by Tamil politician S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, won 10 seats, polling 5.4 % of the votes.⁷⁰ The FP, the major Tamil moderate party, campaigned on the federalist alternative for the territorially- based Tamils and attempted to win Tamil rights from the Sinhalese-dominated state through available democratic channels.

On 5 June 1956, Bandaranayke introduced in the House of Representatives a bill to make Sinhala the only official language of Sri Lanka. The purpose of the legislation was to terminate the English language influence in Sri Lanka. Due to the British language policy, the English language had occupied a superior place in pre-independence Sri Lanka. Minorities in Sri Lanka particularly ethnic Tamils and Christians enjoyed better opportunities due to the British way of implementation, and ordinary Sinhala-Buddhists' hesitation to adopt English as their medium of instruction/communication.

The bill was passed on the same day with the main opposition *UNP voting with the government* and opposed by the Tamil parties (FP and ACTC) and leftist parties (LSSP and CP).

The Tamils were riled because their language was not given the same official language status as Sinhala, and they actively tendered their support to the FP's non-violence campaigns. The Sinhalese political leaders' decision to introduce the Sinhala-Only Act not only promoted religio-ethno-linguistic nationalism, on both sides of the ethnic divide, but became a source of radical Tamil nationalism in the 1980s.

The 1956 election, which successfully mobilized the extremist Sinhala-Buddhists, radically changed the shape of the island's politics for years to come: the major Sinhala parties, including the left parties⁷¹ switched to religio-ethnic symbolic politics sandwiching religious emotions and ethnic hostile politics as a way to garner popular Sinhalese support.⁷² The LSSP, the major left party, is a case in point. The party which used to claim that it fights for the oppressed marginalized segments of the society demanded that the state provides special assurance to the Sinhalese people so that a national unity can be forged.⁷³ Notably, since then the UNP has changed its secular policies and rhetoric to balance the Sinhala nationalists. The UNP's support of the MEP's Sinhala-Only Act of 1956, its violent opposition to the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam pact of 1957 (described later),⁷⁴ enthusiastic involvement in the anti-Tamil campaign in March 1960 and after the 1977 general elections, and its abrogation of the power-sharing pact with the FP leader Selvanayagam in 1965,⁷⁵ otherwise known as the Dudley-Selva Pact, to allay the Sinhalese opposition, were a few demonstrations of the UNP's radical

changes in adopting anti-Tamil outbidding strategies to challenge the SLFP and left parties, in order to seek Sinhalese votes.

The election victory of Bandaranaike strengthened the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists, and encouraged Buddhist monks to play a more active role in state affairs and activities directed towards the Sinhala-Buddhist interests. These forces continued to lobby government to make Buddhism the national religion, and opposed political concessions to the Tamils.

Bandaranaike, in the meantime, attempted to seek some political compromise with the FP to reduce Tamil fears. He took the constructive step of signing an agreement with Chelvanayakam, the FP leader on 26 July 1957, known as the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact (B-C Pact).⁷⁶ The Sinhala political opposition led by J. R. Jayawardene, the opposition leader (later President of Sri Lanka) mobilized Sinhala-Buddhist forces against the pact. Jayawardene called on Sinhala-Buddhists to fight to safeguard their religion and language and promised that he would lead the campaign to this effect.

Bandarnayake was aware of legal constraints in making Buddhism the state religion.⁷⁷ His efforts to seek a political compromise with the Tamils and his inability to make Buddhism the state religion frustrated the Sinhala extremists who had tirelessly worked for the election victory of Bandaranayake. All this effectively contributed to his assassination, on September 26, 1959, by a Buddhist *Bhikku*.⁷⁸

Post 1956: Toward the Sinhala-Buddhasization

The growth of Sinhala-Buddhist extremism helped weaken the secular structure of Sri Lanka state. There were no serious efforts made by politicians to discourage the extremist

forces; rather they promoted these forces to win power. Politicians' tolerance of the behavior of the Sinhala-extremists and *Bhikkhus* affected political modernity and rational choices in politics such as de-emotionalization of politics and group reconciliation to ease tensions between different groups.

In 1966, *Bhikkhus* opposed concessions to the minority Tamils. The government, to satisfy the Sinhala-Buddhists and *Bhikkhus*, retracted the concessions. Donald Horowitz has suggested the reasons behind the breakdown of the agreement:

“Most important were UNP electoral concerns. Following the 1965 elections, the SLFP had moved back to an anti-Tamil line, portraying the UNP as a party manipulated by the federalists. The district council issue provided a focus for such attacks, spurred by Buddhist monks. Some UNP backbenchers, fearful of the consequences-for the government would have to go to the polls by 1970-were on the verge of revolt. In the end, the UNP leadership withdrew the bill... the party had not yet faced an election with the Federal Party millstone around its neck and did not know how much it weighed.”⁷⁹

In 1967, in a bid to mollify the Sinhala-Buddhists and *Bhikkhus* the UNP government introduced “the poya holiday under which the weekly holiday was based on the phases of the moon while the traditional Sabbath holiday was abandoned.”⁸⁰

However, the UNP was not able to win the elections of 1970.

In 1970, the SLFP formed a “no-contest” electoral alliance with traditional pro-Sinhalese left parties to defeat the UNP. The alliance promised nationalist social and economic policies and opposed the Tamil demand for self-autonomy. The alliance also

promised to replace the British introduced Constitution, with its article 29(2) which sought to protect the rights of minorities.⁸¹ The UNP did not adopt any pro-minority programs, but refrained from adopting what Tamils considered anti-Tamil programs. The SLFP allies who fought on the symbolic pro-Sinhala agenda recorded a massive win: the SLFP won 91 out of 108 seats, while its key allies the LSSP and the CP won 19 and 6 seats respectively. The UNP only secured 17 seats out of 130 it contested. And the Tamil moderate party the FP which contested in the Tamil dominated Northeast on Tamil autonomy and security won 13 out of 19 seats where it fielded candidates.⁸²

The return to power of the center-left alliance, led by the SLFP, further contributed to the decline of the secular state structure of Sri Lanka. In April 1971, the Sinhala nationalist JVP launched a violent revolt against the state.⁸³ The JVP's campaign successfully attracted the unemployed and economically disadvantaged Sinhalese youth and farmers. The growing influence of the JVP among the Sinhalese who lived in Southern Sri Lanka increased the pressure on Mrs. Bandaranayake's government. Hence, the SLFP allies executed pro-Sinhalese policies to mollify the disgruntled rural poor Sinhalese youth and farmers. The net result was the Republican Constitution of 1972 which replaced the British introduced 1948 Constitution. A leading Trotskyite, Dr. Colvin R. de Silva was appointed as a Minister of Constitutional Affairs and granted authority to design a new Constitution. Dr. de Silva understood the *Sinhalese need*, and according to notable Tamil scholar A.J. Wilson "compromised his Trotskyist principles" to consolidate his party among the Sinhalese masses.⁸⁴ Thus, he framed a constitution that included articles entrenching state patronage for Buddhism, which re-affirmed the pre-eminence of the Sinhalese language in all aspects of public life and anti-Tamil

education policies.⁸⁵ Notably, the new constitution removed the formal safeguards for minorities that had been incorporated into the British Soulbury Constitution under article 29(2). Chapter II of the 1972 Constitution read as follows:

“The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the right guaranteed by section 18 (1) (d).”

When the ruling party presented the proposal for the Constitution, there was no formidable opposition from the UNP. On the other hand, the 1972 Constitution that guaranteed state patronage to Buddhism, as Schwarz observed, obviously provoked alienation among the non-Sinhala-Buddhists, particularly the Tamil youths whose chances to gain admission to the universities were marginalized due to the ethnic standardization policy, which was now characterized by the government as positive discrimination.⁸⁶ According to Tamil opinion, the 1972 Constitution “was changed to set up a permanent racial hierarchy that posits the Sinhala-Buddhist majority as having a 'first and foremost' place in the island with the other minorities as subordinate. In short, Sri Lanka is deemed a Sinhala country in which the minorities - Tamils, Upcountry Tamils and Muslims - are allowed to stay, provided they understand their place in this hierarchy.”⁸⁷ Thus, the Tamils⁸⁸ practically described the First Republican Constitution of 1972 which in many ways embarrassed symbolic Sinhalese nationalism as a “charter of Sinhalese Buddhist supremacy.”⁸⁹

Though the SLFP and its Sinhala left allies succeeded in arousing Sinhalese nationalism with its symbolic political appeals, it obviously disappointed the same masses economically at a later period. The government’s socio-economic policies

burdened the masses with economic difficulties. The government urged the people to exercise patience, but the general masses who were concerned about their stomachs had their own say on the government: The SLFP alliance suffered a huge defeat in the 1977 general elections which brought the liberal UNP back to power.

The UNP secured 140 seats out of 225. The SLFP campaigning independently of the left parties and with few pro-Sinhala policies won only 8 seats out of 147 while its former allies the LSSP and CP were left without a single seat.⁹⁰ The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a newly born umbrella organization of moderate Tamil parties, openly campaigned for the establishment of a separate sovereign Tamil state in the Northern and Eastern regions of the island at the General Elections. In these Tamil areas, the TULF won all 18 seats and thus became the main opposition party in the Parliament.⁹¹

Prior to the election one significant development took place: the LTTE emerged. The lack of power sharing, the decisive shifts toward Sinhala dominance in state and institutionalization of these tendencies through constitutional provisions, encouraged some Tamils to adopt violence to seek a separate state.⁹² Tamil politicians, in turn, were pressured to openly support the Tamil extremists and their programs. On May 5, 1976 Vellupillai Prabhakaran formed the LTTE.

The UNP administration, led by J.R. Jayewardene, introduced the new constitution commonly known as the second republic or 1978 Constitution. Jayewardene initiated some programs to bring the Sinhala constituency to his side. One of them was to retain the same status for Buddhism in the new Constitution, and thus Article 9 of the constitution guarantees Buddhism the foremost place. Accordingly, the Constitution casts

a duty upon the State to protect and foster Buddhism, while retaining the clause which assures freedom of conscience to all religions. The ruling party's interests and promise to protect and promote Buddhism inspired Sinhala-Buddhist extremists inside Parliament to progressively strengthen the community's efforts to politicize the religion, for example, Cyril Mathew, a Senior Minister in President Jayawardene's Cabinet, in a leaflet published in 1982, made explicit reference to the relationship between the Sinhala race and Buddhism, and reminded the rulers of their duty to Buddhism:

"The link between the Sinhala race and Buddhism is so close and inseparable that it had led to the maxim, "There is no Buddhism without the Sinhalese and no Sinhalese without Buddhism." This is an undeniable fact...It is a Buddhist country. Nobody can deny this fact. No rulers can forget this fact. If they do I do not think such a ruler will last for more than twenty four hours."⁹³

The growth of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka significantly increased the influence of Sinhala-Buddhist extremists and Bhikkhus in the Sri Lanka polity. Escalating Tamil violence in the north and east prompted the government led by J.R. Jayewardene to expand military activities against the Tamil resistance movement and gained some success in marginalizing them. In 1983, a no-separation amendment to the constitution was passed in Parliament. The amendment urged citizens of Sri Lanka to safeguard the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Thus, it prohibited any activities that infringed upon the sovereignty of the island and provided punishments for any violations. This led those openly in favor of separation to lose their civic rights.

The TULF members of Parliament lost their seats when they refused to swear a loyalty oath.

The movement for the Sinhalization of the island run by extremist Sinhala forces won state legitimacy in July 1983. The ethnic riot in 1983, known as Black July, mobilized the Sinhala-Buddhist forces against the Tamils. The riot is well documented. Approximately two thousand Tamils were killed in July/August 1983 by Sinhalese mobs in an attempt to begin an operation of ethnic cleansing of the Tamils. Human Rights Watch documented the cruelty of the 1983 “state sponsored” Sinhalese riots. “Many neighborhoods were destroyed and nearly 100,000 Tamils in Colombo were displaced. Evidence suggested government collusion in the riots”⁹⁴ as well as the involvement of a certain section of *Bhikkhus* in Colombo and its surrounding areas.⁹⁵ Mrs. Sudharshana Rajasingham, a survivor of the July violence, in her testimony to a Tamil nationalist run website verifies the participation of some *Bhikkus* in ethnic violence against the Tamils:

“My younger sister and myself were home alone with the door locked as we waited till everything settled down. Around three in the afternoon, we heard loud banging on the door. We saw 35-40 people armed with sticks, and hatchets - shouting at us to come out. Surprisingly, *we also saw Buddhist monks among the rioters.*” (Emphasis added)⁹⁶

The government neither condemned the violence that killed approximately two thousand Tamils, nor took any meaningful measures to punish the perpetrators of the violence. Instead J.R. Jayewardene, then President of Sri Lanka, praised the mobs as heroes of the Sinhalese people.⁹⁷

The UNP's pro-Sinhala fundamental policies continued to shape the Sri Lanka polity and its institutions up to the 1990's. In 1989, President Ranasinghe Premadasa (1988-93) established a Ministry of Buddha Sasana (religion) to provide a strong link between the state and Buddhism.⁹⁸ Moreover, Premadasa carefully exploited the legacy of Emperor Asoka, a consummate ancient Buddhist ruler, for his own political gains.⁹⁹ And he attempted to be a *good Buddhist*: he often visited Buddhists Temples and urged the Sinhala-Buddhists to strictly adhere to the teachings of the Lord Buddha.¹⁰⁰ More to the point, to prove devotion to the revival of Buddhist culture and tradition, President Premadasa appointed a Cabinet of 22 members who shared his rural and traditional Buddhist background.

The UNP regime's concessions to the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists and Buddhism made the state very vulnerable to extremist pressures, and thus closed the door on a policy of political moderation that could have opened a channel to meaningful reform in the state structure. In other words, the means adopted by the UNP regime to consolidate power, weakened its commitments to secularism. It is imperative to point out that the UNP regime was fundamentally liberal, yet, to strengthen its political positions in a competitive electoral environment, it made use of emotional religious cards, and thus contributed significantly to the politicization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The SLFP led People Alliance (PA) has ruled the island since 1994 except for a brief period when the UNP took over in 2001. The PA won both the 1994 and 1999 Presidential elections under the leadership of Chandrika Bandaranayke Kumaratunga, daughter of S.W.R.D. Bandaranayke and Mrs. Bandaranayke.

In 1997, the Kumaratunga administration drafted a new constitution to promote a federalist solution as a way to ease ethnic tensions.¹⁰¹ The proposed Constitution not only made provisions to protect Buddhism, but also authorized the State to consult the "Supreme Council" in all matters pertaining to the protection and fostering of the Buddha Sasana, recognized by the Minister in charge of the subject of Buddha Sasana.¹⁰² The Supreme Council was the product of the Premadesa administration. It was established in September 1990 to administer Buddhist affairs. The Council members were appointed and governed by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana.¹⁰³ Also, according to DeVotta, Kumaratunga's draft constitution proposed a Ministry of Buddhist affairs and "government support for Buddhist education by providing textbooks, buildings, and Buddhist educational centers, allocating land for Buddhist activities, and renovating Buddhist temples."¹⁰⁴ By then the conflict between the Tamil separatists and the government has become a full-scale civil war, the LTTE has established a strong base in the North, and the government forces has lost vast areas in the East to the guerillas. On July 24, 2001, the LTTE attacked Sri Lanka's only international airport, Katunayake. The attack near the capital of Colombo damaged or destroyed five Sri Lankan Airlines Airbus planes and eight military planes.¹⁰⁵ Subsequently, the government led by Mr. Wickramasinghe of the UNP signed a no-war treaty with the LTTE in February 2002.¹⁰⁶

Kumaratunga, who subscribed to the ideas of European Style secularism, made an alliance with the JVP, Sinhala ultra-nationalists party and formed the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) in 2004 to further consolidate her political position.

Unsurprisingly, the Kumaratunga administration did not authorize any practical measures to either contain or dissuade the JHU *bhikkus* from submitting the Anti-

conversion bill to Parliament on July 21, 2004. The legislation has raised profound concerns especially among Christians, a small minority of the population. The JHU believed that the bill was consistent with the Constitution which guarantees Buddhism the foremost place and requires the State to protect and foster Buddhism. Moreover, the Supreme Court has assured the President and the Speaker of the House that the bill entitled “Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act” published in the Gazette of 28 May 2004 does not contravene the Constitution.¹⁰⁷

A casual reading of Sri Lankan history suggests that the movement for anti-conversion is the application to the religious sphere of the provocative “Sinhala-only” policy that helped precipitate the country’s violent ethnic conflict and civil war. Understood simply analytically and historically, anti-conversion was a step towards a “Buddhism-only” policy that has the potential to provoke a level of religious conflict akin to the ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils.

Sri Lanka’s fifth Presidential elections held in November, 2005 provided a means to reinforce the past tradition that linked the state with religion. Politicization of Buddhism was one of the key agendas of the ruling UPFA in a bid to outmaneuver the UNP, which presented liberal agendas including proposed peace talks with the Tamil Tigers.¹⁰⁸ The UPFA led by the former President Mrs. Kumaratunga, fielded the Sinhala nationalist Premier Mahinda Rajapaksa who hails from the Sinhalese dominated south of the country as its candidate, while the UNP was represented by opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe.

To win the Southern Sinhalese vote, Rajapaksa sought to praise Buddhist history, promised war on the LTTE, blamed the West particularly Norway for the

country's current peace crisis, and waved flags.¹⁰⁹ Most importantly, Premier Rajapaksa struck deals with the Sinhala nationalist JVP¹¹⁰ and JHU,¹¹¹ both of which strongly support the Sinhalization of the island, and want the unitary character of the Sri Lankan state to be preserved. The JHU, monk-only party, significantly contributed to the victory of Rajapaksa.

Rajapakse secured a little over 50% of the popular vote against his main opposition rival Ranil Wickramasinghe who won 48.43% votes.¹¹² The vote statistics indicate that Mr. Rajapakse secured the *majority votes of the majority Sinhalese* who predominantly live in the Southern, Western and Northwestern Provinces, while Wickramasinghe won the *majority of votes of the minorities* who are concentrated in the North and East, Central and part of the Western provinces.¹¹³ Soon after the elections, Rajapakse, appointed Ratnasiri Wickramanayake as Premier of the island. Wickramanayake is well known for his pro-war and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalistic stand.

Furthermore, the Rajapakse administration drafted anti-conversion Bill to appease its Sinhala Buddhist supporters such as the JHU.¹¹⁴ The draft was approved in January 2009. Sri Lanka's parliament was expected to vote on the bill either in February or March.¹¹⁵ Buddha Sasana Act would be more of a code of ethics to streamline Buddhist education and the Sasana. This was a further measure by the ruling Sinhala elite in the long tradition of expediting state commitments to protect and foster the interests of Buddhism and Sinhala-Buddhists.

However, the Rajapakse regime had to postpone a final vote on the bill due to its preoccupation with the war against the LTTE: the government of Sri Lanka has spent a vast amount of financial and political resources to militarily defeat the Tamil nationalism

led by the LTTE, and urged the Sinhala extremists among its ranks and its allies such as the JHU to actively support the war. The ethnic war ended officially on 20th May 2009 with the total demise of “almost the entire LTTE leadership.”¹¹⁶

Moreover, on May 17, 2009 the LTTE, the major Tamil resistant movement, admitted defeat in the war that was waged without any witness and vowed to silence guns against the Sinhala-Buddhist state.¹¹⁷ In May 18, Sri Lanka security forces announced that Tamil Tiger chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, was killed by “Sri Lanka's military in a firefight that signaled the effective end to one of Asia's longest-running military conflicts.”¹¹⁸

Human right groups expressed deep concerns about the use of heavy weapons against the Tamil civilians. Human Right Watch in its report on Sri Lanka’s war against the LTTE pointed that “the Sri Lankan armed forces have indiscriminately shelled densely populated areas, including hospitals, in violation of the laws of war.”¹¹⁹ Evidence gathered by the Times newspaper has revealed that at least 20,000 Tamil people were killed on the Mullaitivu beach by Sri Lanka Army shelling.¹²⁰

According to some Buddhist monks, it is very likely that the government will seek for a final vote on the anti-conversion bill in the floor of Parliament.¹²¹ The major reason is that the government heavily used Sinhala-Buddhist symbols in its brutal war against the LTTE and won considerable support from Sinhala-Buddhist extremist groups. Therefore, the regime has to offer some *useful* concessions to the Sinhala-Buddhist extremist groups as a political appreciation. Also, the Rajapakshe regime wants to seek early elections, probably in early 2010, therefore, such concession is possible, one of the monks concluded.¹²²

The country has entered into a new phase. A new phase would not anyway promise peace in Sri Lanka nor would it take the island into a post-conflict period. Sri Lanka, in the context of this study, poses some questions; will the demise of the LTTE lead to the erosion of the rights of the non-Sinhala Buddhists in the island of Sri Lanka? Will the collapse of violent resistance by the LTTE further strengthen the hands of the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists who aspire to build Sinhalese only Sri Lanka? Or will it further alienate the minorities of Sri Lanka?

There are no hypothetical answers for these questions, but Sri Lanka's past behaviors and attitudes do not offer any optimistic answers to ease the concerns often shared by the ethnic and religious minorities. The point is that the commitments from the UPFA leaders, both Kumaratunga and Rajapakse, to Buddhism and safeguard the interests of the Sinhala-Buddhists increasingly generate a sense of deep anxieties and fears among the minorities, particularly the Christians and Hindus. It also suggests that Buddhism will continue to play a determined role in Sri Lanka's polity, and that Sinhala political elites, regardless of their attachments to various ideologies, will employ Buddhism to win public office and to outbid their opponents in elections.

Roots of Political Buddhism

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that in the past sixty years the Sri Lanka political parties of various shades have instrumentalized the Buddhist religious symbols for political gains; and that a distinct Sinhala-Buddhist political agenda has been fostered and nurtured over this period. The bottom line is that the Sinhala-political elites and politicians have intentionally politicized Buddhism as a means to advance their political agenda. Evidently, Sri Lanka's competitive electoral system generated a channel for

politicians to employ religious and ethnic emotions for a political purpose. Such an emotional strategy radically weakened the secular nature of the state in Sri Lanka. Also, it significantly persuades the state to make disproportionate concessions to Buddhism and Sinhala-Buddhists, and thus it imposes an inalienable duty upon the Sinhala political elites to promote and protect the interests of both Buddhism and the Sinhala-Buddhists. Moreover, the politicization promotes extremist Sinhala-Buddhist political groups such as the JHU. These forces deliberately justify Sinhala-Buddhist domination over the minorities and oppose a political consensus and power-sharing as a way to seek a solution to the Tamil national question. They also promote, justify and mobilize supporters for ethno-religious violence.¹²³ In other words, they shun non-violence.¹²⁴

But what we must also underscore is that this agenda is not entirely invented by the political elites; there is a social root to these symbols. In short, the political Buddhism must have been present in the society; even if within a small minority of the population. The politicization of Buddhism is, incontrovertibly, the main agenda of the Sinhala-Buddhist extremists. But the politicization engrosses some issues which attract systematic manipulation and narrow interest by politicians. Therefore, despite the fact that the political elites have inflated these symbols, reconfigured them in their political discourse and helped them gain strength; it is imperative to examine the roots and its expressions in public discourse, both historically and contemporaneously. The worldview of an influential segment of the Sinhala-Buddhist population, a ‘nationalist’ response to the westernization, fear and anxiety of a perceived outside connections of other ethnic/religious communities are some of these factors which have played significant roles in politicization of Buddhism.

The Sinhala-Buddhist worldview has been shaped and reshaped by the myths and the monkish chronicles such as the Mahavamsa, Culavamsa which underscore two crucial issues, the rightful heir of the state (*Dhammadipa*) and Sri Lanka as the repository of Buddhist message. Both these two issues have shaped the popular psyche and political discourses.

In the post-independence Sri Lanka, particularly beginning the 1960s, Mahavamsa, a text written in the fifth century, has been elevated into the level of canonical text. According to *Mahavamsa*, the Sinhalese people are the preservers of Buddhism and the entire island is the sacred home of the Sinhalese and of Buddhism. It fervently identifies the Tamil rulers who ruled Northern Sri Lanka as invaders and thus, their sole aim was to subjugate the Sinhalese and the island of Sri Lanka.¹²⁵ It also states in plain words that King Dutthagaani to defeat the Tamil-Hindu king extended his rule to Anuradapura, an ancient northern Kingdom of the island, and went to war with hundreds of *Bhikkus*. Mahavamsa, therefore according to Tessa J Bartholomeusz, attempts to radicalize the majority Sinhalese and justifies the violence against the Tamils.¹²⁶ It also plainly endorses the idea that Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhalese, the preservers of Buddhism, and it is an inalienable duty of the rulers to safeguard Buddhism and its followers. Historical incidents and texts such as *Mahavamsa*, fears about the minorities

and the symbolic myths offered opportunities for the Sinhala political class to employ and manipulate those sources as means to gain political position.

Similarly, influential sections of the Buddhist *Bhikkus* are concerned about the rightful heir to the island (*Dhammadipa*) and who should dominate it. They argue that anyone can live in Sri Lanka as long as Sinhala-Buddhists can enjoy cultural, religious, economic, political, and linguistic hegemony.¹²⁷ This belief has pushed for the state recognition of the Buddhism before the 1972 constitution. They argue that without the recognition and consequent state protection the religion will be in danger, which they cannot allow to happen. This argument clearly brings these Bhikkus to the political arena and blurs the dividing line between religious responsibility and political activism. It is of their opinion that power-sharing with any other minorities (especially Tamil Hindus) and federalist structure of the state will facilitate the demise of the Buddhism in the land they consider the repository of the Buddha's words and deeds.

The last point needs little elaboration. There is a belief among the Sinhala-Buddhists that Buddha chose Sri Lanka as a repository of his message, and thus Sri Lanka is the homeland of the followers of Buddha and non-Buddhists can live in Sri Lanka as long as they are ready to live under the domination of the Sinhala-Buddhists and submit to their 'benevolence.' Although one cannot find support for this position in Buddhist canonical texts, it has been popularized by Anagarika Dharmapala (1864- 1933), the key architect of extremist Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. He was successful in constructing an emotional identity for the Sinhalese, emphasizing Buddhism and Sinhala language. Dharmapala, considered as a vicious Sinhala racist by the minorities "ridiculed Sinhala Buddhists who adopted British custom and dress,"¹²⁸ and emotionalized the

society by asserting that death is preferable to the Sinhalese without Buddhism.¹²⁹

Dharmapala blamed the colonial administration for the problems of the Sinhala-Buddhists and accused the British of giving the Sinhalese opium and alcohol to annihilate the Sinhala race.¹³⁰ As it happens, his thoughts inspired many Sinhala-Buddhists, and thus paved the way for the growth of the anti-colonial movement led by Sinhala nationalists.

There were many Sinhala-Buddhists ready to deliver his message to the next generation. One of them was Walpola Rahula (1907-1997), a *Bhikku*, scholar and one of the leading proponents of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. He formulated fundamentals for political Buddhism and was successful in mobilizing *Bhikkus* to challenge the rulers who denied a position for Buddhism. Rahula in an interview with the Sunday Times maintained his political position:

Get this straight and quote me. Sri Lanka is a Buddhist Sinhala country. Let no one make a mistake. Seventy percent of the country consists of Buddhists and Sinhala people. Also make this clear that Sri Lanka is the only Buddhist Sinhala country in the world. If we don't live here, are the LTTE and some of the Tamil parties asking us jump in to the sea? I got angry with [former president] Premadasa because he chose to call *Sri Lanka a multi-national and multi-religious state. No. It is a Buddhist Sinhala State...* (emphasis added).¹³¹

The message of Dharmapala and Rahula is very simple. The island of Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhala-Buddhists and nothing can be materialized for non-Buddhists if they rebel against the preeminence of Buddhism and Buddhists. This message has been

successfully dominating the minds of Sinhala-Buddhists, particularly those Sinhala-Buddhists who live in the poor pockets of Southern Sri Lanka. The message is also the key source of political Buddhism which aggressively pursues the emotional ideology of building a Sinhala-Buddhist theocratic state. One political Buddhist writes that, “Rome is sacred to the Catholics, so is Jerusalem to the Jews and so is Mecca to the Muslims. The tiny island in the Indian Ocean...where the Sinhalese lived for over 25 centuries...is the hallowed land of Sinhala-Buddhists.”¹³²

Although the arguments of Anagarika Dharmapala centered on religion, they were discernibly nationalist, and clearly anti-West. His anti-colonial stance and criticisms of the British colonial rule has been reinvigorated by his followers in the contemporary contexts. Interestingly, their message has been resonated well among a section of people who might not otherwise support a Sinhala-Buddhist political agenda. In this context, the international Non- Governmental Development Organizations (NGDP) commonly referred to as Non Government organizations NGOs, have replaced the colonialism. In this view, these organizations represent the neo-colonial oppression as they subscribe to the agendas of Western imperialism.

Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist opinion argues that the global community, particularly the West has interests in Sri Lanka, and thus to implement their project, they operate through the agendas of NGOs.¹³³ In other words, the goal of NGOs is to secularize the state structure in Sri Lanka for economic and political progress for the benefits of the West. For this reason, according to this opinion, the objective of the call by influential western countries for peace with the LTTE is to undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the Sinhala-Buddhist dominated island. Hence they consider those who

urge peace with the LTTE or support genuine power-sharing democracy as a means to build ethnic harmony and peace as traitors or terrorist sympathizers,¹³⁴ in other words, they live on the LTTE pay list.

These kinds of views have great buyers among the Sinhalese, particularly the economically and socially disadvantaged groups.¹³⁵ Naturally, due to their socio-economic condition, this section of the Sinhala-Buddhists subscribes to the nationalist agendas of the Sinhala politicians who fill their minds with emotions and profound anger toward the NGOs. The key point is that they believe that the NGO's are actively working to divide the Sinhala-Buddhist country on the pretext of the peace process that sought negotiations with the Tamil nationalists..¹³⁶ There are many Sinhala nationalist organizations that oppose the activities of the NGOs on the above-mentioned ground. However, the JVP and JHU are the major firing powers against the NGOs, primarily due to the NGOs support for the peace process and their opposition to military solutions to the ethnic civil war. However, because of the JVP and JHU's organizational structure to effectively mobilize the Sinhala masses and amazing capability to incite Sinhala-Buddhist anger through symbolic emotions, they play a considerable role in the anti-NGOs movement.

Furthermore, during the month of May 2008, the NGOs played a significant role in mobilizing global support against Sri Lanka's bid to secure a second term on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Their efforts won the support of winners of the Nobel Peace Prize from three continents: Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of Argentina, and Jimmy Carter of the United States. They each published statements urging opposition to Sri Lanka because of its abusive human rights

record.¹³⁷ For example, Jimmy Carter, Former US President and the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2002 “calls on the General Assembly not to re-elect Sri Lanka to the Human Rights Council,” citing “the country’s deteriorating human rights record since its first election to the Council in 2006.”¹³⁸ This pressure paid off: Sri Lanka was denied reelection to the UN Human Rights Council.¹³⁹

Sri Lanka’s departure from the UNHRC provoked nationalist sentiments against what they termed as the Christian West. One nationalist opinion by Bandu de Silva, former Sri Lankan Ambassador to France and UNESCO, furiously linked the UNHRC vote with the world Christian conspiracy against a non-Christian country and suggests the damaging objectives of world Christian colonialists with two doctrines:

“Two other objectives of the colonialists were the Harrington doctrine (16th century leading British thinker) to substitute the local populations with foreign populations as done in practically all colonies and which was behind the annihilation of original populations of Americas and Australia and even the decapitations by the British colonial government of all males above the age of 14 years in leading Kandyan families in Sri Lanka; and the Macaulay doctrine of creating ‘Brown Sahibs,’ a doctrine that has taken so much root that we still suffer this malaise in the field of historical and archaeological interpretation and others...”¹⁴⁰

It needs to be reiterated that the NGOs are targeted not because of their activities, but because they have been turned into symbols which can be attacked to prove a nationalist credential. That is why these verbal attacks seldom mention specific organizations, but talks in a much generalized ideological terms.

Fear motivates people to act irrationally. The interesting fact is that although the Sinhalese are, in fact, the majority of the population on the island, they are, due to fear, struggling with a minority complex *vis-à-vis* the Tamils.¹⁴¹ They are overwhelmed by the reality that the Tamils of Sri Lanka together with the Tamil-speaking population of Tamilnadu in South India number more than 60 millions.¹⁴² Thus, while in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese outnumber the Tamils by more than three to one; they are outnumbered by nearly six to one by the Tamil-speaking people of South Asia.¹⁴³

There are vast differences in terms of historical tradition and geography between the Tamils of Sri Lanka and Tamilnadu. Yet there is a strong link between the two groups because of the common language and culture. Also, the majority of the Tamils of Tamilnadu are Hindus. Hence, the Sinhalese fear of cultural and political threat from the Tamils of Tamilnadu. This factor is said to have caused a sense of anxiety among the Sinhala-Buddhists.

The political relationship between the Tamil political class in Sri Lanka and that of Tamilnadu further aggravated the fears of Sinhalese: the moderate Tamil leadership had always maintained links with Tamilnadu. The militant Tamil leadership had links with Tamilnadu Tamils and the Tamilnadu federal government and received overt support in terms of finance and provision of military training. These factors served to aggravate the fears of Sinhalese.¹⁴⁴ In Wilson language, “the ordinary Sinhalese regards the total Tamil population as a threat to the existence of the Sinhalese race especially when viewed in the context of neighboring South India’s Dravidian millions.”¹⁴⁵

Concluding Remarks

The demise of the cold war between the USA and the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s has generated new actors in global politics. These actors, by and large, employed a kind of politics that associated with religious and ethnic symbols to create a center of attention to emotions. This symbolic politics (identified with religion) has been similar to the developments elsewhere in the third world over the past few decades.¹⁴⁶

In Sri Lanka, since independence in 1948, Buddhism, which teaches tolerance and nonviolence,¹⁴⁷ became a great means to gain political position. As discussed, such political exercises pressured the Sinhala political class to make disproportionate concessions to the Sinhala-Buddhists who make up a large percentage of the country's electoral map. The results of the politicization were two fold: the erosion of the secular nature of the state and its institutions such as the legislature, bureaucracy, judicial system, public education system and the police and defense forces; and the deepening distrust of marginalized minorities, particularly the Tamils both in the state and its institutions.

The gloomy reality is that politicians still use the same old emotional agendas as a means of winning elections. Premier Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, for example, to meet the demand of the extremist Sinhala-Buddhist organizations has long been attempting to introduce a nineteenth amendment to the constitution and by this means firmly establish a link between the state and Buddhism. Furthermore, Mr. Wickremanayake promised his full backing to Buddhists in the struggle to protect their interests against unscrupulous evangelists.¹⁴⁸

However, explanations for the growth of forms of political Buddhism frequently, and necessarily, highlight two developments. The first is Sri Lanka's highly competitive and emotionalized-electoral structure, in which political parties outbid their opponents

either on the pro-Sinhala-Buddhist or anti-Tamil policies. In Downs' language, politicians are motivated by the desire for power, and income... their primary objective is to be elected [to public office].¹⁴⁹ For that reason, to maximize the Sinhalese votes and outbid their opponents, the Sinhala politicians offered pro-Buddhist concessions. This eventually opened a channel for the growth and increasing political prominence of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka polity.

The second is popular frustration among the Sinhala-Buddhists at increasing economic difficulties.¹⁵⁰ The Enlightenment ideology of the eighteenth century, which inspired American independence and the French Revolution, did much to liberate Europe from the clutches of emotional agendas (the separation of church and state) whereas countries like Sri Lanka are still struggling to embrace economic democracy which is capable of producing a strong middle class who can, consecutively, pursue political reform. The existence of such a vacuum in the Third World has inaudibly created comfortable space for illiberal and irrational forces to employ political democracy to gain power.

The failure to pursue economic modernity, by successive governments in Sri Lanka, based on equality and fair distribution left the majority of Sri Lankans, including the Sinhala-Buddhists who live in the Southern rural community of the island with frustrations and anxiety. The next result is the absence of a healthy urban-oriented middle class (including among the Sinhala-Buddhists) who can act against destructive forces. These policies, on the other hand, have widened the gap between poor and rich, and thus triggered deep social and political frustrations among the poor. The chauvinistic Sinhala politicians exploit the unhealthy condition of the Sinhala-Buddhist masses for their

political agendas and even hire them to kill political opponents and the minorities. The evidence, associated with the 1983 violence against the Tamils, suggests that the Sinhalese who were hired by local Sinhala politicians to kill the Tamils are from deprived social classes and acted as they did for economic benefits.¹⁵¹ These factors can be cited for explanations for the phenomenal growth of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Millions of people across the world believe a democratic system will liberate them from the burden of ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination. But what is distasteful in Sri Lanka is that electoral politics, the key element of democracy, has helped increase religious and ethnic tensions and hostility among different groups.

The point is that the opening-up of political modernity in the absence of economic democracy in Sri Lanka has created destructive religious and ethnic forces that are able to manipulate sensitive emotions for political gain, and thus paved the way for instability. However, the future offers three formulas to gain stability and progress, and to strengthen democracy.

They are, (1) De-politicization of religion. This inevitably involves politicians' commitments to non-emotional issues to win elections, and the political class needs to demonstrate some strong willingness to withdraw state patronage for Buddhism; (2) Measures to promote negotiated religious and ethnic reconciliation and compromise. This requires genuine efforts to build power-sharing measures with the minorities. The demise of the LTTE provides opportunities to commence serious discussions on power-sharing with the Tamil nationalists. In actual fact, power-sharing could strengthen Sri Lanka's democracy, its war-ridden economy, and religious and ethnic harmony, and (3) Democratization of economic policies to ease the sufferings of disadvantaged people.

This study suggests that economically weakened masses become easy targets for irrational political slogans, employed by narrow-minded politicians and community forces. Greater economic opportunities and “interaction among people, coupled with widespread education and mass communication networks, would breakdown parochial identities of ethnic and religious groups.”¹⁵²

Sri Lanka’s Sinhala political class and politicians need to adopt progressive steps to de-politicize Buddhism from politics and to take measures to ease the concerns of the ethnic and religious minorities. Such positive developments likely generate trust and loyalty among the ethnic and religious minorities both at the masses and elite. But it is likely Buddhism will continue to play a significant role in Sri Lanka’s politics.

It is, therefore, safe to assume that Sri Lanka, which once aspired to be the Switzerland of Asia, may face serious instability and disharmony between the different religious and ethnic groups, if accommodative approaches to de-politicize Buddhism and to win political and economic modernity are not attempted or do not succeed.

Suggested Reading:

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- A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Breakup of Sri Lanka – the Sinhalese – Tamil Conflict*. (London: Hurst. 1988).
- K. Jayewardene, *Ethnic & Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka – Some Aspects of Sinhala Buddhist Consciousness over the Past 100 Years*. (Colombo: Centre for Social Analysis. 1985).
- J. van der Horst, *Who is He, What is He Doing? – Religious Rhetoric & Performances in Sri Lanka during R. Premadasa's Presidency, 1989-1993*. (Amsterdam: VU University Press. 1995).

Notes

1. Neil De Votta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2004) and K.M.De. Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*. (New Delhi: Penguin Books. 1998).
2. Patrick Peebles, *The History of Sri Lanka*. (Westport, Connecticut.: Greenwood Press. 2006.),10.
3. The GDP grew at an average annual rate of 5.5% during the early 1990s, until a drought and a deteriorating security situation lowered growth to 3.8% in 1996. The economy rebounded in 1997-2000, with average growth of 5.3%. The year 2001 saw the first recession in the country's history, as a result of power shortages, budgetary problems, the global slowdown, and continuing civil strife. Signs of recovery appeared after the 2002 ceasefire.
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<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Abstract_2006/abstract2006/table%202007/CHAP%202/A B2-12.pdf (19 March 2008).

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

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(Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress. 1988). Electronic version of the book is available at <http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/>.

9. Ibid.

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11. A.R.M. Imtiyaz, "Eastern Muslims of Sri Lanka: Special Problems and Solutions," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 44, (4) (August 2009): 404-427,.

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13. James W. Gair, "Sinhala 'an Indo-Aryan Isolate,'" in *Studies in South Asian Linguistics: Sinhala and Other South Asian Languages*, (ed) Barbara C. Lust. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998): 1-13.

14. M. Varadarajan, *A brief History and Features of the Tamil Language*, <<http://tamilelibrary.org/teli/tamil7.html>> (8 June 2008).

15. The World Fact book: Sri Lanka, *CIA World Fact Book*, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html (10 May 2008).

16. Russell R. Ross and Andrea Matles Savada, 1988.

17. M.A. Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity*. (Colombo: ICES. 2007), p.5..

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18. Francoi Houtart, *Religion and ideology in Sri Lanka*. (Bangalore: TPI. 1974).
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22. Phadnis, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka*, Op.Cit, 1976.
23. Sri Lanka Constitution 1972,
www.tamilnation.org/srilankalaws/72constitution.htm (18 June 2008).
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25. Neil DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*. (Washington, DC: East West Center. 2007), 24-27.
26. “The JVP intensifies its campaign against Sri Lankan peace talks,”
www.wsws.org/articles/2004/aug2004/jvp-a31.shtml (12 January 2008).
27. Department of Elections, *Sri Lanka*,
www.slelections.gov.lk/genaral/2004_results/general.html (4 March 2008).
- ²⁸ **Wimal : notable absentee**,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2008/04/080405_april.shtml> (8 June 2009)

²⁹ **JNP 'alternative' to main parties,**
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2008/05/080514_jnp_weerawansa.shtml> (8 June 2009)

³⁰ Ibid.

31. Emily Wax, “As Fighting Flares in Civil War, Key Buddhist Shuns Nonviolence,” *The Washington Post Online*, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/25/AR2008032502695.html?hpid=topnews (19 June 2008).

32. Ibid.

33. Timothy Samuel Shah and A.R.M. Imtiyaz, “A Brief on Sri Lanka’s Proposed Anti-Conversion Legislation: Information, Observations, and Analysis,” www.lankaliberty.com/reports/Anti-ConversionLegislationBrief.doc.

34. Sarah Page, “Buddhist Mobs Attack Five Churches in Sri Lanka: Aggression Designed to Force Passage of Anti-Conversion Laws,” *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int*, www.hrwf.net/html/sril_lanka_2003.html (7 August 2003). “[In November 2002, Mr. Maheshwaran, former Hindu Cultural Affairs Minister, made a visit to Tamil Nadu, one of five states in India with anti-conversion laws. On his return to Sri Lanka, Maheshwaran made a public statement vowing to introduce a bill in parliament to curb religious conversions. In subsequent months, Maheshwaran repeated his intentions to introduce the bill to parliament. A draft bill closely modeled on the Tamil Nadu anti-conversion law has now been prepared, according to the EASL, leading to increased attacks on Christian churches in recent months.” See also Don Asoka Wijewardena, “Anti-conversion laws within 60 days” *Sunday Observer at 3*, (18 January 2004). (The proposed anti-conversion laws were drafted by a special multi-religious committee appointed by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe in agreement with former President Chandrika Banaranaika Kumaratunga. Prior to the dissolution of the Sri Lankan parliament in February 2004, Minister of Justice, Legal Reforms, National

Integration and Buddha Sasana, W.J.M. Lokubandara stated that the act would come into effect within the next 60 days.)

35. "Sri Lanka 'withdraws' from CFA," *BBC Online*, www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2008/01/080102_cfa_government.shtml (19 June 2008). A. R.M. Imtiyaz, "Theoretical understanding of the death of truce," *The Sunday Times*, 42(34) (20 January 2008) /www.sundaytimes.lk/080120/News/news00020.html.

36. Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, "The Quality of democracy: An overview," *Journal of Democracy* 15(4) (October 2004), 24.

37. S.J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2001): 15-47.

38. Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Moderns Italy*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1994),154-56.

39. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. (New York: Harper. 1957), 28.

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47. Herbert W. Harris, "A Conceptual Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Identity, Racial and ethnic identity" in *Racial and ethnic identity: psychological development and creative expression*, eds Herbert W. Harris, Howard C. Blue & Ezra E.H. Griffith. (New York: Routledge. 1995),1-15.
48. Kari Edward, "The Interplay of Affect and Cognition in Attitude Formation and Change," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59(2) (1990): 202-16.
49. S.J. Kaufman, Op.Cit, 28.
50. Robert N. Kearney, "The Political Party System in Sri Lanka," *Political Science Quarterly*, 98(1) (Spring 1983): 17-33.
51. Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, "Buddhist Fundamentalism and Identity in Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, eds Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1998),1-35.
52. Josine van der Horst, '*Who is He, What is He Doing*': *Religious Rhetoric and Performances in Sri Lanka during R. Preadasa's Presidency-1989-1993*. (Amsterdam: VU University Press. 1995),1-16.
53. C.R. De Silva, *Sri Lanka: A History*. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House. 1997), 243.

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54. Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, *Op.Cit*,1-35.
55. Sri Lankan Tamils who dominate the island in the North and east consider they area nation of people due to their symbolic identities and do not identify with the Indian Tamils who were brought to the island in the 19th century as an economic class.
56. The ethnic composition of the east has undergone transformation both as a result of natural factors and as a result of the conflict. The long civil war has created many Internally Displaced Persons. There are also a considerable number of both Tamils and Muslims who have migrated. The stated percentage as it is today going by the recent survey done by the Department of Census and Statistics makes the Muslims a majority in the Eastern region, the former stronghold of the Tamil Tigers where elections were held on May 10, 2008 to legitimize the provincial council system.
57. A. Shastri, "Estate Tamils, the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and Sri Lankan politics," *Contemporary South Asia*, (8)1 (1999): 65-86.
58. Sri Lankan Tamils who dominate the island in the North and east consider they area nation of people due to their symbolic identities and do not identify with the Indian Tamils who were brought to the island in the 19th century as an economic class. See Elizabeth Nissan and R.L Stirrat, "The generation of communal identities," in *Sri Lanka: History and the roots of Conflict*, ed Jonathan Spencer. (London: Routledge. 1990), 38.
59. Mohan Ram, *Sri Lanka: The Fractured Island*. (New Delhi: Penguin Books.1989).
60. V. Navaratnam, *The Fall and Rise of the Tamil Nation*. (Madras: Kaanthalakam. 1991), 48.

61. To prevent discriminatory laws being enacted, the British provided a safeguard prohibiting the enactment of any law which would make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions were not made liable, or confer advantages or privileges on persons of any community or religion which were not conferred on persons of any communities or religions. This provision, which became Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution (1947), proved to be totally ineffectual in preventing either individual discrimination or outright deprivation of existing collective rights of franchise, citizenship, language, etc.

62. Bruce Fein, "International Law, Human Rights will salute Tamil Statehood", *TamilNet*, www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=25709 (19 June 2008).

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66. Laksiri Jayasuriya, *The Changing Face of Electoral Politics in Sri Lanka: 1994-2004*. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International. 2005), 11.

67. The highest Buddhist order.

68. S.J Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*. (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press. 1992), 42-44.

69. S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed*, 44.

70. Statistics of Elections from 1947 to 1977,
<http://archive.srilankanelections.com/elections4777/1956.html> (16 June 2008).

71. The left parties realized that their pro-minority policies would alienate them from the majority Sinhalese, who are demographically and electorally superior. And the LSSP at its annual conference in June 1964 accepted “Sinhala-Only” and joined the SLFP and other Sinhala chauvinistic groups’ demonstration to protest the Dudley-Selva pact of 1965, a power-sharing accord signed by the then Premier Dudley Senanayake of the UNP and Tamil leader Selvanayakam of the FP.

72. Kumari Jayewardene, *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka: Some Aspects of Sinhala Buddhist Consciousness over the past 100 years*. (Colombo, Dehiwala.: Center for Social Analysis. 1985), 74-79.

73. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict*. (London: Hurst. 1988), 39.

74. The pact could have resolved the ethnic conflict in a way acceptable to both the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The pact paved the way for the wide-ranging decentralization of administration and devolution of powers to the Tamil areas of the North and East. This pact sought that Tamil Northern Province would constitute a single regional authority, while the predominantly Tamil but demographically more complex eastern province would be divided into two or more such units. However, all these units would be free to amalgamate, if they so desired. Moreover, it was agreed that Parliament

would devolve all powers to the regional bodies on the following subjects-agriculture, cooperatives, lands and land development, colonization, education, health, industries, fisheries, housing and social services, electricity, irrigation schemes and roads. Most important of all, the pact stipulated that Tamil should be used as the official language for all administrative work in the northern and eastern provinces.

75. The new pact proposed a moderate degree of devolution of power through the mechanism of district councils in the Tamil areas. It also underscored in the granting of land under colonization schemes, the following priorities to be observed in the northern and eastern provinces: (a) Land in the two provinces to be granted in the first instance to landless persons in the district concerned; (b) Secondly, to Tamil-speaking persons resident in the northern and eastern provinces; and (c) thirdly, to other citizens of Sri Lanka, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the island

76. The pact opened the way for a wide-ranging decentralization of administration and devolution of powers to the Tamil areas of the north and east. It proposed that a Tamil Northern Province would constitute a single regional authority, while the predominantly Tamil but demographically more complex Eastern province would be divided into two or more such units. However, all these units would be free to amalgamate, if they so desired. Moreover, it was agreed that Parliament would devolve all powers to the regional bodies on the following subjects - agriculture, cooperatives, lands and land development, colonization, education, health, industries, fisheries, housing and social services, electricity, irrigation schemes and roads.

77. Section 29 (2) (c) of the Soulbury constitution explicitly states that no law enacted by Parliament shall... confer on persons of any community or religion any

privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions.

78. Mapitigama Buddhakkita was the key figure behind the assassination of Bandaranayake who played the leading role in mobilizing the Bhikkhu against the UNP. However, the actual killing was carried out by another Bhikkhu.

79. Donald I Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1985), 390.

80. K.M. De Silva, Op.Cit, 333.

81. To prevent discriminatory laws being enacted, the British provided a safeguard prohibiting the enactment of any law which would make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions were not made liable, or confer advantages or privileges on persons of any community or religion which were not conferred on persons of any communities or religions. This provision, which became Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution (1947), proved to be totally ineffectual in preventing either individual discrimination or outright deprivation of existing collective rights of franchise, citizenship, language, etc.

82. Statistics of Elections from 1947 to 1977,
<http://archive.srilankanelections.com/elections4777/1970.html> (25 January 2008).

83. For a detailed analysis of the JVP insurgency, see A.C. Alles, *Insurgency-1971*. (Colombo: Apothecaries Co.Ltd. 1977).

84. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, Op.Cit., 87.

85. After 1956, the Tamils' percentage in the state sector suffered continuous decline because of the Government policy on the official language. However, in certain professional fields like medicine, engineering and accountancy, Tamil dominance was more or less unchanging or slightly higher than before. The reason for this was that Sri Lankan Tamils who appeared with higher academic qualifications had now begun to concentrate on the sciences, especially medicine and engineering. Their efforts led to success because of their advanced teaching facilities for science at the high-school level in Jaffna. This encouraged Tamils to enter universities for professional courses of study. This was a common tendency until the SLFP returned to power.

86. Tigers celebrate Heroes Day to Butress myth of "a Tamil Homeland"
<http://www.slembassyusa.org/features/2007/tigers_celebrate_26nov07.html> (10 June, 2009)

87. 'Tamils seek liberation, not just an end to human rights abuses,'
<www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=26071> (20 June 2008).

88. After 1956, Tamils percentage in the state sector remarkably suffered continuous decline because of the Government policy on the official language. However, in certain professional fields like medicine, engineering and accountancy, Tamils dominance was more or less remains unchanging or modest greater than before. The reason for this was that Sri Lankan Tamils who appeared with higher academic qualifications had now begun to concentrate on the sciences, especially medicine and engineering. Their efforts reached success because of their rather advanced teaching facilities for science at the high-school level in Jaffna. This encouraged Tamils to enter

universities for professional courses of study. This was a common tendency until SLFP returned to power.

89. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, Op.Cit, 88.

90. Statistics of Elections from 1947 to 1977,
<<http://archive.srilankanelections.com/elections4777/1977.html>> (25 January 2008).

91. For a detailed analysis of the votes polled by the TULF in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, see ‘The Mandate of Tamil Ealam,’ *Economic Review* (Colombo), 3(4) (July 1977):12-14; and Tissa Balasooriya, ‘Tamil mandate from Ealam: Fact or Fiction?’, *Tribune* (Colombo), 22(14) 24 (September 1977):10-11; and 22(15) (1 October 1977):14-16.

92. Ibid,115.

93. Sinhala Buddhist Ethno Nationalism,
<www.tamilnation.org/tamileelam/fundamentalism/index.htm> (10 June 2008).

94. J. Becker, “Funding the “Final War” LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora,” Op. Cit. *Human Rights Watch*, (2006).

95. Author’s interview by phone with three Sinhalese who declined to disclose their names. They acknowledged their role in violence against the Tamils in Colombo on July 24, 1983. An interview was held on July 25, 2004 for author’s research on ethno-political conflict in Sri Lanka. See, A.R.M. Imtiyaz and Ben Stavis, “Ethno-Political Conflict in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Third World Studies*, 25, (2) (fall 2008): 135-152.

96. *Black July '83* < www.blackjuly83.com/Survivors.htm > (7 June 2008).

97. A. R. M. Imtiyaz and B. Stavis, Op.Cit.

98. K.M. De Silva, Op.Cit, 34.

99. Josine van der Horst, Op.Cit.

100. Ibid.

101. She promised the Buddhist High Priests in Kandy that the 'Devolution' package will not be finalized until the 'war is won'. She added that the package will not 'erode the powers of the centre' and declared that there would be no merger of the North and East'. It was later announced that the 'Devolution' package would be further watered down.

102. The clause 7 of the proposed constitution: (1) The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while guaranteeing to all religions the rights granted by Articles 15 (1) and 15 (3). (2) The State shall consult the Supreme Council in all matters pertaining to the protection and fostering of the Buddha Sasana. (3) For the purpose of this Article ``Supreme Council" means a Council established by law in consultation with the Maha Sangha.

www.tamilnation.org/conflictresolution/tamileelam/cbkproposals/97constitution/ch1to6.htm#Buddhism

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150. The Sinhala dominated Southern region of the island largely pockets the Central, Uva, Sabaragamuwa and Southern provinces. These provinces suffer reasonable agricultural growth. A significant lack of infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and irrigation and communication facilities reduces people’s hope to gain a decent life-style and restricts opportunities to earn profits through non-traditional economic activities. “Malnutrition among children is common. In some areas in six of the seven provinces, seven out of ten people have no access to electricity, and almost half of the population does not have access to safe drinking water.” “Rural poverty in Sri Lanka,”
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151. An interview with three Sinhalese who declined to disclose their names. They acknowledged their role in violence against the Tamils in Colombo on July 24, 1983. According to them, they were asked by the local Sinhala politician who offered some bottles of local alcohol and 500/=SLR each to loot and burn the Tamils shops as much as they can with others, who were on the same mission on the same day. An interview was held on July 25, 2004. A. R. M. Imtiyaz and B. Stavis, Op.Cit.

152. A. R. M. Imtiyaz and B. Stavis, Op.Cit.