

ICES Ethnicity Course Series 2

Buddhism, Identity and Conflict

Lecture delivered by
H.L.Seneviratne

at the
Course on Ethnicity, Identity and Conflict
ICES Auditorium, Colombo
August 14, 2002



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Colombo**

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Acknowledgements

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) was established in August 1982 with two offices in Colombo and Kandy. To celebrate its twentieth anniversary in August 2002, the ICES introduced a 25 day study course on **Ethnicity, Identity and Conflict** bringing together Sri Lankan scholars living abroad and as well as in Sri Lanka as the faculty members.

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Buddhism, Identity and Conflict

H.L. Seneviratne

In many popular accounts of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka such as news items and TV and radio broadcasts, and even some supposedly scientific or scholarly accounts, it is often stated or implied that the conflict is historic, going back to over two thousand years. Recent social and historical research tell us a different story. Far from going back to more than two millennia, the conflict is rooted in recent developments going back to no more than a century or so. This is not to say that there are no continuities. This paper is an attempt to elucidate some aspects of the nature of that continuity in relation to an important element in the conflict, namely, the group identity of the majority, the Sinhala Buddhists.

It is often held, especially by nationalist intellectuals and opinion leaders of Sri Lanka, that the island is and has always been a unitary Sinhala Buddhist state in which the minorities are assumed to be non-existent, are aliens, or in some other way peripheral to the Sri Lankan polity. This view, once confined to nationalist elites has now trickled down, facilitated by the extensive and longstanding reach of the media in a small, largely literate country. In this view, Sri Lanka is an autonomous geographical entity with clearly demarcated and impermeable boundaries, a belief particularly facilitated by the insularity of the country, the coastal waters providing a visible, tangible, audible and easily comprehensible boundary. In its ideal formulation, this view excludes the minorities by observing complete silence about them, although in day to day life they emerge everywhere and have to be dealt with.

Even the most cursory glance will show that the model behind this understanding is the modern nation state, which came into being in world history no earlier than the last few centuries. By the end of the World War I, the nation state has become more or less the sole

form of political and state organization on the globe. Its nature and characteristics, the reasons for its emergence, its historical progress, its legal framework, its philosophical, ideological and economic foundations, its impact on human social existence and so forth constitute one of the most voluminous bodies of historical and social science literature of the last two centuries. Its ubiquity, its socializing power, its impingement on day to day life, and its hegemony over all other forms of organization, enables us to understand and even forgive to some extent the assumption, however false, that this is the political form of society that always existed.

It is the particular contribution of anthropology to empirically demonstrate that, far from being the universal form of state and polity, this is a strange and aberrant form in the morphology and comparative study of political institutions. For our present purposes it is not necessary to go into the complex cross-cultural variety of political systems around the world. Instead, let me briefly cite some examples that illustrate the particular type of pre modern polity appropriate for the present discussion.

My first example is the Chola empire as described by George Spencer who saw it as consisting of three zones.¹ The first is the central zone, the Cholamandalam, where the power of the ruler is the strongest and most effective, and where the mode of exploitation is taxation. In the second zone consisting, among other territories, of Tondaimandalam and Pandimandalam, wealth is collected in the form of tribute. Here, the ruler's power was not absolute but his influence was considerable. In contrast to these two zones where extraction of wealth was regularized, we have a third and outermost zone, Ilamandalam, a zone of sporadic incursion and plunder. It is to this last *mandala* or circle to which Sri Lanka in its "Chola Period" belonged. This broad kind of state organization is elaborated in fascinating and varied ways in the literature of anthropology. Particularly relevant for Sri Lanka are Hocart's conception of the

¹ "The Politics of Plunder: the Cholas in eleventh century Ceylon". *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35, no. 3 (1976): 405-419.

state as a sacrificial organization, where the "royal style" was re-enacted in increasingly smaller scale as one moved from capital to province to district to village; and Dumont's conception of the Hindu polity reminiscent of, if not derived from, Coomaraswamy's classic formulation of the Indian state as a partnership of temporal power and spiritual authority.²

Let us now look at some examples from Southeast Asia. The Malay political system as described by Gullick is at first glance a monarchy.³ At the apex of the system in each Malay state was the king (sultan). Gullick explains that in most states the sultan did not enjoy any exceptional concentration of administrative authority. Powerful local or district chiefs could and did flout the sultan's wishes with impunity. Some of these chiefs were wealthier than the sultan. He was in control of a district, like other chiefs did, and governed it loosely as they did. His role in the system of the state did not constitute any exercise of pre eminent power. A given chief held his district by means of his own strength rather than by the backing of the sultan. The sultan had little or no say in the succession to provincial chiefship, which was a matter for the family of the chief. Despite all this, the sultan had symbolic status as the head of the system. While he enjoyed no power, he carried in him a great deal of dignity, derived from his status as the symbol of the total system's conceptual unity, and the spring of its titles and ranks. The continuity of the sultan's dignity and symbolic status was enabled among other devices

² A.M.Hocart, *Kings and Councillors* (1936. Repr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Loius Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966. English Translation, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (ed.)Zellig S.Harri (American Oriental Series 22, 1942; Repr. Kraus Reprint Corporation New York, 1967).

³ J.M.Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, L.S.E.Monographs in Social Anthopology 17 (London, Atholene Press, 1958).

by its regular ceremonial enactment at court. These enactments served to periodically transmit to the chiefs righteous authority embodied in the ruler and transferred through the use of sacred objects and regalia.

A particularly vivid illustration of the pre-modern polity and state organization is found in Stanley Tambiah's analysis of the traditional polity of Thailand⁴. Tambiah considers the pre-modern Thai polity as a center-oriented rather than centralized system, and, following the analogy of the world system or the *mandala* of ancient Indian cosmology, labels it "galactic polity". We have already seen that the Chola kingdom was explicitly such a *mandala* system. In the "the galactic polity" there are no boundaries just as there is no center. Each constituent entity is as good a candidate for the pre-eminent or central position as any other. Today's center may be tomorrow's periphery. Each entity pulsates and expands to swallow others, and contracts to become its former self.

An important feature of these pre-modern systems is their acceptance of multiple cultural loyalties and absence of a consciously formulated single cultural identity. Let me illustrate this from an ethnographic example from another Asian society, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Ernest Gellner describes the identity of a Himalayan peasant as follows:

A Himalayan peasant, for example, may be involved with priests and monks and shamans of several religions in different contexts at different times of the year; his caste, clan and language may link him to diverse units. The speakers of a given tribal language may, for example, not be treated as members of it, if they happen to be of the wrong occupational caste. Life style, occupation, language, ritual practice may fail to be congruent. A family's economic and political survival may hinge, precisely, on the adroit manipulation and

maintenance of these ambiguities, in keeping options and connections open. Its members may not have the slightest interest in, or taste for, an unambiguous, categorical self-characterization such as is nowadays associated with a putative nation, aspiring to internal homogeneity and external autonomy. In a traditional milieu an ideal of a single overriding cultural identity makes little sense.⁵

It is precisely such a "single overriding cultural identity" that the nationalists claim for pre colonial Sri Lanka. We *do* have in the pre-colonial literary works a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness and a model of a hegemonic and unified Sinhala Buddhist state. However, historians find no hard evidence to back this up, and our theoretical knowledge of pre-modern political systems does not support it. If so, why is such a state portrayed in the literary sources? The answer according to some specialists is that this is a response to the trauma of invasions from South India, as depicted, for example, in the Sinhala texts composed by the Buddhist monk literati, which make repeated reference to the long Chola occupation of the island in the 10th century, especially the invasion of Magha in 1235 AD⁶.

The nationalist understanding of ancient Sri Lanka as a hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist polity is also indirectly and unintentionally supported by the work of well recognized scholars, ironically some of them the most articulate and convincing advocates of the opposite case. The best example of the latter is Stanley Tambiah who, primarily on the basis of Thai evidence, has argued for the existence in the Buddhist polities of South and Southeast Asia a

⁴ *World Conqueror World Renouncer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983): 12-13.

⁶ R.A.L.H. Gunawardhana, "People of the Lion", in ed. Jonathan Spencer *Sri Lanka: History and Roots of Conflict*. (London: Routledge, 1990); S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992)

deep-structural tendency to identify the religion, the people and the king, in other words, a Buddhist nationalist identity. This view of the Buddhist state is also argued for by the textual scholars Heinz Bechert, Trevor Ling and B.G. Gokhale, and the monk scholar Walpola Rahula.⁷ Bechert goes so far as to argue that the ancient Sri Lankan state was a proto nation state. Through the work of nationalist theorists and propagandists, these ideas have trickled down to the average consumer of the media, and they find a fertile receptacle in the educated young: graduates, undergraduates, and school children. The term “hydraulic society”, originally a technical term used by Edmund Leach has also been appropriated by the nationalist ideologues the same way. Glossed as “*vari samskritiya*”, this term now constitutes part of the standard vocabulary portraying a glorified past society.

Contrary to the theory of a centralized, hegemonic and homogeneous proto nation state, what we in fact have in pre-colonial Sri Lanka is a text book illustration of the pattern of the pre-modern agriculture based society Tambiah has called “the galactic polity”. Let us look at the Kandyan Kingdom for which we have plenty of historical data. The kingdom consisted of two types of divisions. First, the smaller divisions, known as *rata* were adjacent to and surrounded the city of Kandy. These, in charge of a chief known as *rate mahatmaya*, being close to the capital were effectively under the control of the king. The second and much larger divisions were headed by an officer known as the *disava*. The more distant and isolated of these divisions were de facto autonomous domains, completely out of the king’s control, but like in the Malay systems,

the king had ritual and symbolic authority, in particular as the custodian of the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha. The Asala Perahara served to enhance this ritual authority of the king by symbolically capturing the kingdom annually for the king.

The ancient and the medieval polities of Sri Lanka were not unitary or *ekiya* as believed by the nationalist elites and relentlessly reiterated in the nationalist media. The territory of the polity did not embrace the island as a whole as imagined in the present day Sinhala Buddhist conception of an “island of Dhamma”. There was nowhere in pre-colonial Sri Lanka the kind of orderly and smooth handing down of administrative and bureaucratic authority the history textbooks declare and history teachers transmit to trusting students, such as, from the king to the *dissava*-s and downwards to the *korala*-s, the *atukorala*-s, and the *vidane*-s. Such a picture is no more than a projection of modern bureaucratic hierarchical organization on to the Kandyan system. If with all the military strength of the state and its legally constituted sovereignty the modern state of Sri Lanka cannot extend its writ to the modest 25000 square mile area of this island and the LTTE can operate freely in some parts of that territory, it is not difficult to understand how the ancient and mediaeval kings could possibly do so, except in a ritual sense. According to the historian R.A.L.H. Gunawardhana, it was not until about the 12th century that the group called Sinhala was identified with those who spoke the Sinhala language.⁸ The craftsmen-agriculturists who spoke Sinhala were excluded from the Sinhala group which included only the elite that Gunawardhana labels the “ruling class”. So in the early period of Sri Lankan history, language did not form part of the ethnic group’s identity. This is even more problematic with regard to religion. There were Buddhists who were not Sinhala, and Sinhala who were not Buddhist, as indeed is the case today. So, Buddhism was not always part of the Sinhala identity. Gunawardhana suggests a gradual and progressive extension of the

⁷ Heinz Bechert, “Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: *Mahavamsa* and Political Thinking”, in ed. Bardwell Smith *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*. (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books 1978). Trevor Ling, *The Buddha* (London: Temple Smith 1973); B.G. Gokhale, “Early Buddhist Kingship”, in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26, no. 1 (1966): 15-22. Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*. (Colombo: Gunasena, 1956).

⁸ “People of the Lion...” (cited above). All quotations below are from this work.

Sinhala identity from the “ruling class” to the kingdom, and later to the people of the kingdom.

Gunawardhana cites Brahmi inscriptions found in different parts of the country and an array of literary works to argue that ancient Sri Lanka was a land of small disparate entities dominated by petty rulers. While the rulers of Anuradhapura may have been preeminent, there is nothing to prove that other rulers accepted the authority of the Anuradhapura dominion established, according to the *Mahavamsa*, by Devanampiya Tissa. The kingship at Anuradhapura is reminiscent of the ritual sovereignty associated with the galactic polity, such as the Malayan states, and the Thai polity described by Gullick and Tambiah respectively.

Gunawardhana also sees the Dutthagamani-Elara conflict as more complicated than is generally understood in the nationalist reading of the *Mahavamsa*. According to this reading, the conflict was between two developed ethno-religious identities, the Sinhala led by the hero Dutthagamani, and Tamils led by the villain Elara. But the *Mahavamsa* itself, says Gunawardhana, bears witness to the fact that not all who fought against Dutthagamani were Tamils. He defeated 32 rulers before the war with Elara. That is, according to this account, there were at least 32 independent power centers, presumably led by petty Sinhala kings, which were brought under Dutthagamani’s rule. The term used to indicate Dutthagamani’s victory is that he brought these kingdoms under “one umbrella”. This does not suggest a “unification” although that is how the standard history books gloss this term.

Elaborating on the Buddhist part of the Sinhala Buddhist identity, Gunawardhana rejects the view expressed in the chronicles and other literary works that Buddhism was an exclusive component of that identity. He finds no inscriptional evidence to support the view that the invaders destroyed the Buddhist order as the chronicles claim. The inscriptions show that there were Buddhists among the invaders. Some of them in fact were benefactors of Buddhism, and one was named ‘Buddhadasa’, ‘servant of the Buddha’.

Gunawardhana suggests that it is only after the development in India of a militant form of Hinduism which was hostile to

Buddhism and Jainism that Tamils were perceived as enemies by Sri Lankan Buddhists. Till then the Buddhists of Sri Lanka and South India shared a Buddhist identity. It is only after these events that Buddhism became a distinctive part of the Sinhala identity. While differing in some details, the textual scholar K.N.O. Dharmadasa⁹ agrees with the idea that by the early 10th century the Sinhala and Buddhist identities were coming together.

Commenting on the arguments of Gunawardhana and Dharmadasa anthropologist Stanley Tambiah points out the following¹⁰:

- (a) while these two writers appear to be taking adversarial positions, they converge on the idea that identity formation was a gradual process;
- (b) the by-product of the arguments of these two scholars is that the evidence on identity formation is complex and indirect, and a consciousness of history constructed by writers “cannot mechanically be attributed to a larger public”;
- (c) modern interpreters of the past who inevitably look at the past with present ideological concerns, should be open to the possibility of multiple discourses and multiple intentionalities operating at different levels;
- (d) the perfect Sinhala Buddhist state covering the whole island as imagined in the chronicles could not have existed at the time of Dutthagamani and probably not even at the time the *Mahavamsa* was composed (I would add, not at any time);

⁹ “The People of the Lion: Ethnic identity, ideology, and historical revisionism in contemporary Sri Lanka”, *Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities* 15, no. 1, 2, (1989): 1-36; also, *Ethnic Studies Report* 10, no. 1, (1992): 37-59. All references to Dharmadasa are to this work.

¹⁰ All references to Tambiah in this section are to *Buddhism Betrayed?* Cited above.

- (e) Buddhization and Sinhalization have been processes continuing through the centuries, (and I would add they still are);
- (f) the genius of the Sri Lankan civilization lies in this process of incorporation as much as the formulation of the mutuality between kingship and the Sangha and their responsibility for the cultivation of Buddhist values in an agrarian society.

Assuming that somewhere around the 10th century we have the crystallization of an identity between the Sinhala group, their language and Buddhism, Tambiah raises the question as to how these labels were deployed in the succeeding centuries. He posits minimally the existence of two strands, first, a continuously transmitted consciousness made possible by a common language and common religious beliefs and worship. This he calls an “inclusive, incorporative, assimilative, and benign sense of common sharing and becoming one Sinhala people without the need for an external enemy or threat” (p.138), and second, precisely the consciousness of such a threat and a sense of antagonism to the Tamils as alien in language and religion. However, for this threat to be effective there must be an unbroken presence of the threat. There is no such unbroken threat because, about the late 13th century, with the abandonment of Polonnaruva, a Tamil kingdom came into being in the north and parts of the Vanni. Tambiah argues that from this period well into the British period, there was a social separation and distancing rather than a steady symbiotic interaction. Thus an unbroken relationship of enmity that could be the basis of a Sinhala Buddhist identity does not exist since the 13th century.

While there is no basis for a Sinhala Buddhist identity based on inter ethnic enmity, we have mythic as well as historical information that bear witness to the process of assimilation that was going on uninterrupted, for example, in the colonization or “peopling” myths, like the myth of Gajabahu’s capture of 10,000 Chola soldiers and settling them in the island. According to Tambiah, there are two

colonization myths in Sri Lankan history. The first is the founding myth about the arrival of Vijaya, of which the most important extant account is that of the *Mahavamsa*. This is elaborated and repeated in a large number of subsequent (ancient and mediaeval) literary texts. This is the basis of the exclusivist and hegemonic strand in Sinhala Buddhist ideology. The second type of colonization myth is about the waves of migration of south Indian linguistic groups and their assimilation, incorporation, and indigenization within the Sinhala polities, which to Tambiah express “[the] incorporating, inclusive and elaborative capacities of the Sinhala culture” (p.139), for example, the incorporation of Indian elements into the Kotte and Kandyan kingdoms, including immigrants from the Coromandel and Malabar coasts.

These myths of assimilation and incorporation deal with the pervasive experiential fact of having to deal with immigrants and their cultural baggage. We have two types of these myths. The first type sees the new immigrants as “alien” but nevertheless incorporates them by placing them in acceptable hierarchical and geographical locations (p.146). The second type deals with the more pleasant task of incorporating elements considered desirable. These, like cult of the goddess Pattini, a deity of the Buddhists and Jainas of South India, and the mercantile families, such as the Alagakkonara and Mehenevara families of Kerala origins but Buddhist affiliations, are given favorable if not enthusiastic acceptance. We know from historical sources that through their control of trade in the southwest coast, the Alagakkonara and Mehenevara scions became powerful political figures.

These examples of inclusivism in the form of Sinhalization and Buddhization, Tambiah argues, are themes as interesting as the theme of continuity of a Sinhala Buddhist destiny considered to be inscribed at the beginning of Sri Lankan history. But as the notion of an orthodox Theravada Sangha bound together with a Sinhala polity solidified, the hegemonic potential of the theme of Sinhala Buddhist destiny gained ascendancy over the alternative and inclusivist tendency. The selective nature and treatment of literary themes illustrate this process. The *vamsa* texts, for example, are silent about

the fertile and creative influence of Indian Pallava culture in Sri Lanka, and the creative exchanges between Indian and Sri Lankan Mahayana Buddhist centers.

Tambiah sites a sequence of texts from the 13th to the 18th century which signal a strong message of Sinhala Buddhist entitlement to the island as a unitary territorial space, and negatively stereotype the Tamils as “demala” or “damila” which is generalized to all South Indian groups understood as subversive of Sinhala Buddhist interests. This however does not obliterate the inclusivist current. Tambiah makes the following observations:

- (i) even in the centuries during which the Sinhala kingdoms were founded in the south after the abandonment of Polonnaruwa, South Indian influences continued unabated;
- (ii) for the monastic writers, the Tamil threat was not so much military but cultural, especially religious;
- (iii) but the texts also depict in no uncertain terms the continuing process of incorporation, which to Tambiah is “a counterpoint to the ideology of timeless hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist sovereignty over the island” (pp.144-5).

Summing up, we can say that there is certainly evidence of a Sinhala identity or consciousness in the pre-colonial history of Sri Lanka, but evidence for it is confined to the literary sources, whose authors had an interest in the invention and propagation of this sense of identity and consciousness. Such identity was not uniform temporally, socially or content wise. It arose at certain times under certain conditions, particularly the trauma of foreign aggression, and to this extent can be seen, partially at least, as a compensatory fantasy as suggested by the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere.¹¹ It was

¹¹ Most recently in “Buddhist Identity in Sri Lanka”, in eds. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George de Vos. *Ethnic Identity*. (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1996); Obeyesekere also discusses colonization myths in several other writings. See *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). Ch. 8, especially.

socially confined to certain sections of the literati and geographically to the urban centers, as indeed was the case in the early days of the contemporary nationalist revival. It evolved from the consciousness of a Sinhala speaking elite to encompass other Sinhala speaking groups, and in theory the whole of the kingdom. In the course of its evolution Buddhism was acquired as an important element, at times superceding ethnicity, but eventually as a mutually invigorating and symbiotic partner. At no time however does it seem to have been a pervasive force that unified and homogenized the social order, and its invention may have certain psychological origins of individuals, especially of the monk literati whose innate gifts and inner dynamism were held in check, and prevented from blossoming out in more productive and universalistic creative expression.

Based on the above discussion we can say that there is agreement among the specialists that there was in pre colonial Sri Lanka, from time to time, and among some sections of the people, a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness or identity. But it is the opinion of the same authorities that contemporary Sinhala Buddhist identity is quite a different matter altogether: it is recent and qualitatively different from its pre colonial form. Gunawardena points out that it was during the colonial period that the Sinhala Buddhist consciousness began to assume the form in which it operates today (70), making it no older than about a hundred years. To the above general observations on the Sinhala Buddhist identity, we might also add that it has not been static, but changing. It is still evolving, and we can expect it to continue to do so.

The twentieth century definition of a Sinhala Buddhist identity is largely the work of the reformer Anagarika Dharmapala, and it is related to the social, political and economic changes that took place in Sri Lanka under colonial domination. In this definitional task Dharmapala dipped into the past that was discovered and laid out for him by colonial and orientalist history and archeology. His progeny continues to do so while they also dip into the work of Dharmapala himself, as we shall see below. But the contours of this new identity are different from those of the pre-colonial identity,

and are inseparable from the social, political and economic factors of our own times. In particular, as I have emphasized above, the modern conception of the nation-state has imparted to the contemporary Sinhala Buddhist identity a nationalist sentiment which did not and could not have prevailed in the pre-colonial 'galactic' polity.

Anagarika Dharmapala's social and political activities have been much written about and I shall make only the following brief comments:

- (1) Dharmapala, along with monk activists like Mohottivatte Gunananda represents a new dynamism and militancy in the Sinhala Buddhist consciousness. They do not by any means constitute a direct continuation of the religious revival of Kirti Sri Rajasingha, but their work would not have been possible if not for the renaissance in religious and literary activity inaugurated by the Sangharaja Valivita Saranamkara with the patronage of the king Kirti Sri Rajasingha.
- (2) Scholar monks such as Hikkaduve Sumangala, the founder of the Vidyodaya monastic college, are mediators between the tradition of learning that sprang from the Kirti Sri Rajasingha revival and the modernism represented by Dharmapala. Sumangala did not directly participate in militant revivalism. He represents the benign aspect of the union between kingship and the Sangha that Tambiah and others have defined as the distinctive feature of the Buddhist states of South and Southeast Asia. This union contains the potential for Sinhala Buddhist hegemony but, under responsible and urbane leadership and favourable social conditions, this could be held in check while cultivating its more positive and productive aspects. The monks of the Vidyodaya monastic college succeeded in doing this, and represent the current of inclusion of the island's history that we discussed above.

- (3) Dharmapala partially represents this, but his failure was his inability to contain the potential for Sinhala Buddhist hegemony by accepting all ethnic groups as legitimate inhabitants of the island, and by forging a broader national identity integrative of all communities. In such a broader national identity, Sinhala Buddhist culture could, in the nature of the case, have enjoyed prestige and priority with the willing if not enthusiastic consent of the minority cultures, and in which the minority cultures in turn would receive respectful acceptance. This failure continues to afflict Dharmapala's progeny whose vociferousness is even today the greatest obstacle to peace among the ethnic groups in so far as politicians, out of greed for power, overestimate the electoral clout of this progeny and their cohorts, and refrain from taking the needed positive steps.
- (4) This failure of Dharmapala's indicates and constitutes part of a thought complex which includes another decisive and fatal attribute in recent Sri Lankan culture and electoral politics: the subjugation of the pragmatic and the economic to the ideological and the narrowly cultural. Though derived from Dharmapala, it was the Vidyalkankara monks who elaborated on this and made it the engine of the Sinhala Buddhist electoral victory of 1956, which unleashed in unprecedented manner the destructive potential of the Sinhala Buddhist identity, and let loose the process of social disorganization and anomie of which the invention of a new enmity between the Sinhlas and Tamils is only one, if the most visible manifestation. It gave rise to a new and narrowly conceived Sinhala Buddhist identity that feeds on adverse economic conditions, plays hide and seek, lies low and re-groups, and appears in different guises, such as Jathika Cintanaya, to which we will now turn.

Jathika Cintanaya

In its continuing evolution, the Sinhala Buddhist identity emerges and re-emerges in different forms, and I shall now examine one

particularly interesting recent development, the Jatika Cintanaya movement.¹² In the periodic assertion of identity, the Jatika Cintanaya movement is unique in that we have in it a conscious attempt to place the search for identity on a theoretical foundation. The leaders of the movement are two well-known national figures, Gunadasa Amarasekera, a professional dentist who is the most distinguished living Sinhala poet and novelist, and Nalin de Silva, a mathematician formerly at the Colombo University now at the Kelaniya university. While the origins of the Jatika Cintanaya movement goes back to the 1970s, its theoretical formulation has been gradual and more recent. It is still evolving, and I hope the account I give here represents a more or less up-to-date version. Both leaders are admirably articulate, but are also polemical and confrontational in their writing. We can literally gloss Jatika Cintanaya as “National Thought” or “National Ethos”, but Amarasekera, the senior leader of the movement, gives it a more comprehensive and encompassing gloss, calling it “Civilizational Consciousness”. Amarasekera says that the concept of civilization has been much in vogue in 19th century European thought, and was employed in elucidating social and historical development by many thinkers among whom he lists Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. By the middle of the 20th century, the concept of civilization became unfashionable and was replaced by the political ideologies of liberal capitalist democracy on the one hand and Marxism on the other, as the foundational explanation of social process. Whereas in the civilizational framework the destiny of societies was conceptualized in cyclical terms as rise and fall, the liberal democratic capitalist and the Marxist frameworks saw it as teleological and linear. In both ideologies, history ends, as explicitly proclaimed in Fukuyama’s book “The end of history” for liberal capitalism, and in the classless utopia in the Marxist interpretation of history. The two frameworks, while

¹² The sources for this account of Jatika Cintanaya are the recent writings of Gunadasa Ameresekeera and Nalin de Silva, most of them appearing in newspapers and other popular publications, and the interviews I had with these two leaders. All quotations are from these articles.

ideologically divergent, are two sides of the same coin, believing as they do in teleological evolution ending in universal society. This is compatible with the Judeo-Christian teleology of blissful Messianic redemption. With the collapse of the Marxist teleology, the world is left with the sole alternative of the liberal capitalist teleology, which in more worldly terms means market economy and globalization. Amarasekera considers this conception and explanation of societal process to have been seriously challenged by the Harvard University political scientist Samuel Huntington who in his mid 1990s theory of “the clash of civilizations” argued that “the so-called universal civilization is Western Christian civilization”. According to Amarasekera, the myth of a universal civilization has been most vigorously propagated not by westerners, but immigrants to the west who face an identity crisis. His examples are literary figures like V.S.Naipul and Salman Rushdee. He considers these writers to be apologists for the west (presumably as compensatory over-identification), and that one of them, Naipul, got the 2001 Nobel Prize for literature as a reward “more for his propaganda carried out on behalf of the Western imperialists and his open diatribes on Islam”. He lists other expatriate writers in the same category, like the “unknown and insignificant” French domiciled Chinese writer who was awarded the last year’s Nobel prize, whose main qualification was his “bitter attacks on the Chinese establishment”. He considers the Nobel prize to be “a powerful weapon in the hands of the Westerners in this era of clash of civilizations”. He praises Huntington for pointing out that the concept of a universal civilization is a product of Western Civilization; that the 19th century concept of the White Man’s burden helped justify the extension of western political and economic domination over non-western societies; that at the end of the 20th century, this concept was being used to justify western cultural dominance over other societies; and that universalism is the ideology of the west for confrontation with non-western cultures.

Praiseworthy as Huntington is for Amarasekera, what he says is “nothing new to us who have seen this cultural imperialism from

the inside". He is saddened that "our anglophone intellectuals confuse modernization with Westernization", two concepts well clarified, according to Amarasekera, in Huntington's work. The recent proposal to teach English to children from kindergarten onwards is an attempt "to produce a new generation that will become happy members of such a universal civilization".

While Amarasekera agrees with Huntington that the inter-state clashes of the 21st century will be clashes between civilizations like Western versus Islamic or Western versus Chinese, he disputes Huntington's view of intra-state civilizational clashes, such as the conflict in Sri Lanka which Huntington sees as one between Sinhala Buddhists and Hindu Tamils. He considers this error in the otherwise infallible Huntington to be the result of "the information he is fed by our own Anglophone intellectuals". What Huntington says — that the Sri Lankan conflict is between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus— would be correct if the Tamils of Sri Lanka identified themselves with the Tamils of South India and the Sinhalese held them back. He does not believe that the Tamils of Sri Lanka want such alliance and identification.

Amarasekera finds a better explanation of the Sri Lankan conflict in another idea of Huntington's, namely, the latter's concept of "the civilizationally lost or torn societies". Russia and Turkey are the classic examples, with their failed attempt to "westernize" under Peter the Great and Mustapha Kemal respectively, but most of the third world countries that came under colonial rule suffer the same fate. These are torn or lost societies, and the deepest and the saddest reason for this is "the civilizational identity that they lost at the hands of the colonialists". Shorn of a civilizational identity, these are bewildered societies, and there is no better example than Sri Lanka. Its 2000 year old identity was lost and not yet regained. Amarasekera cites what he considers the confusion that Sri Lanka has experienced for the last 50 years "from extreme communism to extreme capitalism" and "from Sinhala only to English only" and says, "only a bewildered nation that has lost its way could have behaved in that manner". Amarasekera raises the question, "How could one expect

the minorities to relate themselves to such a majority community that has no civilizational or cultural identity? This according to Amarasekera leads the minority communities to "identify with cultural identities outside". So, luring the minority to identify with the majority, and weaning it away from "cultural identities outside" is the major reason for Amarasekera and his colleagues to espouse Jatika Cintanaya. This to Amarasekera is a "voyage of discovery" and it is an essential first step in the solution "to the so called ethnic problem". Indeed the voyage in itself might well be the solution. Jatika Cintanaya, according to this statement, is clearly yet bafflingly something that the minorities can identify with. If so these writers have some convincing to do, because Jatika Cintanaya's present image is that of a narrow Sinhala chauvinist ideology. Clearly the term is plural and polysemic. It is also contradictory, the Sinhala original "Jatika Cintanaya" sounding narrow, and the English gloss "civilizational consciousness" connoting a broader social sentiment. Huntington's clash of civilizations, says Amarasekera, is a paradigm to understand the world, a paradigm that replaces the cold war paradigm of bipolarity, with liberal capitalism on the one hand and communism on the other. It is however important to realize that civilizational consciousness is not ideological, contrary to how Huntington looks at it, namely, as no different for class consciousness. Just like the bipolar paradigm, Huntington's multipolar civilizational paradigm will at some point become obsolete because it takes civilizational consciousness to be ideological.

For Amarasekera and his colleagues Jatika Cintanaya or civilizational consciousness is not an ideology. It is quite different from the Marxist class consciousness, which is a sentiment implanted in the working class by intellectuals outside that class. To Amarasekera, civilizational consciousness is not an implantation, but a stamp that a member of a culture receives in the process of his/her growing up. For example, Anagarika Dharmapala was not forcing an external civilizational consciousness on the Sinhalese masses. He was "bring[ing] to the surface the cultural consciousness that was already there in the minds and hearts of people". The concept is

“much more fundamental, and almost an integral part of the consciousness of the human being”. The individual is “inseparable from the civilization and culture to which he is born, his mind and heart, his thought process —cintanaya- is determined by the culture and civilization”. Culture makes individuals and the individual sees the world through his or her culture. All thoughts and actions are “primarily guided by the cultural ethos”. The impact of culture on individuals vary but no one escapes its influence entirely. In times of cultural imperialism this impact is “never absent so long as a civilization retains its language and religion”.

Amarasekera goes on to say that some of the major revolutions of modern times can be, and recently have been explained not in Marxist but civilizational terms. The Russian revolution was “an attempt by a torn society that ha[d] lost its cultural identity to recover it in an oblique manner”. Amarasekera tells us that the Polish writer Andreas Walicki in his book on the history of Russian thought “sees the Russian revolution as a stage in the evolution of Russian thought”. So, according to Amarasekera, is the Chinese revolution, a stage in the evolution of Chinese thought. These two examples to Amarasekera demonstrate that the civilizational paradigm is not a “period piece”, but the “eternal paradigm by which human action could be understood”. Indeed that there is such a paradigm for every culture is Jatika Cintanaya’s discovery and major premise.

Jatika Cintanaya’s conception of Buddhism enables us to further our understanding of the evolving form of the Sinhala Buddhist identity. According to the movement’s junior leader Professor Nalin de Silva, there is no Buddhism but only Buddhisms, a position about which anthropologists have no quarrel: they have been saying it for at least half a century, and getting beaten up for that. De Silva says there is Sinhala Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism and so forth, which is what anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere said in the mid 1950s, when the latter actually coined the term “Sinhala Buddhism”, now a standard term in the sociology of Buddhism.

Here, de Silva parts company with the anthropologists for whom Sinhala Buddhism is the totality of mystical beliefs and associated practices of the Sinhala Buddhists. He draws a clear line and sub-divides Sinhala Buddhism into two categories: “Sinhala Buddhism proper” and “Olcott Buddhism”. One feature of Sinhala Buddhism is that there are no intellectuals in it, whereas you get plenty of them in Olcott Buddhism. Sinhala Buddhism proper is based on Jatika Cintanaya or Civilizational Consciousness, whereas Olcott Buddhists work within the framework of a Judaic Christian cintanaya, which he also calls “white cintanaya”. And he doesn’t quite help clarify these definitions when he lists the Mahanayaka of Asgiriya as an Olcott Buddhist. Although de Silva lists Olcott Buddhism as a part of Sinhala Buddhism, he makes it quite clear that it occupies an outcaste status within Sinhala Buddhism, and he characterizes it in derogatory and racist terms.

Sinhala Buddhism is what the Arahant Mahinda introduced officially into Sri Lanka more than 2300 years ago. This original Sinhala Buddhism however had a serious deficiency —it didn’t have war. This was because of the influence of the emperor Asoka who became a Buddhist after fighting a war, and then denouncing it. It was Dutugamunu who added war as a component of Sinhala Buddhism, and this led to a “metamorphosis” of Sinhala Buddhism. So, within Sinhala Buddhism, de Silva isolates two further components: “pre-Dutugamunu Sinhala Buddhism” and “post-Dutugamunu Sinhala Buddhism”. These two are radically different because of the incorporation of war into the latter, which de Silva suspects was made possible because of the advice of Vihara Maha Devi. Continuing the saga of Sinhala Buddhism, de Silva thinks that the post Dutugamunu Sinhala Buddhism went through some modifications (which he does not specify) introduced by the Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa.

Henceforth, Sinhala Buddhism fared well until the arrival of Colonel Olcott and the Theosophists. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the British tried but failed to suppress post-Dutugamunu Sinhala Buddhism, but Olcott managed to do so. He revised Sinhala

Buddhism to make it Olcott Buddhism, and (presumably) converted Sinhala Buddhists to Olcott Buddhism in such large numbers that most Buddhists of today are Olcott Buddhists (Let's recall that one of them is the Mahanayaka of Asgiriya). Post Dutugamunu Buddhism and Olcott Buddhism constitute the two "trends" of the 19th century Buddhist revival. The former was led by the monk Mohottivatte Gunananda and the reformer Anagarika Dharmapala, and the latter by the Theosophists. The former was a continuation of Dutugamunu Sinhala Buddhism "with necessary modifications", and this de Silva now calls "Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Buddhism". The two —Olcott Buddhism and Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Buddhism— were not independent of each other, and not mutually exclusive, and de Silva's (tentative) conclusion is that "gradually Olcott Buddhism took the upper hand". This however was not due to any superior arguments on the part of Olcott, but the prevailing social forces.

De Silva complains that political developments today are directed by Olcott Sinhala Buddhism and not by Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Sinhala Buddhism. There are brief exceptions to this, for example, the 1956 elections. For de Silva the problem with Olcott Buddhists is that the educated among them are internationalists. International culture today is nothing but western culture, and the educated Buddhists are trying to interpret Buddhism to the westerners. In the process they have created "a so called objective rational Buddhism that appeals to the west". It is this Buddhism that these scholars have in mind when they talk about Buddhism betrayed, an "abstract imaginary Buddhism that exists in the minds of the educated Olcott Buddhists and probably the western Buddhists". What de Silva forgets here is that this abstract imaginary Buddhism, on his own reasoning, and on textual analysis, is the closest to the Buddha's Buddhism.

But to bolster his case that Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Buddhism is somehow the "true" Buddhism, de Silva needs to connect this variety of Buddhism with the Buddha. Thus, he is not averse to trying a shot at militarizing the Buddha. "The Buddha

realized the importance of an army for the state" he says. When the Buddha said *attabi attano nattho* (one is one's own refuge) he was talking about the quest for Nibbana. But in day to day life we have to depend on others, for example, an army. "The Buddha never asked any king to dissolve the army" de Silva reminds us. He refers to king Bimbisara's complaint to the Buddha that his soldiers were leaving the army to become bhikkhus. The Buddha then introduced a rule requiring a soldier to get the king's permission before being ordained as a bhikkhu. Armed with this evidence, de Silva tries to connect the Buddha's ruling with Sinhala Buddhism. It is because of this ruling that the Dutugamunu soldier Theraputthabhaya had to get the king's permission to become a bhikkhu. And he later became an arahant. In Sinhala Buddhism, says de Silva, even after engaging in war, one can become an arahant. In a reversal of his appropriating ahimsa solely to Buddhism when he was talking about Hinduism, here de Silva is suggesting that killing is no impediment to Nibbana. In fact he goes to the extent of connecting killing with life. Angulimala became an arahant after killing thousands of men and women, but the text *Angulimala paritta* is chanted for the protection of pregnant women. "The man who killed so many people" comments de Silva, "has now become the protector of life as Arahat Angulimala".

De Silva is quick to add that this does not mean that the Buddha approved of killing people. Neither do Sinhala Buddhists approve of killing. But "kings and states have to protect the state and sometimes it becomes necessary to engage in war". War is not prohibited in Sinhala or any other Buddhism (except, one might ask, Olcott Buddhism?). He sees a "contradiction" in Sinhala Buddhism during the time of king Kavantissa, Dutugamunu's father: Kavantissa raised an army, but could not go to war. Dutugamunu resolved the contradiction "probably with the help of some Bhikkhus" and resolved to go to war against "the invader Elara". Dutugamunu's contribution to Sinhala Buddhism is that he added "make war" to "Sinhala Buddhism as a culture", and deleted "don't make war" from "Sinhala Buddhism as a religion". In de Silva's

view, the contradiction between Buddhism and war is the result of using two valued formal logic out of context: “refrain from killing, therefore refrain from engaging in war”. Here, the logician in de Silva fails to see the reality that war is hardly matter of handing out roses to the enemy.

It is not difficult to see that this is *Mahavamsa* all over, and Sinhala Buddhist consciousness or identity in its most militant form, even when de Silva puts it in these absurd terms. Starting from the *Mahavamsa*, the Sinhala Buddhist consciousness or identity runs through the textual tradition, Dharmapala, his fragmented progeny as represented in incarnations like the Jatika Cintanaya and its breakaway leaderships, and some of the militant young lay and monk activists, erupting from time to time in fiery words or action, inciting war and trying every method to block a political settlement to the ethnic problem the existence of which they deny.

As already mentioned, Jatika Cintanaya is evolving and making accretions all the time. A recent addition to its vocabulary is the term “Sinhalatva”, alarming on the face of it because of its evocations of the Hindu fundamentalist concept “Hindutva”. As de Silva uses the term, it is broad, unclear and ambiguous. In this paper, I can do no more than mention the following:

(1) de Silva defines Sinhalatva as “Sinhala nation, Sinhala language, Sinhala Culture and Sinhala History”. Sinhalatva is the ideology L.H.Mettananda gave the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) in 1955. Till then the SLFP, founded in 1951, had no ideology. The founder S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike was a liberal who even wanted to name his previous political party “Lanka Maha Sabhava” rather than “Sinhala Maha Sabhava” (we might add, the former suggestive of an broad Sri Lankan identity, and the latter a narrow Sinhala identity). The SLFP was (mis)guided by Marxism/liberalism instead of its former indigenous ideology, and under Chandrika Kumaratunga, it has been hijacked by the SLMP (a leftist and secularist party), although she used the SLFP, “the party of Sinhalatva” to come to power.

- (2) Sinhalatva seems to be an attempt at defining sharply the differences between the Sinhala and Tamil cultures, and cleansing the Sinhala culture of any traces of contact with Tamil culture. For example de Silva acknowledges the fact that the Sinhala are mixed with Yaksha, Nagas, Devas and “other indigenous tribes such as Singha”, and Shakyas of Indian origin. The Sinhala language is a mixture of “the original Hela of the Yakshas and Nagas and others”, Magadhi, Prakrit and Bengali, and later influenced by Sanskrit. Thus, neither in the case of ethnic mix nor language does de Silva mention the Tamil connection, which we know is stronger than that of every other ethnic group or language he lists.
- (3) Sinhalatva denies to the Tamils both any possible early origin in the island or a continuous history “even from the 13th century”. De Silva considers the Tamil population to be descendents of immigrants who, even when born in the island, are somehow not indigenous. Similarly, he denies the Tamils of Sri Lanka an autonomous culture on the contention that their culture is the same as that of the South Indian Tamils, and that their language was not created in Sri Lanka but in India. In these and other ways Sinhalatva involves a tortuous attempt to define Tamils as alien and non-belonging in Sri Lanka. De Silva seems quite oblivious to the fact that the Tamils of Jaffna have had an identity distinct from that of South India, with Jaffna Tamil, which its speakers consider Sen Tamil, or “pure” Tamil, as a central element in it. This view of the Tamils and their culture as alien stands in stark contrast to the copious reality of migration and indigenization which we discussed above. A creative Sri Lankan policy would be not to deny but to accept, admire, respect, and foster the language, culture and identity of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka as distinctly Sri Lankan as opposed to Indian.

Before concluding this discussion, I would like to refer to two further contemporary expressions of the Sinhala Buddhist identity (1) the

work of the Buddhist monk Elle Gunavamsa, and (2) Jatika Cintanaya in the expatriate communities as represented in one case. A third expression, Sinhala Urumaya, should be at least mentioned as there is no scope here to discuss it.

I have discussed Elle Gunavamsa's militancy elsewhere¹³, so I will keep this brief. Gunavamsa is a song writer and his Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Sinhala Buddhism is clearly evident in his songs, which are available in a cassette titled "bala senagata samara gi" (martial songs for the army), which a *Ravaya* columnist dubbed "bala senagata marana gi" (killer songs for the army). The songs are packed with xenophobic and exclusivist sentiment. In at least one, there is a naked exhortation to kill, not to sheath the sword until blood smeared. They evoke Dutugamunu, his superhuman ten soldiers and his brave mother Viahara maha Devi, who for Gunavamsa becomes the model for Sinhala Buddhist women whose sole task is the production of killer sons. The dominant theme of violence is connected and juxtaposed with images of religion and worship.

Jatika Cintanaya activity, like Tamil separatism, is not confined to the shores of Sri Lanka. This is obviously true of many of today's regional struggles, which are exported to the major metropolitan centers of the world where they are mostly fought as proxy wars by expatriates. The case I want to mention now is a group whose core appears to be located in US but, due to the availability of internet communication, they can be widely dispersed, yet act as a cohesive group. Such dispersal yet close interaction by means of internet communication is a common and general feature of contemporary local and regional struggles. This group calls itself "The Seventh Force" (*hatvani balavegaya*). This is significant because of the six antecedent forces with which this group identifies itself — Buddhist monks, indigenous physicians, vernacular teachers, peasants and workers, the "fivefold great force" that supposedly elected the 1956 nationalist government. The sixth force consists of

migrant labor, those men and women, especially women, who sweat in oil rich Arab countries under oppressive conditions and bring home most of the country's foreign exchange. While the group does not specifically and explicitly identify themselves with Jatika Cintanaya, it holds Nalin de Silva in awe, espouses the movement's pet themes like NGO bashing, and in other ways has Jatika Cintanaya inscribed all over its visible form, and we can safely conclude that it is a foreign arm of the movement. Many of these ideological characteristics are shared by the Sinhala Urumaya, with which it is allied in expatriate propagandist activity.

In a recent incident, the Seventh Force expressed its Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Sinhala Buddhist identity unambiguously. The incident centered round a familiar personality and a favourite target, Stanley Tambiah, and Susantha Goonatilake, a well known critic of NGOs who is himself a walking NGO. Last year Goonatilake published a book titled "Anthropologizing Sri Lanka" which is a scurrilous attack on several major anthropologists, Sri Lankan and foreign, who have worked in Sri Lanka. The incident described below was sparked when a person who identified himself as "Chand Wije" emailed his colleagues to inform them of a major discovery: Eureka, "Tambiah has lied". The announcement of the "lie" deserves to be quoted verbatim: "Thambiah (sic) intentionally lied stating that he, Thambiah, was in Ampare when the 1958 communal riots broke out!!" (exclamation marks Chand Wije's). Tambiah in fact was in the middle of the Gal Oya riots in 1956, not 1958, and his "lie" was his correction of the date of the riots to 1956, after noticing, to his credit, that he had erroneously mentioned the date as 1958. Caitrin Lynch, an anthropologist at Johns Hopkins has pointed out the howler into which Gunatilake evidently rushed un-angel like in his eagerness to "nail" Tambiah¹⁴.

¹³ *The Work of Kings*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999): 242-245.

¹⁴ Review of Susantha Goonatilake, *Anthropologizing Sri Lanka: A Eurocentric Misadventure*. *American anthropologist*, 104, no. 4, December 2002): 1240-1241

What is of interest to us is how the discovery of this “lie”, became a projective arena for the expression of the Dutugamunu-Dharmapala Sinhala Buddhist identity. Many Seventh Forcers expressed righteous indignation and wrote angry condemnations not only of the “liar” Tambiah, but the entire community of “anthropologizers” of Sri Lanka, all of them liars. They accused the anthropologizers of organizing an “anti Mahavamsa movement” allegedly spearheaded by four Sri Lankan born anthropologists, and supported by a group of Sri Lankans located at various institutions in Colombo. Much energy was expended by Chand Wijie and his colleagues, unsuccessfully, trying to get Tambiah and others to respond and waste their time in getting drawn into this puerile exercise. Goonatilake was hailed by Chand Wijie as a “national treasure” for doing this great academic, moral and patriotic service of lie detection. Chand Wijie further panegyricized Goonatilake as follows: “An electrical engineer who studied at Royal, became a sociologist and he has disclosed frauds by others who came from Royal-St. Thomas and spoilt the good names of Harvard, Princeton and Oxford.” He compared Goonatilake to the “moon in the Subhasitaya”, which shines brighter than the innumerable stars. “His (Goonatilake’s) contribution by this one book is similar to what Denzil Kobbakaduwa did in Jaffna. I often wonder how safe his life is in Sri Lanka...” wrote an anxious and concerned Chand Wijie, adding that, “We must translate his book and distribute it to Sinhala and Tamil villagers to read (sic).” And in a revealing sentence he wrote: “But, one thing is clear, we the children of the 1956 revolution (Prof. Nalin Silvas phrase) must come out, and try to fight back this clique of western Ph.Ds and the Marga and other groups”. At Lynch’s careful demonstration of the facts of the case, even some of the Seventh Forcers were baffled, and publicly urged Goonatilake to explain. But some others, like H.L.D. Mahindapala, while admitting that Caitrin Lynch may be right and Tambiah did not lie, still argued that Tambiah and other “western” scholars must be liars any way, and therefore should be dealt with, reminding us of the Roman mob tearing Cinna the poet for his bad verses.

From the above, it appears that this internet based expatriate community of nationalists represents one of the most bizarre expressions of the Sinhala Buddhist identity. Some of its stridence and self-righteousness must be explained by the crisis of identity it experiences as expatriates domiciled in a social and cultural environment presumably antithetical to their values and ideals. This makes their thinking conflicted and hypocritical. On the one hand, they are denouncing western society, social values and culture, yet on the other are enjoying unabashedly the opportunities for advancement and the vast array of individual freedoms rooted in those same values and culture. At the same time, by means of their support of Sinhala chauvinism and hegemony, they are doing everything they can to prevent the utilization of these same values in the implementation of social, political and economic policies that will bring about peace, harmony and prosperity at home in Sri Lanka.

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