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Sangha and State: An Examination of Sinhalese-Buddhist Nationalism in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka

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An Examination of Sinhalese-Buddhist Nationalism in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka

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by
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To the following, with immeasurable gratitude:

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Introduction

While spending a semester studying in Sri Lanka, I became acutely aware of the post-civil war issues that were being sorted out by the state. Daily newspapers displayed updates on new infrastructural developments and efforts to rebuild the areas of the island that had been destroyed by warfare. There were also many articles that presented the opinions of leading Sinhalese and Tamil politicians regarding political and social approaches to dealing with the aftermath of the conflict, which is often portrayed as being aggravated by hostilities between ethnic groups. In my attempt to understand the best way to move forward from the twenty-six-year war, I sought to know more about the actual issues fueling the antagonisms between Tamil and Sinhala parties.

The beginning of the war between the Sinhalese-majority government and Tamil separatists was marked by an eruption of violence in 1983. Though specific recent events served as a catalyst, the tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations were fueled by the propagation of ethnonationalist rhetoric for over a century. Both Sinhala and Tamil populations integrated various characteristics of their respective ancestral historical narratives into the presentation of their political views. However, the role of religion and combined religious and ethnic identities, namely the Sinhala and Buddhist identity, is not clearly defined and is often misrepresented.

The portrayal of the conflict in Western media often gives the impression that the antagonisms are based in a divide between different religious communities. However, the basic dichotomy of Sinhala-Tamil or Buddhist-Hindu does not accurately represent the issues that influenced the violence. Euro-American news reports about Sri Lanka often depict the seemingly-ironic image of a violent Buddhist monk protesting or participating in an attack on a

Hindu temple, or Tamil community. Since the end of the civil war, political monks have turned their attention to the island's Muslim minority population. During the summer of 2014, there was significant media coverage of monks participating in attacks on Islamic institutions. I wished to investigate this idea of the violent, extremist monk, and understand the motive behind the attacks on non-Buddhist institutions and people. The monk held a significant, multi-faceted role in pre-colonial society according to Sinhalese-Buddhist history. Monks, or *bhikkhus* in Sinhala, have been continuously revered and have held influence among the lay population. Thus, to what extent does the image of the politically-active monk contribute to the categorization of this conflict as 'religious'? Why do bhikkhus get involved in politics? What are they asserting, or defending? These initial questions prompted me to consider the role of the monk and of Buddhism as a larger institution in the history of Sri Lankan society.

When identifying the influences of anti-Tamil attitudes throughout the decades leading up to the civil war, one must account for the post-colonial anxiety faced by the Sri Lankan state after the country gained independence in 1948. Finally free from the oppression of the enforced rule by a foreign power, Sri Lanka quickly had to make the transition into being a sovereign nation-state. The country needed demonstrate its ability to keep pace with the modern world and to assert a distinct national identity. However, the fact that the island's population was not homogenous - linguistically, ethnically, or religiously, made this challenging. As the Sinhalese were the largest ethnic group and carried a historical claim to the island, a Sinhalese nationalist ideology was advocated as the 'Sri Lankan' identity.

The emphasis on Sinhalese identity became an evident priority for the first several prime ministers of Sri Lanka, however, Buddhism, which is inextricable from Sinhalese identity, was not given such priority. Thus, the sangha was confronted with a sense of instability that

influenced a rush to ally themselves with individuals and parties that held, or had substantial

promise of securing, political authority. This initiated a debate of whether bhikkhus should be

involved in politics. The decade following the departure of the British saw the emergence of

bhikkhu groups concerned with protecting the clergy's agenda and its civil and political rights, as

well as ensuring the furtherance of Buddhism.

The development of the relationship between politically-engaged monks and Sinhalese

nationalist politicians can be attributed, in part, to the threatening secularity signified by the

Western-style government that was implemented during colonialism and continued to be used in

the newly sovereign nation. It must be understood that the rise of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism

and the re-establishment of bhikkhu participation in the political realm was influenced by the

country's experience under British colonial rule. Moreover, examining the effects of British

colonial rule and the pressures that continued to be exerted on the country even after the

departure of the colonizers requires an examination of ideas such as 'modernity',

'globalization', and 'Western'. Often 'modernity' is imagined as an undefined, fluid agent that

spreads across the world, exerting pressure on communities to adopt particular goals that

emphasize productivity, effectiveness, and accumulation of wealth and encourage a constant

effort towards achieving these goals. It should not be assumed that the standards imposed by

'modernity' and 'globalization,' and the values that stimulate the development of nationalist

ideologies necessarily exist in opposition. It has been argued that there is in fact a link between

the effects of the structures and ideas introduced by modernity, and the development of

nationalist ideologies.[1] Thus, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism is not necessarily a defense against

the influence or demands of the modern world, rather particular aspects of systems that have

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[1] Kapferer, Bruce, *Legends of People, Myths of State*: *Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*, Crawford Press, 1998. Also, Calhoun, Craig, *Nationalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

been made the global standard supported the construction and maintenance of an ethno-religious national identity. The assertion of a distinct Sri Lankan Sinhalese-Buddhist identity by politicians, monks, and laypeople is not simply a blatant, bigoted opposition to groups that simply do not align with the proclaimed majority identity. It does indicate the struggle of a nation, aware of the economic and political necessity of being a part of an international community, demonstrating its ability to adhere to the global expectations of a nation-state while not sacrificing its values, traditions, and sense of self.

Chapter One

Part I: Buddhism under British rule

Sangha and state before colonialism

Long before Ceylon came under European colonial rule, the body of Buddhist monks, or *sangha*, maintained a close relationship with the state. [2] One need only to look to the *Mahāvamsa* ("Great Chronicle"), an account of the island's founding and early history, for evidence of the historical association of the king with the Buddhist tradition. Though the practice of asceticism is a fundamental part of being a monk, the king provided the sangha with land and funded the construction of monasteries and stupas. Based on the historical narratives documented in the *Mahāvamsa*, the sangha served as advisors to the king and legitimated his authority, thus ensuring his political decisions were justifiably 'Buddhist.' The monarch reciprocally monitored the sangha, and periodically purged the sangha of members who did not exemplify virtuous behavior and values.[3] The social order in Sri Lanka consisted of the king, the sangha, and the people. The sangha ensured the religious purity and political legitimacy of the king, the king provided economic support and to an extent, monitored the purity of the sangha, and the people looked to both for leadership and guidance, putting faith in the sangha and monarch to maintain order. [4]

Influence of the Mahāvamsa

Suspicion and fear of the development of an overwhelming Tamil presence in Ceylon can be traced to the history of the Sinhalese people as presented in the *Mahāvamsa*. The text includes

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[2] 'Ceylon' became 'Sri Lanka' in 1972. I use both names alternately to refer to the country throughout this project.
[3] H.L. Seneviratne states that the schedule of these public purges was not determined by the whether or not any monks had demonstrated unrighteous behavior, rather it was a regular ritual performance. The practice served to maintain the perception of the sangha as the emblem of purity and virtue.
[4] For a concise overview of the samgha's (sangha) traditional position in society, see Seneviratne, H.L., "Samgha and Society," in *Buddhism and Asian History*, ed. Kitagawa, Joseph M. and Cummings, Mark D., New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.

records of frequent invasions originating from south India beginning in 6th century B.C.E., not long after the founding of the island by north Indian Prince Vijaya, until 13th century C.E.[5] The *Mahāvamsa* not only includes accounts of the invasions by Tamil parties, but also contains detailed depictions of Sinhalese Buddhist monarchs' responses to these attacks. One of the most renowned narratives is the epic of Dutthagamini in which the venerated Sinhalese Buddhist king leads a successful counterattack on Elara, the Tamil prince who invaded a kingdom within Sri Lanka in the second century B.C.E. These accounts have significantly influenced the anti-Tamil attitudes and rhetoric that have risen repeatedly over the past few centuries. The Dutthagamini epic supplies evidence of the close relationship between *bhikkhus* (ordained Buddhist monks) and political authority. Those who later advocated for the preservation of a 'Sri Lankan' identity used this narrative to emphasize the integral roles of Buddhism and bhikkhus in the island's political structure. These advocates strategically interpreted parts of the *Mahāvamsa* to effectively ensure support for Sinhalese Buddhist parties in conflicts concerning politics, education, and religion.

While the *Mahāvamsa* provides a foundation for a specific characterization of Tamil or south Indian invaders, it also offers a historiographical basis for the founding of the island of Ceylon and the Sinhala people. The account of the Buddha prior to his attainment of *parinibbāna* (*nibbāna*-after-death, which occurs upon the death of a person who has attained enlightenment during their lifetime) imparts the notion that Ceylon holds a unique place in the world in terms of religion. The story describes Gautama Buddha on his deathbed, entrusting Prince Vijaya with the duty to protect the island of Lanka and to establish his (the Buddha's) religion there, ensuring its perpetuation. Furthermore, specific language and terms in the text have been interpreted to

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[5] Dharmadasa, K.N.O., *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992, p.13.

legitimate the claim that Sri Lanka is a place for the growth of the Sinhala population and the

preservation of Buddhism. Words such as *Sīhala* ("on account of the lion") and *Sīhaladīpa* ("the

island of the Sinhalas") used to describe the island in the *Mahāvamsa*, the fourth-century C.E.

Dīpavamsa ("the chronicle of the island"), and other texts composed by various visiting monks

from India and China in the fifth century, substantiate the notion of Ceylon as the island of and

for the lions, the Sinhalas.[6] Similar reinterpretations of language in the *Mahāvamsa* and the

Dīpavamsa are used to affirm the claim of Sri Lanka as the chosen place for Theravada

Buddhism, and emphasize the responsibility of the Sinhala people to protect Buddhism. For

example, these texts are largely responsible for supplying the term 'Dhammadīpa,' which has

been popularly interpreted to mean "island of the dhamma" or "lamp of the dhamma." Thus, the

ancient text establishes the notion of an inextricable interrelatedness of Buddhism and Sri Lanka.

These key terms have more recently been re-interpreted and applied to support arguments that

negate the notion of Ceylon as the chief protectorate of Buddhism.[7] Steven Collins offers a

different translation of words like *dhammadīpa* and *avabhāsī* (radiant, or shining). He insists that

the idea that the light of the Dhamma shines upon Sri Lanka thereby making it a place for the

growth and protection of Buddhism, should not suggest it is the one and only place for Buddhism

to thrive.[8] The image of light being shone or cast upon the island should serve as a reminder of

the true universality of the Dhamma. Light's natural tendency to travel, and thus its limitlessness

must be kept in mind. Thus, though Sri Lanka falls within the range of the Buddha's radiating

light, claiming it is the sole, selected preserver of Buddhism is erroneous. However, Collins'

interpretation represents a modern view. The nationalist sentiments that arose in response to the

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[6] Ibid, p.19.
[7] See Steven Collins, "Appendix 2," *Nirvana and other Buddhist felicities,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 589-99 footnote.
[8] Collins, 598-99.

force of British rule were based required a belief in the deep, inherent connection between Buddhism and the Sinhalese identity, as supported by the *Mahāvamsa*.

British annexation of the Kandyan state

In 1815, the British seized political rule over the previously Dutch-controlled areas of Ceylon. Anagarika Dharmapala, a prominent writer and lay activist, attributes the British annexation of the Sri Lankan state to internal government corruption, specifically the Sinhalese Prime Minister and Viceroy's joint betrayal of the king, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha. In his account of the fall of the Sri Lankan government, Dharmapala places the blame on several malevolent British court ministers and the evil effects of alcohol - also the fault of the British, as they introduced liquor to Sri Lankan society.[9] Dharmapala summarizes the narrative as follows:

> The Viceroy of the King in the Sabaragamuva province was the good Ehalapola, and the King's Prime Minister was Molligoda. The British resident came between the King and Ehalapola, and by strategic means and intrigue made the King understand that the viceroy was conspiring to overthrow him. Molligoda, the Prime Minister, by associating with the English Resident, learned to taste the poisons of alcohol, and he became a drunkard, and initiated the King into alcoholism, who became a loyal devotee to the alcohol demon. He became partially insane, and the Court ministers who were against Ehalapola were successful in their conspiracy. The King believed that Ehalapola was in league with the British Governor, Mr. North, who had promised him to overthrow the King, and in a fit of anger, under the influence of alcohol, the King ordered the execution of Ehalapola's wife and his two little sons. The execution was accomplished. The Kandyan Sinhalese rose in revolt. Ehalapola joined the British, the King was captured, and the British flag was hoisted in the citadel at Kandy. The Sinhalese lion flag, that was unfurled twenty-four centuries ago in Vijitapura, near Anuradhapura, was for the first time brought down after a triumphant conquest of twenty-three centuries, and for the first time in the glorious history of the lion-armed Sinhalese, their independence was lost, in the year 1815 of the Christian era.[10]

Dharmapala's agenda must be acknowledged in his advocacy for resisting toxic elements of 'Western' culture. In his writing, he frequently demonizes the British colonizers and criticizes nearly everything they introduced to Sri Lankan society. The king's drastic actions, which

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[9] Dharmapala, Anagarika "Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon (1908)," *Return to Righteousness*, ed. Guruge, Ananda, Ceylon: The Government Press, 1965, p.480-81.
[10] Ibid.

according to Dharmapala were paranoia-induced, are confirmed by Governor Edward Barnes in an 1818 proclamation. However, Barnes' account does not address the British involvement in the interactions and affairs that led up to the king's sudden descent into 'madness' and like Dharmapala he is not an objective source.[11] Nonetheless, the British succeeded in conquering the monarchy in the Second Kandyan War of 1815, which inevitably led to a reform of state policy, manifesting in the Kandyan Convention, an agreement between the British and chiefs of the Kandyan Kingdom affirming the dismissal of King Sri Vikrama Rajasinha.

Though the British political occupation of Sri Lanka involved changes in government, initially it appeared that the colonial power was willing to help preserve certain aspects of the social and political relations to religious institutions. One article of the 1815 Kandyan Convention delegated to the British the responsibility of upholding the relationship between sangha and state: "The Religion of Boodhoo professed by the Chiefs and Inhabitants of these Provinces is declared inviolable, and its rites, Ministers and Places of Worship are to be maintained and protected."[12] After receiving responses from the Buddhist clergy, who doubted the British would keep this promise, a proclamation was issued in 1818 explicitly stating that "the priests all the ceremonies and processions of the Buddhist religion shall receive the respect which in former times was shown to them."[13] Thus the British assumed responsibilities reminiscent of those held by traditional royalty, including protecting the Tooth Relic of the Buddha (a canine tooth retrieved from the Buddha's funeral pyre) and appointing chief priests.[14] Governor Brownrigg acknowledged that maintaining relations with the clergy and showing some

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[11] Vimalananda, Tennakoon, *The State and Religion in Ceylon since 1815*, Colombo: D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1970, p.225.
[12] Malalgoda, Kitsiri, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society: 1750-1900*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, p.109.
[13] Vimalananda, p.89 as quoted by Bartholomeusz, Tessa, *Women Under the Bo Tree*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1994, p.30.
[14] Bartholomeusz, *Women Under the Bo Tree*, p.30.

amount of respect for the Buddhist religion and practices were essential for the possibility of effective governance.[15] Thus, during the first several decades of British rule, state policy more or less promised the sangha a continuation of the treatment it received prior to 1815. However, as Gombrich and Obeyesekere note in *Buddhism Transformed*, the government did not adhere to these initial agreements due to the agitated responses it provoked from Christian missionaries and British citizens living in Sri Lanka, [16] as both groups were suspicious of a government that was Christian, but also acted as a benefactor of Buddhism.[17] British political authorities noticed the Buddhist clergy's influential position in Sinhalese society, as they acted as educators to the lower classes while maintaining influence amongst the elites as well.[18] Throughout the subsequent decades, the increase in state support for Christian missionaries and withdrawal of support for Buddhism resulted in a divide slowly forced between Sri Lankan religious authorities and the modern state system.[19]

A commission appointed to assess and revise elements of the British administration in Sri Lanka led to the publication of the 1833 Colebrooke-Cameron Papers. In the documents were proposals for the establishment of executive and legislative councils, and numerous reforms regarding education, all of which supported British efforts to implement a representation-based form of governance and centralize government rule. The advocated government-regulated education (meaning an English, Christian education) served several purposes. First, it would separate the monks and the laypeople by drawing the latter away from monastic education (though Colebrooke did not consider monastic schools notable or worthy of evaluation anyhow,

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[15] Liston, Yarina, "The Transformation of Buddhism during British Colonialism," *Journal of Law and Religion* Vol. 14, No. 1 (1999-2000), p.197.

[16] Gombrich, Richard and Obeyesekere, Gananath, *Buddhism Transformed*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p.202.

[17] Bartholomeusz, p.31.

[18] Liston, p.196.

[19] Seneviratne, H.L., "Politics and Pageantry: Universalisation of Ritual in Sri Lanka," *Man*, New Series, 12.1 (1977), p.73.

thus their exclusion from the report).[20] Additionally, it "would be a means of preparing candidates for public employment; and it would serve as an aid to 'the natives to cultivate European attainments.'"[21] In order to effectively govern and establish a sustainable political system throughout the island, the government needed to instill certain values in the minds of the Sri Lankan population. Altering the education system was seen as a highly efficient way of propagating a Christian ideology and increasing knowledge of the English language to produce citizens who would be able to contribute to and help sustain the British colonial system of governance.

Along with the modifications to legislature, education, and political duties brought about by the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms, anthropologist David Scott argues that a new set of conditions were established regarding the perception of society's structure and religion's place in it. This marked the beginning of the secularization of society through the introduction of "a new social space (that of civil society as a differentiated field of seemingly self-sustaining institutions and organizations); a new social and conceptual object (that of 'religion'); a new sovereign discourse (that of reason as the adjudicating truth-discourse); and a new form of subject (that of a laity whose business it is to take positions on the assumed truth or untruth of religious propositions)."[22] 'Religion' was presented by Protestant Christian missionaries as a distinct entity that could be separated from other areas of society, leaving these other areas to be governed by judgments based on individual reason rather than the guidelines as dictated by religious authorities or tradition. Scott avers that it is largely due to this concept that Buddhism

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[20] Malalgoda, p.177.
[21] Ibid, p.175.
[22] Scott, David, "Toleration and Historical Traditions of Difference," *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence,* ed. Chatterjee, Partha and Jeganathan, Pradeep, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 290.

was defined as a 'religion,'[23] effectively altering the way the ideology and practice would be viewed and discussed throughout successive decades. The dilution of religion in society, and relocation of Buddhism to a separate place (specifically, confining it to temple grounds) incited a rise in the agency of the lay population. The introduction of a secular society invited the use of individual judgment and a deviation from relying on the sangha. This attitude became embedded in the outlook of the laypeople, and served as a key component to the range of influence and effectiveness of the Buddhist revival later in the century.

Scott also draws attention to the introduction of a "*new game of politics*"[24] during the period of British rule. The new political system and perceptions of government in general instituted by the British remained in effect even after Sri Lanka gained independence in the mid-twentieth century. This can be attributed to the perceived need to meet the standards set by the major actors of the global body of nation-states in order to receive recognition as a legitimate political agent. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

In 1846, the government declared its withdrawal from religious ceremonies and that the members of the clergy could no longer be employed by or receive monetary contributions from the state.[25] By the mid-1850s, the government had established a clear separation of the Buddhist religion and the state, affirmed by the returning of the Buddha's Tooth Relic to the clergy. The self-identified Christian government averred the Buddhist reverence for the relic was a form of 'paganism,' from which the state explicitly dissociated itself by transferring possession of the tooth. The image of a Christian government was maintained for a period of time, reinforced by the state's permission of the construction of churches within close proximity of Buddhist

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[23] Scott, David, *Refashioning Futures: Criticisms after Postcoloniality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, p.60.
[24] Ibid, p.45
[25] Liston, p.199.

temples. State association with Western religion persisted until the final decades of the century, until the government endorsed total secularism by dissociating itself from religion entirely, Christianity included. [26]

Dharmapala identifies several occasions of the state revoking sangha ownership rights and positions of employment, drastically altering the bhikkhus' role in society as well as the dynamic between the clergy and government.

> The Temple Land Commissioners in 1854 alienated nearly a 100,000 acres of land that belonged to the Buddhist Church and made it British property; in 1860 the Educational Commissioners deprived the self-sacrificing Elders of the Buddhist Church of their tutorial office as guardians of the youth of Ceylon and by diplomatic cunning prevented the growth of the spirit of individuality in the child by making penal to attend the temple schools.[27]

The confiscation of temple lands and displacement of the clergy from the role of educator diminished the visibility of Buddhism and the sangha in society. It is important to acknowledge that it was not the withdrawal of government funding that illuminated the fragility of the temples and sangha, thus bringing their capacity to survive into question. Rather, it was the sudden lack of an outside authority to hold the sangha accountable for effective temple management which proved to be detrimental as it exhibited sangha vulnerability towards potential corruption through the misuse of funds. As Kitsiri Malalgoda notes, this became a concern particularly following the issuing of Ordinance No. 10 of 1856, "which was intended 'to provide for the settlement of claims to exemption from taxation of all temple lands in the Kandyan provinces, and for the due registration of all lands belonging to such temples.'"[28] In the revocation of the privilege of tax-exemption, the temples became, to the government, like any other institution, reflecting a state effort to reduce the sangha to a far less esteemed position in society.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Dharmapala, Anagarika, 'Buddhist Studies in Ceylon,' *Maha Bodhi Journal* 22, (Feb. 1914), as printed in *Return to Righteousness*, p.498.

[28] Malalgoda, p.177.

The Buddhist Revival

The last quarter of the 19th century was largely defined by the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, a co-founder of the American Theosophical Society, is often credited with the movement's success in reinstating Buddhism in mainstream society and imparting a sense of social activism among the Sri Lankan lay community. Olcott and several Theosophist colleagues arrived in Sri Lanka with a curiosity for the Buddhist tradition and an intention of establishing a branch of the Theosophical Society. Though the Society proclaimed a nondenominational ideology, they nonetheless established a Buddhist Theosophical Society in Colombo and were very influential across the Sinhalese lay population, employing Western education methods used in the Christian missionary schools to propagate Buddhism.[29] As the British government had begun to promote a policy of religious neutrality in schools, and only provided financial support to secular schools, advocacy for Buddhist education was ostensibly positive. However, the interventionist approach employed by the Buddhist Theosophical Society to advocate for Buddhist education is inherently problematic. Anthropologist Michael M. Ames notes that the methods used by monks in traditional Buddhist schools were viewed with disdain and considered ineffective by members of the Theosophical Society. "J. Bowles Daly, a member of the Buddhist Theosophical Society and himself a strong supporter of Buddhist education (although in Westernized form), complained in 1891 that the condition of Buddhist temple (pansala) schools was very unsatisfactory due to lack of organization, materials, and finances, the want of discipline, and 'slovenly methods of teaching.'"[30] Thus, the Society implemented 'Western' structure and techniques which they knew to be efficient.

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[29] Liston, p. 206.

[30] Ames, Michael M., "The Impact of Western Education on Religion and Society in Ceylon," *Pacific Affairs* 40.1 (1967):19-42, p.28.

The application of 'Western' structures and ideologies in the Buddhist revival movement did not occur solely in relation to education. Olcott's contributions to the construction of a Buddhist nationalist identity can, naively, be deemed praiseworthy, as he was playing a key role in confronting the limitations imposed by British authorities on a Sri Lankan identity and lifestyle. Despite the esteem with which Olcott was viewed for his work in re-advancing Buddhism in Ceylonese society and combatting Christianity, the systems used to reassert the religion that is inherent in the island's identity are nonetheless 'Western' models. Many of the Buddhist institutions Olcott and his fellow Theosophists established were facsimiles of British Christian organizations and symbols that were perceived as necessary to ensure legitimacy. These included: "a national fund for the establishment of Buddhist schools, […] a Buddhist catechism, […] a Buddhist flag" as well as "Young Men/Women's Buddhist Associations (YMBA/YWBA), Buddhist Sunday school and Buddhist army chaplains."[31] Though the constructed emblems and content of the curriculum in the newly-established schools emphasized Buddhist values and practice, it was delivered in English through a form that establishes and reinforces the notion of an implicit adherence to standards defined by the European powers that colonized Sri Lanka. Thus, the dissemination of Buddhist education through British models essentially kept Sri Lankan Buddhists and the Buddhist revival movement inside the 'Western'-defined system.

The movement was eventually labelled 'Protestant Buddhism' for several reasons: (a) its emulation of 'Western,' Christian institutions, (b) its foundation as a protest against Christianity,[32] and (c) the shift in the roles of religious leadership, specifically an increase in

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[31] Liston, p.206-207.

[32] Obeyesekere, Gananath, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon," *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1 (1970) p.46-47. Also noted by Urmila Phadnis and Yarina Liston.

activity and agency among laypeople, and a concurrent decrease in the authority of the monks.[33]

The relegation of bhikkhus to a remote area of society was particularly apparent in their

exclusion from the Theosophists' Buddhist schools. Though he sought and initially gained some

approval from members of the sangha, Olcott ultimately found himself at odds with several

prominent monks and lay activists who were advocating the advancement of Buddhism and

resisting Christian missionaries. Migettuwatte Gunananda Thera, a monk noted for his

participation in Buddhist-Christian debates during the latter half of the nineteenth century, shared

similar goals to Olcott and the Buddhist Theosophical Society. Publications of Gunananda

Thera's speeches and public debates, in fact, influenced Olcott's interest in going to Sri Lanka.

However, Migettuwatte did not see the Theosophist attitude towards Buddhism as authentic, thus

he "emphasized the need to re-assert the 'true' doctrines of Buddhism, as many Western

sympathizers of Buddhism-he claimed- had begun to incorporate into Buddhism many doctrines

which were 'false' (*mithyā*) and alien to it."[34] Gunananda Thera was not the only Sri Lankan

monk or layperson to share these sentiments.

Anagarika Dharmapala, a proponent of the reassertion of Buddhism and traditional Ceylon

cultural values, was closely associated with Olcott and the Buddhist Theosophical Society for

some time. By the mid-1890s he began to distance himself from the Theosophists, as he

disagreed with many Theosophical intellectual notions, for instance the idea of universal

religion. Kitsiri Malalgoda writes, "His relations with them reached the breaking point between

November 1897 and July 1989 when he made an attempt to eliminate the word 'Theosophical'

from the name of the Colombo branch."[35] Dharmapala's attempt to reclaim Buddhism and its

inherent 'Sri Lankan-ness' was met with resistance by the Westerners who drove the religious

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[33] Liston, p.206-207. Also posited by Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society,* p.246.
[34] Malalgoda, p.252.
[35] Ibid, p.253.

revival. Hikkaduva Sumamgala, the head monk of the Vidyodaya Pirivena (a prestigious

monastic college), also broke ties with Olcott and formally withdrew from the Buddhist

Theosophical Society in the early 20th century "on the grounds that 'the platform of the Society

had been changed and that it was no longer an eclectic body.'"[36] Olcott ultimately persuaded

Hikkaduve to maintain an association with the Society, an act for which he commended himself

in his diary: "I can always dispel it [Sumamgala's doubt in the Buddhist orthodoxy and agenda

of Olcott and the Theosophical Society] by getting him [Sumamgala] to compare the state of

Sinhalese Buddhism to-day with what it was when he and I first met in 1880."[37] Dharmapala and

Sumamgala regarded Olcott and the Buddhist Theosophical Society with suspicion, and thus

were reluctant to fully support their methods of propagating a distorted version of Buddhism.

The Theosophical Society's movement was nevertheless a response to the dominating forces of

'Western' Christianity. Thus, these monks and others who questioned the movement maintained

a neutral, or passively supportive, position

     While the Buddhist revival proved to be influential among the laypeople of Sri Lanka, it

did not in fact permeate all socio-economic classes. The Sinhalese aristocracy remained in an

atmosphere defined by Christianity, the English language and 'Western' cultural values while

Protestant Buddhism thrived among lower classes. Walpola Rahula, a Buddhist scholar and

monk, wrote in the years preceding independence, "they [the aristocracy] have no knowledge of

Buddhism, Buddhist traditions and customs, the Sinhala language, literature and history. They

have no regard of respect for their heritage. Through natives of Ceylon, they are more akin to

foreigners in education, customs and habits, outlook, and mentality."[38] The Christian-educated

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, VI (April 1896-September 1898), Madras, (1935), p.349-50, as quoted in Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p.253.
[38] Rahula, Walpola, *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1974, p.95.

Sinhalese elite also lacked an understanding of the bhikkhu's role in society. Rahula claims that, as a result of being educated and living in a Western-modeled system, they held the view that Buddhist monks should adhere to their basic duties of "receiving alms, chanting *pirit*, performing funeral rites and preaching sermons,"[39] and refrain from becoming involved in national affairs. "They believe that *bhikkhus* should live a life limited to the four walls of the temples. They do not realize that the nation and the religion have to move together."[40] This notion of religion and political affairs as being intertwined would provide grounds for members of the sangha to organize effective political pressure groups in the post-independence years.

Approaching independence

Throughout the early twentieth century, a movement for constitutional reform arose, driven primarily by the elites that made up the Ceylon National Congress. As illuminated by Sri Lankan Tamil historian A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, the movement was driven by an underlying desire for greater representation of the Sri Lankan people in the federal government. The members of the Congress pushed for "first, a greater 'Ceylonisation' of the public services; secondly, more power for the Executive and Legislative Councils, and consequently a balanced legislature where each of the ethnic groups […] would receive an agreed share or representation."[41] Pushes for change remained strictly in regards to representation and securing positions of employment, not altering the state structure in an attempt to restore a 'traditional,' non-colonial Ceylon government. As Wilson notes, "Attempts at promoting the revival of local government institutions were feeble, and anyway proved futile. They were ineffective because of the indifference of the activists for constitutional reform."[42] Tensions mounted among the elites

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Wilson, A. Jeyaratnam, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988, p.6.
[42] Ibid.

of various ethnic groups as concerns regarding representation increased. Hostility between the distinct ethnic groups of the island was not a new development, as evidenced by documentation of Sinhala-Tamil wars in the *Mahāvamsa* and Sinhalese-led anti-Muslim riots of 1915. The unequal treatment the Sinhalese claimed the British had shown them, instead giving favor to the Tamil population, began to emerge in these discussions regarding establishing proportional representation. The rhetoric used to advance the Sinhalese nationalist cause grew stronger over the following decades as the country's population attempted to define its identity.

The Donoughmore Constitution: Universal franchise

In 1931, Ceylon adopted the Donoughmore Constitution by recommendation of the Donoughmore Commission. One of the notable effects of the new constitution was the implementation of universal suffrage. While ostensibly a progressive idea, David Scott asserts it was introduced too soon in British colonies like Ceylon, as it had only gone into effect in Britain over the previous two decades. Scott writes, "By making the elite dependent upon a mass electorate, colonial power intended to deploy universal suffrage as a *tactic* (as Foucault might have called it) by means of which to oblige them to refashion their political sensibilities in the direction of acquiring a more democratic and more egalitarian ethos."[43] However, embedding a notion of a democratic ethos in Sri Lankan society was difficult, as it did not align with the condition of public and private interests. "Particularist interests, in other words, were out of place in the public life of politics. And the refusal on the part of the communities in Ceylon to identify their interests with a "national interest" appeared to the commissioners as the failure of the Ceylonese elite to appreciate cogently and grasp cognitively the essence of the democratic spirit."[44] Though introduced as part of an effort to encourage universal democracy, along with

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[43] David Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, p.168.
[44] Ibid, p.169.

other Western systems and principles, the individual condition of Ceylon society and its history as a colonial state were not given due consideration. This resulted in additional force added to the push towards becoming a facsimile of Western countries, regardless of whether it was the most agreeable or appropriate system for Ceylon.

Part II: Planning an independent nation-state (1940-48)

Having been quelled for nearly a century, the Buddhist clergy naturally sought to reclaim a dynamic, wide-ranging role society when early 20th century pushes for sovereignty brought about discussions regarding plans for a post-colonial Sri Lanka. However, the re-assertion of Buddhism did not seem to be a priority for the members of the state liaising with British authorities in making preparations for an independent government. The Constitution of 1946 lacks any policy addressing the sangha or Buddhism.[45] Liberation from European rulers required the assertion of an intrinsically 'Sri Lankan' identity. As the majority of the country's population was Sinhalese, as were most of the political representatives working with the British heads of state in the years preceding independence, the 'Sri Lankan' identity became understood as a Sinhalese identity.[46] Considering the historical sangha-state relationship and intertwined Sinhalese and Buddhist identities, it was expected that the reinstatement of a 'Sri Lankan' (Sinhalese) government implied the reintegration of Buddhism into the political realm. However, the complete omission of Buddhism and the sangha from policy and thus, from the system of a sovereign Sri Lanka, insinuated deliberate continuation of the secularity of the system enforced by the British.

The question arises of whether, at the time of independence, it was likely or legitimately possible to establish a post-colonial government that resembled the system in place prior to the

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[45] Ceylon Constitution Order in Council, 1946, *TamilNation.,* http://tamilnation.co/srilankalaws/46constitution.htm.
[46] However, this limited equation of 'Sri Lankan' to 'Sinhalese' was not as deliberate or evident at the time of independence as it would be in the subsequent years. See Chapter 2.

arrival of the British, in which members of the sangha and the state were closely associated. Total British withdrawal from the country without creating a plan for the transition of power and responsibilities would have been simply negligent. Moreover, Britain's large stake in the Sri Lankan economy, specifically the rubber and tea industries, influenced preparations for the post-colonial nation-state and made a total relinquishment of control over the country highly unlikely. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson notes the relevant British economic interests in the process of Ceylon's transition to independence. "It is likely that the British wished to keep Ceylon independent of India, so that regardless of what happened in India, they would be able to keep naval and air bases in Ceylon, and thus dominate the vast expanse of ocean between Madagascar and Singapore."[47] It should be acknowledged that nationalist anti-colonial movements were prevalent throughout India at this time, which significantly influenced the shift to an autonomous nation-state for India, as well as Ceylon. While there were not nationalist movements for independence in Ceylon, certainly not to the caliber of those in India, it was only appropriate to grant the small island country independence along with its neighbor to the north. As Wilson notes, Britain wanted to preserve the economic opportunities that Ceylon presented.

The Heritage of the Bhikkhu

In 1946, Walpola Rahula's *Bhikshuvakage Urumaya* ('The Heritage of the Bhikkhu') contributed to the ongoing discourse regarding the participation of bhikkhus in state affairs. Rahula concurs that the British intended to take over Sri Lankan society by weakening established, influential institutions and implementing their own systems. According to Rahula, the colonial rulers "did everything possible to undermine Buddhism and Sinhala culture, to spread Christianity and western culture, to create disaffection in the minds of the people towards their national government and to strengthen the power of their own government in Ceylon. They

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[47] Wilson, p.25.

aimed at gaining supremacy over the whole island by instigating internal conflicts among the

Sinhalese."[48] Despite the article in the Kandyan Convention which bestowed upon the British

government the responsibility to protect Buddhist traditions, objections from Christian

missionaries and the notion of secularism, grounded in the model of Western government,

further contributed to the diminishing authority of Buddhism and the sangha in Sri Lankan

society.[49] This perpetuated a sense of instability within the sangha, intensifying concerns about

the future of the clergy's relationship with the laity, and its once mutually-dependent relationship

with the state. Although the British succeeded in conquering the Sinhalese monarchy, and in

their authoritative position, forced a divide between the sangha and state, as well as sangha and

laypeople, Rahula asserts the spirit and value of Sinhalese and Buddhist culture and identity was

sustained through the colonial period by the courageous, selfless bhikkhus.[50]

The Heritage of the Bhikkhu proved to be a significant contribution to the debate

regarding politically-active monks as it led to the foundation of activist groups and publications

in the post-independence period. However, it did not escape criticisms from the political-

bhikkhu-opposed United National Party (UNP), and individuals who disagreed with Rahula's

interpretation of the true role of a monk and his notions of suitable goals for Sri Lankan society.

In 1948, Henpitagedara Gnanavasa wrote *Bhiksubage Urumaya Kumakda?* ('What is the

Heritage of the Bhikkhu?') as a response to Rahula's work. While Rahula advocates the adoption

of Western systems of education and work to encourage Sri Lanka's capacity for productivity

and progress, Gnanavasa promotes a traditional form of education as opposed to a modern

secular one. The author advises monks to adhere to the *vibhavagami* path, thereby committing

his life to perfecting his self-discipline, and remaining focused on the ultimate goal of evading

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[48] Rahula, p. 64.
[49] Ibid, p.79.
[50] Ibid, p.91.

rebirth. This distinctly contrasts with Rahula's extolling of the monk as a leader of society, a symbol of wisdom who should dedicate his time and efforts to guiding others. Gnanavasa asserts that for a bhikkhu to intervene in social affairs is "to utilize Buddhist ideas for mundane benefits."[51] However, Gnanavasa does not discourage bhikkhus from all social activity. He asserts that there is no issue if, as a monk pursues the Middle Path (*vibhavagami*) towards enlightenment, his behavior or activities benefits or contributes to the social welfare of another. He does emphasize that working for the betterment of the lives of others in and of itself is not part of the direct journey to enlightenment, which he calls "the distinctly Buddhist goal."[52] Gnanavasa insists on the importance of a monk remaining focused on one key goal and on the elimination of distractions as he works to achieve it. He believes that the world is filled with too much temptation for a monk to maintain his specific, ascetic lifestyle while concurrently performing the social service that Rahula discusses.[53]

In this compilation of his views on the state of Buddhism and the bhikkhu in a time of national transition, Rahula draws on Anagarika Dharmapala's notion of the monk's fundamental role in contemporary society. H.L. Seneviratne emphasizes the importance of critically assessing Dharmapala's constructed image of the monk:

> Although monks did play a social role in precolonial society, it is nothing compared to the social role of the monk invented and publicized by Angarika Dharmapala. Dharmapala's monk was composed of traits (Methodism, punctuality, cleanliness, orderliness, time-consciousness, dedication) and had responsibilities that were influenced by exposure to Christianity and the role of the Christian priest. […] They [Dharmapala's bhikkhu] are not the product of precolonial Buddhist culture but of a neo-Buddhist culture whose neo-ness was derived from contact with Christianity, its organizational structure, its social teachings and, above all, its idea of ministering to a flock."[54]

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[51] Seneviratne, H.L., *The Work of Kings*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p.162.
[52] Ibid, p.163.
[53] Ibid, p.163.
[54] Ibid, p.27.

One of the significant effects of the late-19th century Buddhist revival is re-emphasized in Seneviratne's analysis of Dharmapala, specifically that the Buddhism that was encouraged by the movement was a new Buddhism, elements of which resembled Western Christian institutions that had been developed by the British in Ceylon over the previous century. This conception of the monk and society allowed for the substantial poor population to serve as the mission while the monk became the missionary. Seneviratne continues, "The monk came to think of himself as an empowered political activist and an entrepreneur, in addition to being a caretaker of the flock."[55] This self-perception became a significant motivational factor for some bhikkhus over the years that were to follow.

Bhikkhus put forth efforts to remind Sinhalese politicians, specifically the United National Party, led by D.S. Senanayake (who would soon be prime minister), J.R. Jayewardene, and D.S. Wijewardene of the necessity of monk activity in the political sphere, for the benefit of society. The UNP aggressively asserted their position on the preferred separation of monks from politics, coordinating with the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress to hold the Sāsana Sōdhana (cleansing of the Buddhist order) in early 1946. The party emerged from this meeting with a set of guidelines prohibiting monks from becoming members of government, voting, electing council ministers, and further, giving government officials permission to discipline bhikkhus who disobeyed these rules.[56] These actions of course incited a response from the bhikkhus. One of their strongly advocated points was the sangha's need for the support of the chief political authority in order to maintain internal discipline and effectively disseminate the dhamma throughout society.[57] A new weekly newspaper, *Kālaya*, established and published by monks, printed the editorial "Bhikkhus and Politics: The Declaration of Vidyālaṅkāra Pirivena" in 1946,

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Abeysekara, Ananda, *The Colors of the Robe*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p.86.

[57] Phadnis, Urmila, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka,* Columbia: South Asia Books, 1976, p.210-11.

in response to the UNP's set of guidelines. The article, which reflected the publication's general tone, asserted the bhikkhus' rights to be involved in spheres of society beyond the temple.[58] It reminded readers of the divide forced by colonial rulers between sangha and state, and sangha and laity, and cautioned against allowing another separation of these various societal parties.[59] Within the following months, bhikkhu organizations joined political parties and set out to ensure the protection of the liberties and political rights of monks and ensure the furtherance of Buddhism in Sri Lankan society through its transition into a modern nation-state.[60]

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[58] Abeysekara, p.84.
[59] Rahula, "Appendix II: The Declaration of the Vidyālaṅkāra Pirivena," *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, p.131-33.
[60] Phadnis, p.167.

Chapter Two

Sri Lanka in the shift to sovereignty

The transition to independence in Sri Lanka was unlike that of many other British

colonies that were granted sovereignty swiftly following the conclusion of the Second World

War. The history of independence in India, Sri Lanka's closest neighbor and ancestor, is

portrayed as a long, difficult journey. In Sri Lanka, sovereignty came about relatively quickly

and quietly, with few dramatic confrontations between the Crown and native populations that

could provide a nationalistic narrative and identity for the land and people. The rise of the notion

of sovereignty as an inherent right in the post-World War II period strongly influenced Sri

Lanka's attainment of independence. However, the recognition of the country's autonomy also

implied that it would be held to standards set by the nations that dominated the global stage. The

transition of Sri Lanka from a European colony to an independent nation-state was entirely

facilitated within the framework of a Western system of government, which was the global

standard to which all countries should aspire and against which they would be evaluated. The

consequences of Sri Lanka's seemingly uncomplicated arrival to sovereignty will be addressed in

depth in Chapter 3.

The officially-recognized year of independence in Ceylon is 1948. When it became

apparent that an independent government did not imply a reinstatement of the state-sangha

relationship of the pre-colonial period, some bhikkhus became anxious. The 1947 Soulbury

Constitution, issued under the authority of Prime Minister Don Stephen (D.S.) Senanayake and

the Board of Ministers, contained Section 29(1) which instituted a distinct separation of state

control from religious entities and the affairs of religious bodies.[61] While separation of religious

institutions and the state may have been appropriate under the rule of the British, who lacked an

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[61]Wilson, p.36.

understanding of and had no intent of continuing the sangha-state relationship of previous years,

some monks expected that a Sri Lankan political authority would reestablish a distinctly

Ceylonese system of governance. In February 1948, the head monks of the Kandyan Asigiriya

and Malwatte chapters of the sangha wrote to Senanayake requesting the inclusion of Article 5 of

the 1815 Kandyan Convention, which stated the government's responsibility to protect

Buddhism, in the new constitution. However, Senanayake refused to elevate the status of any

particular religion in a modern religiously-pluralistic nation-state. The reluctance of the head of

state to align himself or his government party with the sangha, not wishing to give the

appearance of ascribing privilege to 'any particular religion' is a trend that continues throughout

the following decade. In this chapter, I will examine the tensions that arose in religion and

politics as a result of trying to secure the support of the majority of Ceylon's population within

the context of the modern state system.

UNP views on bhikkhus and politics

The key figures of the United National Party (UNP), Don Stephen (D.S.) Senanayake and

Junius Richard (J.R.) Jayewardene, strongly discouraged the interaction of monks and politics.[62]

In March 1946, the UNP and the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress held the first Sāsana Sōdhana

(cleansing of the Buddhist order) at the Kelaniya temple outside of Colombo. At the meeting, the

council issued guidelines concerning monastic behavior. Monks were forbidden from becoming

members of government and from participating in the election of council ministers as well as

general elections. Furthermore, the government had the authority to discipline monks who

disobeyed any of these rules.[63] While applicable to all bhikkhus, the guidelines undoubtedly

were created with the intent of sending a message to the monks who were active members of the

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[62] Abeysekara, p.81.
[63] Ibid, p.86.

Marxist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), many of whom were students from the prestigious Vidyalankara Pirivena. Opposed to their political activity and socialist views, J.R. Jayewardene publicly rebuked the Marxist monks, calling them a threat to Buddhism and Sinhalese Buddhist monastic order.[64] The Vidyalankara monks responded by nominating an LSSP candidate to run in the 1947 elections. Despite differences between the UNP, LSSP, SLFP, and other parties regarding whether the state should align itself with a particular religion, the political parties found a common cause: to promote Sinhala as the principal language of Ceylon.

The Language Issue

In its transition to becoming an independent state, Ceylon was confronted with the issue of selecting a state language. Most Ceylonese opposed the continued use of English in government, schools, and the professional sphere. They viewed it as an inherent remnant of British colonial power. Pre-independence discussions acknowledged proposals for making both Sinhala and Tamil the primary languages after independence. The primary concern was to efface English and promote *swabhasha* ('one's own language'), an authentic, wholly Sri Lankan language. However, when the island officially became an autonomous nation-state, the government saw a necessity to select a single language in which to conduct state affairs. As an emerging nation-state, Sri Lanka had to decide how it would present itself in order to legitimize itself within the global group of nation-states, thus it needed to assemble an identity as a country. Since Sinhala was the language of the majority ethnic population, members of the state pushed for it to be made the national language.

Regarding the need to establish a national language, D.B. Jayatilaka, an active member of the Buddhist revival, stated: "'It is impossible for a people to grow to their full manhood, to their fullest stature, unless the individuals that compose that people have a language of their own, in

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[64] Ibid, p.89.

which they give expression to their highest and best thoughts' (*Debates, LC* 1928:367)."[65]

Jayatilaka equates the ownership of language and sense of national identity with self-respect and

a sense of legitimacy in expressing one's thoughts, as K.N.O. Dharmadasa has observed.[66]

Jayatilaka emphasizes the necessity of replacing English with a language that appropriately

reflects an authentic Sri Lankan identity. He also supports the cause for making Sinhala the

national language, and recognizes the Sinhalese people as the founders of the island and the

perceived need for them to reclaim authority over their country. As Ceylon moved through its

first several years of independence, some Sinhalese noticed a lack of government effort to fully

reinstitute Sinhala and Buddhism to the rightful place in the state.[67] Bhikkhus and Sinhala-

educated school-teachers, in particular, voiced this sentiment as they felt they were held at a

stark disadvantage to those who received an English education under British rule.[68] They held a

legitimate fear of their roles in society being jeopardized if the government were to continue

using and promoting English as the primary language. The growing advocacy for the use of

Sinhala and assertion of the Sinhalese identity was a response to the domineering forces of

Western colonizers and the perceived inequalities that resulted from the implementation of

Western systems.

While some governmental officials advocated parity for Sinhala and Tamil in an attempt

to avoid aggravating those on both sides of the language issue, others including the leaders of the

ruling UNP deemed it an inefficient and unrealistic solution. D.S. Senanayake, prime minister

and UNP leader, reminded the Ceylonese population that it was futile to try to alter in one decade

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[65]Dharmadasa, p.215.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Phadnis, p. 248.
[68] Ibid.

a system that had been built over the span of a century. As Urmila Phadnis, a scholar of South

Asian studies writes:

> The history of the pre-colonial past in which Tamil invasions loomed large, coupled with the fear and suspicion of the average Sinhalese *vis-á-vis* the Tamil community, led to a general belief that two official languages would divide the country as neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils would [have] any incentive to learn each other's language. Further, if both Tamil and Sinhala were accorded official status as State languages, the former might corrupt the latter. Parity, it was thus feared, might lead to the eventual triumph of Tamil over Sinhala.[69]

I would like to acknowledge that the arguments for the advancement of Sinhala 1) as a response

to the ever-present predatory threat posed by Tamil people, and 2) as a means of establishing a

sense of equality between the two ethnic populations following the privilege and success the

Tamils allegedly enjoyed under British rule were rhetorically effective, but factually inaccurate.

The Tamil population, which constituted less than a third of the island's population, was not a

legitimate threat in the way that Sinhalese nationalists depicted it. Establishing Sinhala as the

national language signified the deliverance of justice upon the disadvantaged Sinhalese people.

While the claim that they were the victims of unequal treatment justifies the mission to elevate

the Sinhala language and people, this argument it challenged by the fact that the Sinhalese hold

the ethnic majority in terms of the island's ethnic groups, as well as in government and society.

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the SLFP

Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S.W.R.D.) Bandaranaike was an integral member of the

UNP from its founding in 1946. He was also the assumed next leader of the party. However, it

soon became apparent that D.S. (Don Stephen) Senanayake wished to pass leadership onto his

son, Dudley Shelton Senanayake. Senanayake's disapproval of Bandaranaike's revival of the

Sinhala Maha Sabha (Sinhala Great Council) and support of the *swabasha* movement added to

tensions between the two. In September 1951, Bandaranaike left the UNP cabinet and founded

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[69] Phadnis, p.248-49.

the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) to promote Sinhalese and Buddhist interests.[70] I.D.S.

Weerawardana best summarizes the basis of the SLFP, describing it as "a democratic party

informed by some measure of evolutionary socialism."[71] It advocated for free speech, free

assembly and other collective liberties as well as more abstract individual freedoms - "freedom

from fear, freedom from want, freedom from ignorance and the right to choose a government the

public wants."[72]

The SLFP did not formally claim a particular religious orientation, and Bandaranaike

maintained an irresolute stance on religion. While at times rejecting the proposition of

establishing Buddhism as the state religion, he conversely advocated for the constitutional

recognition of Buddhism.[73] "The adoption of Buddhism as that state religion will usher in an era

of religio-democratic socialism," he declared. "More than two-thirds of the population of Ceylon

are Buddhists, and it is therefore inevitable that Buddhism should be the state religion."[74] Yet,

the SLFP manifesto, despite its evident leanings towards Buddhism, insisted that formally

instituting a state religion would be a detrimental move, due to the religious plurality of the

island's population.[75]

Bandaranaike was also a strong proponent for the assertion of Sinhala as the primary

language of Ceylon. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson states, "Bandaranaike advanced the same arguments

as Jayewardene had done in 1944 as to the reasons why Sinhalese should be made the only

official language – the fear of South Indian Tamil influences. Bandaranaike had a further

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[70] Weerawardana, I.D.S., *Ceylon General Election, 1956*, Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1960, p.55.
[71] Ibid, p.56.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Smith, Donald E., *South Asian Politics and Religion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, p.456.
[74] Thomas, Winburn T., "Ceylon Christians Faced by Crisis," *Christian Century*, 1951, vol. 68, pp.58-60. As referenced in Smith, "The Sinhalese Buddhist Revolution," *South Asian Politics and Religion*, p.456.
[75] Smith, p.470.

argument – the Tamil presence in the seven Sinhalese provinces."[76] Bandaranaike emphasized the abundance of Tamil people in the country's workforce, thereby reinforcing the notion of the economic threat they presented to the Sinhalese working class. He also perpetuated the paranoia-inducing notion that the Sri Lankan Tamil population represented the larger Tamil-speaking network throughout the world. Speaking on behalf of the Sinhalese population, he argued, "as the Tamil was spoken by so many millions in other countries, and possessed a much wider literature and as the Tamil-speaking people had every means of propagating their literature and culture, it would have an advantage over Sinhalese, which was spoken only by a few million people in this country."[77] In this reiteration of the argument that the Tamils already had a 'home base' (Tamil Nadu) and a global support network, Bandaranaike lent his support to the belief that Sri Lanka was the one and only homeland for the Sinhalese people and the preservation of the Sinhala language.

1956

Buddha Jayanti

The year 1956 bore inherent religious significance throughout the international Buddhist community as it marked the Buddha Jayanti, the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's *parinibbāna* (the death of one who has achieved enlightenment). Considering the Buddha was said to have requested the protection of the island of Lanka on his deathbed, the year was also a commemoration of the birth of Ceylon as a place of Theravada Buddhism and the Sinhalese people. The Buddhist Council allocated extensive funds (over 5,000,000 rupees – approximately

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[76] Wilson, p.41.
[77] Bandaranaike, S.W.R.D., *Towards a New Era: Select Speeches of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike Made in the Legislature of Ceylon, (1931-1959)* Colombo, 1961, p.418, as referenced in Phadnis, *Relgion and Politics in Sri Lanka*, p.249.

$1,060,000) for the festivities,[78] scheduled to commence in May and continue into the following year.[79] The Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (United Monk Front) vehemently pushed for the postponement of the general election until after the Buddha Jayanti, so much so that "No-Dissolution before Buddha Jayanti" became one of the organization's slogans.[80]

Mahavāmsa Extensions

Two more chapters of the *Mahavāmsa*, containing accounts of the island's history up to the present day, were published in 1956. Historian Jonathan Young notes the significance of the correlation of this publication and the passing of the "Sinhala Only Act", which established Sinhala as the primary language (further addressed below).[81] The series of events in 1956 regarding the role of and value attributed to language and religion perpetuates the apparent entwinement of the Sinhala and Buddhist identities, and the presentation of this combined religion and ethnic heritage as the quintessential Sri Lankan identity. Thus, those who were Tamil speakers and Tamil by ancestry were excluded from the definition of 'Sri Lankan'.

Betrayal of Buddhism Report

In 1951 the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) requested that Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake appoint a royal commission "to examine the question of giving Buddhism its rightful place in the land."[82] Though the appeal was denied, an unofficial ACBC committee called the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry conducted surveys around the island and compiled *The Betrayal of Buddhism* report, published in 1956.[83] Overall, the report offers significant insight into the motivations behind the movement for the reassertion of Buddhism in Sri Lankan society.

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[78] Smith, p.459.
[79] Weerawardana, p.18.
[80] Ibid, p.156.
[81] Young, Jonathan, "Creations of Myth: Sinhala National Identity and the *Mahavāmsa*," *SAGAR: South Asia Graduate Research Journal* 12 (2004): 21-38, p.27.
[82] Wilson, p.52.
[83] Ibid.

It provides a concise, comprehensive overview of the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, its treatment under colonial rule, and recommended reforms that aim to reassert the religion's integrity and influence in society. Unsurprisingly, the historical parts of the document frequently highlight the injustice brought upon bhikkhus and Buddhism by the foreign government and Christian missionaries throughout the colonial era. While the report states that its purpose is not to secure special treatment for Buddhism, it portrays the Buddhist community and institutions as victims of inequitable treatment in comparison to European Christian institutions set up in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist Committee of Inquiry principally asks for the deliverance of justice for Buddhism and calls for efforts to be directed towards the reestablishment of Buddhism as a freely accessible and practicable religion in Sri Lankan society.

The report notably did not recommend that Buddhism be made the state religion due to the religious diversity across the island's population. It did recommend the appointment of a Minister for Religious Affairs, as well as general sovereignty and equality for all religious bodies. It included the Buddha Sasana Act, which proposed the creation of a Buddha Sasana Council "to which may be entrusted all the prerogatives of the Buddhist kings as regards the Buddhist religion […] should consist of representatives of the Sangha and laity selected by election and nomination."[84] The compilers of the report were aware that entirely reforming the state system was not feasible. A Buddha Sasana Council would serve as a liaison between the government and the bhikkhus, creating the possibility of reinstituting a sangha-state relationship evocative of pre-colonial times.

The report discusses reestablishing equal education opportunities in Ceylon. It brings attention to the continuous challenge of establishing schools that would offer a 'truly Buddhist'

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[84] All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, *The Betrayal of Buddhism Report*, 1956, p.41.

education over the last century, and the lack of recognition given to Buddhist schools that

managed to remain in operation. The report attributes the difficulty faced by bhikkhus trying to

establish Buddhist schools and promote Buddhist education to British authorities in Ceylon.

Under their regime, parties such as the 1861 Central School Commission enforced rules

regarding federal funding for education:

> No grant will be made except on the full conditions, to which the applicant for a grant
> will be expected to subscribe before he can receive the grant.
> 1. That only the first hour of tuition each day shall be devoted to Religious Instruction.
> 2. That the Religious Instruction shall be confined to a simple explanation of the Bible
> and the leading tracts of Christianity, and shall be conducted in such a spirit as to avoid if
> possible, the exclusion of any scholars on the grounds of denominational teaching.[85]

This insistence of shifting towards a more secular curriculum, with a limitation on religious

instruction, and the assertion of Christianity as the sole religion reflects a deliberate attempt to

impose British culture and values on Ceylon society. Conducting a brief review of Ceylon

history, highlighting examples of oppressive policy, *The Betrayal of Buddhism* stresses the

authentic, natural place Buddhism holds in all areas of society and culture. Further, it blames the

decline of Buddhism in society on foreign oppressors. The report postulates a fundamental

opposition between Buddhism and Christianity and thereby, Ceylonese and Western culture and

influence.

The predominant rhetoric presented in the *Betrayal of Buddhism* and disseminated by

bhikkhus and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists during the 1950s is a reiteration of Dharmapala's

claim that 19th century British intervention is to blame for the decline of Buddhism and Sri

Lankan culture. As argued by Anagarika Dharmapala, the British assumed and possessed control

by leading the Ceylonese government and elites astray from Buddhism and the Buddhist

lifestyle, thus forcing divides between bhikkhus, the state and lay population. However, the

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[85] Ibid, p.49.

sangha's decline in status and societal influence cannot be solely attributed to a force of European oppression. Donald Smith notes that the sangha holds some accountability for its unintentional shift into a 'weakened' state after the British assumed control of the island. The sangha's internal disorganization made it susceptible to change, which occurred under the influence of a forceful colonial power.[86] Until the British assumed control in 1815, the interdependent relationship between the sangha and state interdependency ensured bhikkhus would be kept in order. As the British colonial government did not assume the same role and responsibilities that the previous political authority had held, the bhikkhus lost an outside body to hold them accountable for using funds efficiently and maintaining organization. The concerns regarding the displacement of the sangha and religion as expressed in the *Betrayal of Buddhism* are valid. Nevertheless, considering what Smith points out, pre-colonial Ceylon society and religious-political relationships were not flawless. Nostalgia for the 'golden' pre-colonial era which reinforced the belief in the reestablishment of a traditional sangha-state relationship was an effective rhetorical device for the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist cause. However, this period of Ceylon history was not perfect, and bhikkhus were not impervious to disorganization despite the support they received from the king.

Mahajana Eksath Peramuna

Following the 1952 elections, in which Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party only secured nine out of sixty seats in Parliament, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP, 'People's United Front') formed. The union, led by the SLFP, also included the Marxist Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party (VLSSP; a reincarnation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party of the 1930s and '40s), Basha Peramuna (Sinhalese Language Front), and a group of Independents. All parties were united by general opposition to the UNP and the party's advocacy of Sinhala-language-

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[86] Smith, p.466.

only.[87] In the coalition's manifesto, it stated the opinion that the country should "seek peace in the international arena by 'steering clear of involvement with power-blocs and by the establishment of friendly relations with all countries.'"[88] The group voiced an intention to develop rapport with other countries, as international connections were necessary in the modern world. However, it also clearly wished to avoid falling under the influence of another country, when Sri Lanka had only just escaped colonialism. In regards to religion, the MEP recognized Ceylon's religious plurality, and like the SLFP, it did not formally align itself with any one particular religion.[89] Nonetheless, the party also acknowledged the place of Buddhism as the religion of the majority and approved of the recommendations made in the Betrayal of Buddhism report. The MEP stance on the language issue was equally indefinite. The coalition promoted the establishment of Sinhala as the official national language, and simultaneously insisted that minority languages, such as Tamil, would "receive due recognition."[90] While the MEP demonstrated a clear leaning towards Sinhalese-Buddhist interests, it tried to avoid being completely exclusionary.

Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna

The Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP) was a union of two bhikkhu organizations that had formed in the early 1950s: the Sri Lanka Maha Sangha Sabha, a body of bhikkhu associations formed in the early 1953, and the All-Ceylon Congress of Bhikkhu Societies, an association led by bhikkhus Mapitigama Buddharakkita Thero and Talpawila Seelawansa Thero. [91] In March of 1956 the EBP held a meeting to promote the Dasa Panatha, or Ten Basic Principles. The

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[87] Smith, p.468.
[88] Weerawardana, p.67.
[89] Donald E. Smith speculates this is due to the participation of the Marxist VLSSP in the MEP. See Smith, *South Asian Politics and Religion*, p.467.
[90] Weerawardana, p.67.
[91] Weerawardana, p.144.

manifesto advocated socio-economic equality and political freedom and also encouraged the restoration of Sinhala and Buddhism to their respective rightful places as primary language and religion of the majority.[92] The principles apparently prioritized establishing equal opportunity and treatment of all persons regardless of religious associations or economic class through nonviolent means, and promoting a more peaceful, harmonious society. However, it also reflected a pro-Sinhalese-Buddhist agenda, as it insisted on ensuring the success of the Sinhala-Only movement, and 'appropriate' recognition of Buddhism as the religion of the majority.

The EBP is noted for its participation in Bandaranaike's 1956 presidential campaign. The bhikkhus utilized their influence among the masses in the rural areas of the island. The party's campaign focused on three key points. The first was advocating for the actualization of the propositions of the 1956 *Betrayal of Buddhism* report, particularly the anti-Catholic sections. [93] The second was to attack the UNP's campaign, namely by asserting that the heads of the current party in power had a very Westernized upbringing. The EBP emphasized that chief UNP representatives had received Christian educations and were immersed in a Christian culture and lifestyle. Further, the EBP perpetuated the allegation that the party was funded by the Catholic Church.[94] The third objective of the EBP's campaign was to associate the UNP with America and the 'West'.[95] The goal was to associate the UNP "with the interests of an alien religion professed by a small privileged minority."[96] Overall, the campaign focused on the propagation of Buddhism and 'Buddhist interests' and the demonization of the opposing party by associating it with Christianity and Western culture, which were the oppressing forces that had impinged on Ceylon's freedom and disrupted its sense of self over the previous century.

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[92] For full list of the Ten Basic Principles, see Weerawardana, p.146.
[93] Weerawardana, p.147.
[94] Weerawardana, p.148.
[95] Ibid, p.149.
[96] Smith, p.471.

1956 Election

The general election of 1956 was a contest between the ruling United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led by Bandaranaike, with the support of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna. While the diversity of the parties that constituted the MEP seemed to give Bandaranaike a broad support base, it inevitably required the SFLP to compromise on certain elements of its platform. For instance, the ambiguous position on Buddhism projected by Bandaranaike and the MEP was the result of a wish to appeal to various audiences, within the MEP and throughout the country. This was the case with the Marxist VLSSP party, whose membership in the MEP, Donald Smith claims, limited the extent of the statements the MEP could make concerning religion. He quotes the MEP manifesto which states, "While realizing the position of Buddhism in this country as the faith of a large majority of the people we guarantee the fullest freedom of worship and conscience to all, and accept the position that there shall be no discrimination on religion grounds." [97] Bandaranaike and the MEP made similar strategically noncommittal statements on the language issue. For instance, the Sinhalese version of Bandaranaike's campaign manifesto explicitly stated his 'Sinhala Only' stance, while the lesser-read English version of the document included a clause recognizing the 'reasonable use of Tamil'.[98] In this way, the MEP and Bandaranaike was able to appeal to a wider audience by avoiding being pushed to any one end of the Sinhalese-Buddhism/Western-Christianity spectrum.

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[97] *Ceylon Daily News*, 8 Mar. 1956, as quoted in Smith, *South Asian Politics and Religion*, p.467.
[98] Vittachi, Tarzie, *Emergency '58*, London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1958, p.18.

The UNP's use of bhikkhus

The high level of activity by the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna invites the assumption that most politically-active bhikkhus in 1956 were supported the SLFP. However, the UNP also reached out for monastic support. After the EBP began publicizing rhetoric targeting the UNP, the party launched a counter-campaign. This included recruiting visible support from monks who were not already allied with the SLFP or MEP. I.D.S. Weerawardana writes, "As a general rule the chief-priests of the leading temples were in favour of the U.N.P. The heads of the two great centres, Malwatte and Asgiriya in Kandy, were persuaded by the Prime Minister to write against the politically active bhikkhus. The Principals of Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Pirivenas [monastic colleges] were also persuaded to issue a similar statement."[99] Further, at a meeting of Buddhist clergy held in March 1956, Rev. Weliwitiye Sorata, the principal of the prestigious Vidyodaya Pirivena, declared that accusing the current government (UNP) of not doing anything for Buddhism was unjustified. The UNP's approach to confronting the national language issue received praise. Most significantly, the council concluded that "the damage of 400 years of colonial rule could not be repaired in 10 years."[100] This alludes to the notion that the transition to an authentic Sri Lankan state, in order to be peaceful, effective, and sustainable, may require patience and time. Perhaps it cannot occur as quickly as the SFLP would like evidenced by its desire to immediately institute Sinhala as the national language and recreate a relationship between Buddhism and the state.

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[99] Weerawardana, p.149.
[100] Ibid, p.150.

MEP versus UNP

The contest between the SLFP/MEP and UNP was colored by a profusion of critical rhetoric from both sides. Both parties had visible bhikkhu membership, which they used to their advantage as much as possible to legitimize themselves amongst the masses by establishing chief priests as spokespersons at public party meetings.[101] However, the bhikkhus of the MEP and moreover, the EBP, proved to have more impact on the election results. Several thousand bhikkhus representing the MEP travelled throughout the island to promote Bandaranaike's allegiance to Buddhism, the Sinhalese language, and Sinhala culture among the Sinhalese-educated lower middle class which, as Smith reminds us, "found its influence small in a society dominated by the English-educated."[102]

Elements of campaign rhetoric such as party symbols and political cartoons were extensively utilized by the two main contending parties during this election. Let us look at the symbol used by the UNP, its justification by the party, and how it was manipulated in the MEP's anti-UNP propaganda. The UNP averred its party symbol, an elephant, was an allusion to the royal elephant King Dutthagamini rode on when he led an attack on Tamil king Elara, a narrative documented in the *Mahavāmsa*. The connections of the elephant symbol with distinct, emblematic Sinhalese Buddhist historical narratives did not end there. "Among the allegorical and historical allusions the following were common: the elephant Nalagiri who vowed to reach enlightenment; the elephant that will be the vehicle of the next Lord Buddha; the elephant which in ancient times was sent round to choose an incumbent to a vacant throne; the elephant that appeared to Maya when she dreamt of the conception of Siddhartha, and so on."[103] While the

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[101] Ibid, p.170.
[102] Smith, p.472.
[103] Weerawardana, p.172.

UNP did not claim a Buddhist agenda as part of its campaign, it recognized the indisputable influence of Buddhism across the island's majority population.

In response to UNP assertions of bearing an indisputable association with Buddhism and Buddhist interests, the MEP disseminated a reinterpretation of the image of the UNP elephant whilst cleverly integrating the MEP symbol. "The M.E.P. replied that it was an elephant which Mara (Satan) sent drunk and excited to kill the Lord Buddha who but raised his Hand (the M.E.P. symbol) to bring him under control."[104] The MEP used its own symbol in encouraging a perception of the party's Buddhist agenda. The party popularized sayings like the following:

> *To the Hand you raise to worship the Triple Gem,*
> *To the Hand you raise to respect you parents*
> *To the Hand like gold you need for all*
> *To the Hand give your voice with pleasure.*[105]

The party suggests an inherent connection between itself and Buddhism in making correlations between its symbol and the fundamentals of Buddhism like the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the dhamma, and the sangha). The lofty promises and hyperbole that often appears in campaign rhetoric was evident in Bandaranaike-advocacy posters as well. The posters displayed Bandaranaike's face and advised voters to choose the MEP or SLFP to save the country and its religion, end poverty, and ensure freedom.[106] These promises align very closely with values propagated by the SLFP and especially with the Ten Principles of the EBP.

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Weerawardana, p.174.

Fig.1 'Mara Yudhaya' (The Struggle with Satan).
Image reproduced in Weerawardana, *Ceylon General Election, 1956.*

Another key element of the MEP's campaign came directly from the EBP. Aside from

providing extensive on-the-ground campaign support, the bhikkhu organization published

political cartoons directed towards the opposition. One of the most resonant cartoons was titled

"Mara Yudhaya", which has been translated as 'The Struggle with Satan' (see Fig.1). 'Mara' can

be more accurately interpreted as 'evil'.[107] Weerawardana asserts the cartoon effectively

"brought within its purview the entire Buddhist-cultural criticism directed against the U.N.P. It

was executed in an allegory which went direct to the hearts of the people."[108] The image depicts

an altered account of the Buddha's confrontation with Mara, or 'evil', before he attained

enlightenment, a narrative familiar to all Buddhists. The Buddha is pictured serenely meditating

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[107] While the title of this cartoon has been translated as 'The Struggle with Satan', this interpretation is overtly Christian. The meaning in Sinhala would be closer to 'evil', not the distinct figure of the devil implied by this particular translation.
[108] Weerawardana, p.175.

under a bo tree while a large crowd, representing the temptations of Mara, descends upon him. Sir John Kotelawala, head of the UNP, leads the mass of people from atop an elephant, a spear in his hand. The crowd is comprised of symbols and representations of the various anti-UNP rumors spread by the EBP during the election. The notion of the party's strong association with Western culture is depicted by several Uncle Sam figures carrying oversized coins with American dollar signs, civilians drinking alcohol and ballroom dancing, and a pig on a bullock cart, ready to be mounted on a spit (alluding to a specific rumor about Kotelawala engaging in such activity). The crowd also includes politicians and armed members of the police force.[109] The cartoon's chief purpose was to reiterate the association of the UNP with Western culture, and to drive the characterization of both as 'evil'. Thus, the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna effectively stressed its clear position as the protector of Buddhism and Buddhist interests on the island.

The propaganda efforts of the MEP parties proved effective. Despite the belief that the UNP would win the election, "The counter-campaign [of the U.N.P.] lacked the force and determination of the E.B.P."[110] Incensed by criticisms of the bhikkhu organization printed in the daily news, as well as comments made by Sir John Kotelawala they found offensive, the E.B.P. demonstrated unmatchable vitality, providing powerful support to the M.E.P. to the final stretch of the campaign.[111] The UNP ultimately lost fifty-two seats of parliament to the MEP, and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike stepped into the position of prime minister.[112]

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[109] Devendra, Tissa, "Revisiting 'Mara Yuddhaya' of 1956," *The Island*, 5 Feb. 2015. http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=118974.
[110] Weerawardana, p.150.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Vittachi, p.19.

Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact

Tension regarding the language issue increased in the years after the Sinhala-Only bill was put into effect, which Bandaranaike had guaranteed would be his first priority if he won the election. August 1957 arrived with the threat of a *satyagraha*, or civil disobedience protest, by a large group of Sri Lankan Tamils. Soon after the intent to protest became apparent, the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam (B-C) Pact was drafted. [113] The pact between the president and the leader of the Federal Party (the largest Tamil party) called for the establishment of regional councils throughout the island so as to allow the Tamil population a sense of representation, affirming equality between Tamil and Sinhala people.

Throughout the following year, Bandaranaike tried to persuade Sinhalese people who were resistant to the idea of the agreement that it "was a fool-proof solution of the Communal Problem, inspired by his understanding of the Middle Way."[114] Bandaranaike made sure to continue to highlight his personal association with Buddhism so as to retain the allegiance of the Sinhalese Buddhists. In his advocacy efforts for the B-C Pact, Bandaranaike asserted that if one adhered to fundamental Buddhist principles, like the Middle Way, one would see that these values affirmed the necessity of the pact. Despite its potential, the agreement never became a fully ratified. It was abandoned after 200 bhikkhus and 300 other Sinhalese Buddhists staged a sit-in outside of Bandaranaike's house in April 1958 to demonstrate their opposition to the pact.[115] Bandaranaike's prompt compliance in calling off the agreement provoked the suspicion that the president "had never intended to implement the B-C Pact and that therefore the Federal Party had been bamboozled into calling off the massive *satyagraha* they had planned for August

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[113] Ibid, p.20.
[114] Ibid, p.27.
[115] Ibid, p.28.

1957."[116] The dismissal of the pact, and thus the evident government disregard for the Tamil population and lack of desire to address the language problem, led to violent outbursts in the late spring of 1958.

1958 riots

To identify a sole cause for the violence that occurred in May and June of 1958 is akin to attempting to name a single catalyst for the entire Sri Lankan civil war. The obvious promotion of Sinhala and devaluing of the Tamil language incited constant tension and motivated countless acts of aggression such as defacing the labels on vehicle license plates in Tamil-majority provinces (the North and East Provinces) so that they displayed Sinhala characters instead of Tamil.[117] Distress over an ethnic imbalance of professional and economic opportunities also contributed to Sinhala-Tamil hostilities. While some of these claims seem unfounded due to the Sinhalese population's overall majority, the perceptions of unequal opportunity are rooted in actual economic issues Ceylon faced at the time. Tarzie Vittachi, former editor of *The Ceylon Observer* newspaper, asserts that Sinhalese entering the professional world in particular were unsatisfied by the post-colonial government's lack of effort to increase economic opportunity for all people, not just the 'privileged' Tamils. Vittachi writes:

> Since 1948, ten years of independence have not produced the industrial and agricultural expansion which was essential to increase wealth and maintain employment levels. The inevitable result has been the creation of a large articulate class of educated, semi-educated and disgruntled young men and women who, as might be expected, are easy prey to the strident seductiveness of racialism, hyper-nationalism or communism. The easiest explanation offered for their inability to find employment or gain promotion in the public service was that the Tamils were deliberately and cunningly packing the services with their own kind.[118]

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[116] Ibid, p.33.
[117] Ibid, p.24.
[118] Ibid, p.14.

Statistical studies have shown that Tamils in no way outnumbered nor were given any particular advantage over the Sinhalese in securing educational and professional opportunities. However, the disproportionate representation of the minority Tamil population in the workforce, especially in government departments, caused anxiety amongst the Sinhalese.

Vittachi asserts that some Sinhalese were jealous of Tamils who received a Western education and were exposed to Western culture. While English-educated Sinhalese apparently struggled to maintain a balance between traditional values and modern customs, "Most Tamils, on the other hand, skillfully balanced the two roles,"[119] and proved they were able to compartmentalize business and family and tradition. Vittachi also notes "the average English-educated Tamil was more conscious of his religious tradition than his Sinhalese friends and colleagues were."[120] It appeared that Tamil people were more capable of maintaining an identity in each world – that of the modern capitalist and that of the religious, traditional family member. Tamil people seemingly adapted to shifting economic standards while effectively retaining their authentic sense of self. This contributed to increased frustration amongst Sinhalese in the working world, who felt they were being put at an even greater disadvantage.

In May of 1958, the British Royal Navy closed its base in the eastern province of Trincomalee, resulting in the dismissal of 400 Tamil workers. The laborers were intended to resettle in Polonnaruwa, a predominantly-Sinhalese district. This enraged many Sinhalese laborers, who then banded together to prevent any Tamils from settling on 'their' land.[121] Sinhalese workers and hoodlums employed by politicians began to instigate violent attacks. The first assault targeted the passengers of a train headed towards a Federal Party (the leading Tamil

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[119] Ibid, p.98.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid, p.34.

party) convention being held in the central north of the country. From this arose a series of outbursts across the island continuing through the week.

On May 27, 1958, a state of emergency was declared after sufficient delay of action by Bandaranaike, who had hoped the violence would simmer and cease on its own. In the sudden surge of activity, stories inevitably spread throughout the island, antagonizing masses on both sides of the conflict. Accounts were passed on of the murder of Sinhalese individuals, as well as the occasional mutilation of the corpses. The brutality of the acts perpetrated in the stories and the overall high level of emotional distress contributed to increasing panic and provoked vengeful rage among Sinhalese people.[122] This also made it difficult to distinguish which stories might be true versus fallacy. The instigating event of the 1983 riots had a similar effect. From one propagated account arose a chain of violence that wrought havoc on the psyche of the government as well as the public, and marked the beginning of a turbulent set of decades.

Initially the 1958 riots were directed against the Tamil population, which as a collective whole was responsible for the economic hardships faced by the Sinhalese, and who refused to comply with the Sinhala-Only principle. However, the target of the attack shifted to the government and middle class, asserts Vittachi. He argues this was a result of the inaction on the government's part to a) offer or decline support to any particular side, as they refrained from giving instruction to the police force, thereby rendering them useless onlookers in instances of hoodlum violence and, b) address the issues which were causing such widespread hostility.[123] "Unless the Government is able to open up new avenues for employment, increase the productivity of the island quickly and effectively, maintain law and order without succumbing to sectional and separatist demands, when violence breaks out again, it is likely that Ceylon's

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[122] Ibid, p.47.
[123] Ibid, p.52.

system of parliamentary democracy will be thrown away for something more 'efficient' and ruthless."[124] Vittachi declares that the system in place was not effectively being managed. Thus, if those with the responsibility of managing the democratic system continued to perform their duties inadequately, another solution must be found, specifically a change in the type of system. Such a change was never made, thereby enabling a similar situation to manifest several more times before the island broke into internal war.

Vittachi illuminates Bandaranaike's ineffectiveness in dealing with the violence of 1958. He asserts that Bandaranaike felt unable to confront a situation that called for action as opposed to one that could be solved with a simple public address. Vittachi argues Bandaranaike also refrained from taking action because:

> His experience of tide-watching has given him a sharp prescience about the force of direction of the next wave of popular emotion. He realized that the administration of the Emergency Regulations, and the military activity necessary to bring the extremists under control, while giving a sense of temporary relief throughout the country, would inevitably cause a strong reaction among the people – both Sinhalese and Tamils.[125]

'Tide watching', Vittachi explains, is "a common political game, perfected in newly-freed Asian countries where Expediency takes the place of Principle, and politicians spend their time watching, like surf-board riders, for the wave which is likely to carry them furthest."[126] Bandaranaike, like many politicians, engaged in this static practice of observation throughout his campaign for and term as prime minister. His apparently indeterminate stance on the issues of language and religion during the 1956 election is indicative of his focus on self-promotion and presenting an amiable, relatable persona. Hence, in the midst of the chaos of 1958, Bandaranaike handed directive control over to Governor-General Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, who demonstrated

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[124] Ibid, p.21.
[125] Ibid, p.77.
[126] Ibid, p.46.

the ability to handle difficult situations previously in his career.[127] The refusal to take a definitive

position and stand fixed as leader and representative of the country without question weakened

the view of the heads of government in the eyes of the public. By not giving any instruction to

the police or military, whose job is to enforce the law, the government essentially enabled the

repeated breaches of the law without repercussions. Vittachi emphasizes that a government is

expected to utilize "a police force, a civil administration and, at times of extraordinary

disturbance, a military arm"[128] when necessary. Moreover, a government that fails to take

advantage of these resources at the appropriate time "destroys the authority of these services and

whips up the suspicion and hatred of the people against them."[129] Thus, the state inadvertently

creates a lack of trust between itself and the public.

Attempts to identify the instigators of the outbursts resulted in fingers pointed at several

political parties. The MEP, the two Trotskyite parties (NLSSP and VLSSP), the Communist

Party, and the UNP were each rumored to have been involved at one point or another.[130] It

should be acknowledged that much of the actual violence was committed specifically by

'goondas', or hoodlums. This is a pattern that continues in Sri Lankan history, as the blame for

the 1983 riots was placed mostly on the VLSSP and other minority political parties, though an

amalgam of individuals from various groups were involved. Of course, the events of 1958 were

not the first acts of violence stemming from tensions between ethnic or linguistic groups in Sri

Lanka. However, certain aspects of the series of incidents and the action (and inaction) of the

public and government authorities are mirrored in the 1983 riots.

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[127] Ibid, p.76.
[128] Ibid, p.103.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid, p.115.

The end of Bandaranaike and decline in political bhikkhus

In 1959 Bandaranaike was assassinated by Talduwe Somarama, a monk involved with the EBP and allegedly under the direction of the group's founder, Mapitigama Buddharakkitha. James Jupp affirms this influenced a negative sentiment towards monks and their involvement in politics. He writes, "While all Sinhalese parties have continued to use the services of *ad hoc* clerical fronts these have become increasingly discredited and probably enroll only a fraction of the strength active in 1956."[131] Nonetheless, the voice of monks resumed a place in politics later in the century, as evidenced by the bhikkhu organizations extant of present day.

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[131] Jupp, James, *Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy*, London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1978, p.175.

Chapter Three

Nationalism and 'ethnicity'

There is no 'nationalism' without acceptance of the idea of the 'nation-state'. While nationalism is usually assumed to be used primarily as a means of differentiation between individual countries, it serves a greater purpose within a single nation. Christopher Clapham, a professor of politics and international relations, reminds us that the development of nationalism supports the creation of a political structure which the state uses to legitimize itself with the general public.[132] Sri Lankan nationalism was used for this purpose in the years immediately following independence.

There are various types of nationalism, thus it should be clarified that the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism that rose in the late nineteenth century and again in the mid-twentieth century is a form of ethnonationalism. Ethnonationalism assumes the people of the nation are defined by one shared heritage, implying a common language, faith, and/or ethnic ancestry.[133] One of the main ideas around which twentieth-century Sinhalese nationalism is centered is that the Sinhala people are a single race or ethnic group that has land rights to the island of Ceylon. However, the idea that the Sinhalese people are a group with a definite, continuous ancestry is disputable.

The Sinhala 'race'

R.a.L.H. Gunawardana, former professor of history at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka, argues that initial Sinhala consciousness was not fundamentally grounded in a common

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[132] Clapham, Christopher, "The Challenge to the State in a Globalized World," *Development and Change* 33.5 (2002): 775-795, p.777.
[133] Muller, Jerry Z., "Us and them: the enduring power of ethnic nationalism," *Foreign Affairs* 87.2 (2008): 18-35, p.22.

language or a particular race of people.[134] Rather, one of the myths in the *Mahāvamsa* in which

Vijaya arrives on and populates the island of Lanka, thereby founding the Sinhala people, is a

key element of original notion of 'Sinhala-ness.' Vijaya, a prince from northern India, then

assumes the role of royal political authority. Gunawardana asserts the myth thus provides a

model for the state as it establishes an affiliation between the Sinhala elite group, Buddhist

institutions (due to the involvement of monks in the narrative), and kingship.[135] He declares that

it enforces a sense of allegiance to the ruling political family: "When the island came to be called

Sīhaḷadīpa, or the island of the Sinhala, this name reflected the claim of the ruling house and this

dominant social group to political power over the whole island."[136] Thought 'Sinhala' is now

conceived as the name of an ethnic lineage, but it does not reflect the original usage of the term.

Gunawardana also highlights the exclusivity of the early notion of a Sinhala group. Caste

was a significant element of early Sri Lankan society. Lower service caste individuals were not

considered part of the elite 'Sinhala' sector of society.[137] However, Gunawardana writes: "The

long period of Cōḻa occupation in the island, spanning the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the

intense rivalry between the south Indian and the Sinhala kingdoms would have been conducive

to the extension of the Sinhala identity to cover a wider social group."[138] When faced with

serious confrontations by a geographical 'other,' a non-Sri Lankan power, the 'Sinhala' identifier

was expanded to include a larger fraction of the population.

Gunawardana aims to show that more recent interpretations and presentations of Sinhala-

Buddhist identity, and the perceptions underlying Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, do not always

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[134] Gunawardana, R.a.L.H., "The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography," in ed. Spencer, Jonathan, *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, New York: Routledge, 1990, p.7.
[135] Ibid, p.9.
[136] Ibid,p.9.
[137] Ibid, p.8.
[138] Ibid, p.12.

accurately portray history. As David Scott writes regarding 'The People of the Lion': "[it] persuasively demonstrates […] that Sinhala history, like all history perhaps, moves not by continuities but by a play of breaks and discontinuities, and that the forms of collective identity that emerge within any moment of its movements are not natural but constructed."[139] Gunawardana reveals that the Sinhalese-Buddhist population is not one defined group with a perfect, continuous history. While the notion of a community's historical continuity is effective in stirring nationalist sentiments, in the case of the Sinhalese group, it is factually incorrect. Moreover, one is forced to recognize that the notion of 'Sinhala-ness' is not a natural occurrence. It is constructed, like all nationalist ideologies.

While considering the evolution of the label 'Sinhala,' and its association with ethnic categorization, I would like to examine how ideas of ethnicity and ethnic groups entered the discussion. Historian Jonathan Young draws attention to particular influences that brought notions of ethnicity and ethnic groups into the broader ideas of identity in Sri Lanka. The concept of 'ethnicity,' he proposes, was introduced by colonial powers in their attempt to organize the Sri Lankan population through ethnic categorization.[140] Young reiterates historical anthropologist Viranjini Munasinghe's assertion that "an ethnic group acquires its significance only because it is an imagined cultural community with an organic relationship to another imagined community—the nation."[141] Young goes on to asserts that although a specific group of people may exhibit the qualities of an ethnic group, it is "only when the concept of ethnicity is introduced to this group at the lay level and individuals are made aware that their particular groups are considered ethnicities does it become possible for them to imagine themselves as a

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[139] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, p.100.
[140] Young, "Creations of Myth," p.23.
[141] Munasinghe, Viranjini, "Redefining the Nation: The East Indian Struggle in Trinidad," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4.1 (2001):1-34, p.24 cited in Young, "Creations of Myth," p.27.

nation."[142] This reinforces the assumption that a nation can be represented primarily by one of the groups that live within its borders. The belief that the members of a group are inherently united by an ancestral history and bloodline is empowering. Also, it allows the people of a particular community to envision the connection between themselves and a larger collective body of people like themselves. The concept of a Sinhalese group that spans most of Sri Lankan territory infuses the Sinhala people with a sense of community and pride. Thus, the larger Sinhala community becomes equivalent with the notion of the greater Sri Lankan community and identity. This association was encouraged by politicians in the post-colonial period who were aware of the need for national uniformity and identity in the new nation-state. Young's statement affirms the importance of ethnicity in the contemporary idea of a unified nation, especially if this idea were to effectively take hold in the minds of the public.

The endurance of ethnonationalism

Ethnonationalism, or the collective belief in a connection that transcends kinship and unites individuals of a common background throughout a country, does not come about organically. Although it may be largely based on tradition, such as myth, nationalism is nonetheless a construction. Sociologist Craig Calhoun accounts for the necessity of reproducing and adapting myths in order to sustain a particular national identity. He writes:

> stories have to be told over and again, parts of traditions have to be adapted to new circumstances to keep them meaningful, what seem like minor updatings may turn out to change meanings considerably, and the 'morals' to the stories – the lessons drawn from them – sometimes change even while the narratives stay the same.[143]

This is pertinent to the *Mahavāmsa*. The text offers a continuous history of the founders and religion of a unique, specific place. The additions to the text in the 1956 are significant in that they suggest the text's permanence and its relevance to the Sinhalese identity and Sri Lankan

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[142] Ibid.

[143] Calhoun, p.50.

society in the present day. In the ongoing discourse regarding Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism,

one of the largest issues how the narratives of the *Mahavāmsa* are interpreted and applied to

contemporary affairs. In recent decades, the text has been used by Sinhalese-Buddhist

nationalists to justify war against the Tamil minority. During the post-colonial period,

government and bhikkhu attempts to organize the new sovereign country resulted in emphasis on

the Sinhalese population's inherent right to the island, and the state relationship with Buddhist

institutions, a symbol evocative of the 'golden,' ancient past.

Anthony D. Smith, an ethnographer who focuses in nationalism studies, also notes the

importance of the reproduction and adaptation of myths and symbols, in the continuation of

ethnonationalist ideologies. He stresses that the slow process of adapting myths, symbols,

memories and values is necessary to ensure their sustainability. Smith argues:

> [Because] ethnicity is largely 'mythic' and 'symbolic' in character, and because myths, symbols, memories and values are 'carried' in and by forms and genres of artifacts and activities which change only very slowly, so *ethnie* [ethnic communities], once formed tend to be exceptionally durable under 'normal' vicissitudes, and to persist over many generations, even centuries, forming 'moulds' within which all kinds of social and cultural processes can unfold and upon which all kinds of circumstances and pressures can exert an impact. [144]

When Sri Lanka gained independence, it was presented with an opportunity, or from another

perspective, an obligation to assert a national identity. With its history as a Sinhala-speaking,

Buddhist island, and considering the majority of government officials were Sinhalese, it seemed

fitting to employ the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist narrative in the Sri Lankan identity. However,

reinstating the sangha-state relationship exemplified by tradition was not feasible in the post-

colonial period. Sinhalese nationalism adjusted as necessary to fit contemporary times and to

exist within the nation-state model. This ethnonationalism in Sri Lanka encouraged greater

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[144] Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Origins of Nations,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p.16 as quoted in Calhoun, *Nationalism,* p.55.

representation of Buddhism in the state through personal political associations with religion, and

the elevation of the Sinhala language.

Craig Calhoun has developed his own notions regarding the re-interpretation and

application of nationalist myths, symbols, and values to fit contemporary events. He argues that

the different media through which nationalist ideas are expressed are significant in determining

their meaning:

> the social and cultural significance of ethnic traditions is dramatically changed when they
> are written down, and sometimes again when they are reproduced for television and
> movies, in other words, ethnic traditions closely tied to the life of a small group when
> they are passed on by word of mouth take on a different meaning and work differently for
> individuals and society when they are reproduced by artistic or academic specialists,
> when they are enshrined in sacred texts.[145]

It is important to consider the various means through which stories are re-presented, especially

when assessing the effects of the accounts spread during the 1958 riots and those that circulated

during the riots of the summer of 1983, which marked the beginning of the civil war. During

both periods of violence, rumors spread wildly of vicious murders and defacement of Sinhalese

corpses at the hands of Tamils and vice versa. These stories provoked passionate emotional

reactions, inciting retaliation from some individuals for the injustice and disrespect shown to

fellow members of their ethnic group. As Calhoun's observation suggests, the effects of the

Sinhala-Tamil hostilities being related through these means, namely by word of mouth and print

media, led to the continuation of drastic, dramatic action.

Becoming a 'best practice' nation: coloniality and modernity

Semiotician Walter D. Mignolo argues that 'modernity' is the flipside of 'coloniality.'

The monopolization of power that characterizes colonialism is emulated in the spread of

'modernity.' In particular, the same countries that were colonizing powers continue to dictate the

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[145] Calhoun, p.50.

'modern' standards of economic and technological progress. Mignolo also asserts that the attitudes and motivations behind the propagation of coloniality are akin to those behind modernity.

Mignolo identifies three key shared aspects of the two pervasive forces. First, both coloniality and modernity operate on the assumed truth of colonization of space and time. This implies that everyone in the world occupies the same temporal space, and that everyone shares a defined past, which brought us to where we are, and a future, towards which we are collectively working. Second, contemporary 'modernity' and the notion of 'modernity' in the colonial era, is synonymous with 'salvation,' 'newness,' and 'progress.' Though 'coloniality' or 'colonialism' is now a term that bears negative associations, in its time, it too espoused that the ideas and institutions it was implementing in a colonized society were 'progressive' and generally a positive step for the native population. This brings us to Mignolo's third point that coloniality and modernity employ the same rhetoric. Both promote notions of salvation and advocate the idea of introducing ideas and structures of 'modern' civilization to uncivilized areas in need. The ideologies claim programs and ideological changes are implemented in the name of salvation, newness, progress, and development. [146] Mignolo explains the goals of modernity and coloniality are largely about the colonizer maintaining control, specifically over subjectivities, authority, the economy, and knowledge.[147] Having jurisdiction over the operation and influence of these aspects was fundamental to being able to institute pervasive, effective change and to fulfill the modernizing mission – to bring newness and salvation to those who were unaware of the 'best,' contemporary methods, thereby expanding civilization.[148]

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[146] Mignolo, Walter D., "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity," *Cultural Studies* 21:1-2 (2007): 39-49, p.43.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

The ideas and structures implemented by British colonial authorities in the 19th century and those emphasized in the early to mid-20th century, as Sri Lanka approached independence were obviously motivated by the rhetoric of 'coloniality' and 'modernity.' It was the essential view of the colonizers that by introducing their methods of governance, government structures and cultural and economic values they were helping to 'better' the Ceylonese people and society. This appears quite explicitly in the case of Christian missionaries, who propagated their religion to show the natives of Ceylon the way to 'salvation.' Associated, though more technical terms like 'progress' and 'development' were used to motivate socio-economic changes, especially in the mid-20th century as the principles of the Donoughmore Constitution set in and the country moved towards sovereignty.

Elements of modernity in the colonial era

The mandated shift towards 'progress' and the adoption of British values and systems began soon after the British took over the Kandyan monarchy. Anthropologist David Scott asserts that one of the most significant effects of the 1833 Colebrooke-Cameron Papers was "the construction of a legally instituted space where legally defined subjects could exercise rights, however limited they were."[149] The intent was not to guarantee just representation of the native population. Rather, the effect was the introduction of a new idea of what constituted political legitimacy and how political actors could function. The acquisition of sovereignty in 1948 incited hopes for the re-establishment of a pre-colonial political system. Nonetheless, the state structure remained reminiscent of the model instituted by British colonizers. The 'modern' elements of democracy introduced in the 19th century remained part of the Sri Lankan state structure into the next century and through various political changes.

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[149] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, p.45.

Becoming a part of the modern nation-state network in 1948 led to an increase in efforts to ensure the actual expression of 'representation.'[150] Yet, Sri Lankan society and government still lacked "that principle which constitutes the heart of modern political subjectivity and a veritable condition of modern citizenship: the principle of political equality."[151] Thus, the British officials who conducted the 1927 Donoughmore Commission recommended the implementation of universal suffrage in the 1931 Donoughmore Constitution. Scott asserts that this was a distinct move by the British to continue to monopolize Ceylon societal and political structure, thereby reinforcing the importance of shifting towards 'progressive' ideas and institutions. Scott avers:

> It was an experiment in colonial governmentality. Universal suffrage was to have an educative, or rather, a *governing*, effect on the conduct of the political elites. It was an instrument in a new apparatus of colonial rule. By making the elite dependent upon a mass electorate, colonial power intended to deploy universal suffrage as a *tactic* (as Foucault might have called it) by means of which to oblige them to refashion their political sensibilities in the direction of acquiring a more democratic and more egalitarian ethos.[152]

Over the previous decades, the colonial authorities took note of the demonstrated power and potential of the Sinhalese elite. Scott points out that introducing universal suffrage diluted the voice of the nationalist elites by inviting a greater percentage of the general Sinhalese population to contribute to the 'native' voice of Ceylon. This encouraged a more democratic and 'modern' society. It was nonetheless done with the intention of maintaining control over the Sri Lankan population.

The narratives of globalization

The rhetoric of modernity encompasses what Christopher Clapham calls the narratives of globalization. These include: 1) the narrative of war, order and security, 2) the narrative of

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[150] Ibid, p.168.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

representation and legitimacy, and 3) the narrative of wealth and welfare.[153] The first is the

notion that a legitimate nation-state is able to maintain an army or has access to external military

assistance should war emerge within national territory.[154] The second narrative promotes the idea

that the inhabitants of a nation have a right to representation in the state and have a voice in the

actions executed by the state in the name of the nation as a whole.[155] The narrative of wealth and

welfare endorses the belief that the people of the nation have access to ample economic

opportunity within the country's borders and that the state ensures the nation's engagement in

international trade.[156] These narratives of globalization, along with the rhetoric of modernity as

outlined by Mignolo, add to the expectations to which the government of a modern nation is

held. Thus, the role of the government is complicated further as it attempts to adhere to these

standards, while remaining representative of a distinct, Sri Lankan national identity.

'Modernity' as a stimulus of nationalism

Craig Calhoun presents philosopher and anthropologist Ernest Gellner's association of

the structures that are the result of 'development' with the increasingly popular perception of a

nation-state's need for a cohesive national identity. Calhoun summarizes:

> Gellner argues that the cultural homogenization of modern societies is an 'essential
> concomitant' of industrial production with its reliance on science, technology, and mass
> education. 'A homogeneity imposed by objective, inescapable imperative eventually
> appears on the surface in the form of nationalism' (1983: 39). In other words, the
> nationalist drive for conformity reflects an underlying pressure from modern industry
> which needs this uniformity to function well.[157]

The emphasis on consistency and the related need for homogeneity did not apply solely to the

workforce, where technological and economic progress was measured with quantifiable

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[153] Clapham, p.785.
[154] Ibid, p.785-86.
[155] Ibid, p.792-93.
[156] Ibid, p.792.
[157] Calhoun, p.80.

production. A perceptible sense of identity that could be easily illustrated on a national and global level was also implicit to the survival and prospective success of a new nation-state in the modern world. Due to the influence of recently-introduced concepts such as proportional representation, which emphasized the significance of the majority population, the logical conclusion was that the identity of the majority group should be integrated into the representation of the nation as a whole.

Calhoun claims the oppression of the native populations serves as a stimulus for resistance to colonial regimes, which influences the rise of nationalism.[158] He avers that the efforts of the colonizers to implement structure for the 'disorganized' native population were motivated by the rhetoric of modernity (as outlined by Mignolo). "In many cases, colonial ideology also stimulated nationalism by claiming that the colonized were essentially disunited (except for the peace maintained by the colonizers) and incapable of self-organization; nationalism was both the visible evidence against this and in some cases part of the actual achievement of capacity for self-organization on a large scale."[159] The actions of the colonial powers and the 'modernization' ideology had a lasting impact in Ceylon, as even those who initiated nationalistic movements eventually adopted some of the methods used by the colonizers to create organization, as well as the goals of 'modernity.' The 19th century Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka is an example of this. The fact that the leadership of the movement was in the hands of Sir Henry Steel Olcott and the Theosophical Society legitimated the use of British structures and systems as models for the renewed Buddhist identity and institutions. Calhoun does note that nationalist ideologies formed in response to colonial domination often combined traditional ideas

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[158] Ibid, p.108.
[159] Ibid.

with the rhetoric of modernity.[160] Calhoun cites Basil Davidson, a historian who frequently wrote

about colonialism, who acknowledges the intersecting external pressure of colonial powers and

internal pressure felt by the native population, which leads to the formation of nationalist

movements: "Where colonialists claimed that their power was necessary to keep the peace and

secure economic progress, indigenous elites sought to create or demonstrate the existence of an

indigenous nation adequate to the modern era (Davidson 1992)."[161] In doing so, the native

population presented an identity the colonial powers would recognize as legitimate, since it was

defined using the language of modernity, and modeled after the systems familiar to the colonizer.

Ethnonationalism and 'modernity'

Once Ceylon was no longer a British colony, the state had an opportunity to define what

constituted the Sri Lankan identity. Writer for *Foreign Affairs* Jerry Z. Muller argues that certain

conditions of 'modernity' and elements implicit in the modern nation-state stimulate ethnic

nationalism. Muller re-presents Ernest Gellner's argument which states the rise of ethnic

nationalism in part is provoked the demand to meet certain material standards defined and

modeled by the nation-states leading the contemporary global economy. He writes: "Military

competition between states created a demand for expanded state resources and hence continual

economic growth. Economic growth, in turn, depended on mass literacy and easy

communication, spurring policies to promote education and a common language – which led

directly to conflicts over language and communal opportunities."[162] The evolution of the debate

over establishing a primary language that pervaded the decade following Ceylon's independence

was inevitable, considering the expectations to which Ceylon was held as a new nation-state.

Calhoun calls attention to the fact that the state must maintain a monopoly of violence which

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[160] Ibid, p.107.
[161] Ibid, p.112.
[162] Muller p.22.

means that it must have an organized body of armed forces to enforce laws and ensure order amongst the public.[163] Of course, armed forces require adequate funding, which the state must find a way to acquire, often by increasing commercial business activity. This presents the need for one common language in which to conduct local and international business. The unlikelihood of Sinhala and Tamil holding equal positions as the languages used in professional and educational settings was confirmed by Sri Lanka's history. Thus, the task of selecting a single primary language acquired an increased sense of urgency.

British implementation of 'modernity'

David Scott's comparison of early British colonial efforts to effect 'progress' and those of the mid-twentieth century affirms the applicability of Mignolo's notion of coloniality and modernity to the case of Sri Lanka. In both instances, the foreign authorities attempted to create a more 'progressive' society by instilling their cultural values and instituting structures with which they were familiar and believed to be the most effective. However, Scott draws a distinction between the two occasions:

> Schematically, and simplifying considerably, where the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of a hundred years earlier sought to reorganize the colonial polity *in a modern direction* through the inscription of a liberal rationality (fashioning the kinds of economy, society, and subjectivity such a rationality depended upon), the project of the later reforms [the Donoughmore Constitution] (their introduction of adult suffrage and the principle of territorial representation) was to *re-shape* that emerging modern order through the explicitly numerical ratio of territorial representation, to re-shape it, that is, on an understanding of democracy as a matter of numbers.[164]

The new emphasis on the notion of proportional representation inevitably contributed to a shift in the self-image of the Sinhala and Tamil demographics, respectively. It drew attention to the statistical indisputability that the Sinhalese population was far larger than any other, and caused a certain amount of anxiety among minority populations, particularly the Tamils. These concerns

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[163] Calhoun, p.67.
[164] Scott, 'Toleration and Historical Traditions of Difference,' *Subaltern Studies XI*, p.292.

over the effects of the increased focus on representation were unsurprisingly discounted by the

Sinhalese elites in government. Equality amongst various ethnic populations and in the context

of issues such as selecting a primary language would be difficult to achieve with a Sinhalese-

dominated government. Scott acknowledges the challenge faced by the Tamil people:

> History, in short, had moved on in the progressive direction of secular democracy, and the anachronisms (like parity) that such Tamil politicians as G.G. Ponnambalam wanted to reintroduce, charming as they might have been and animated as they no doubt were by a fond memory for a bygone era, were now uncompromisingly, irrevocably obsolete. What is more, in this progressivist narrative those Tamil intellectuals who opposed universal suffrage can appear to be not only elitist and communal, but worst of all in collaboration with the colonial government, while those in favor appear forward-looking, national-democratic, and anti-colonial.[165]

Universal suffrage became part of with a national identity that focused on reflecting the majority.

The Sri Lankan state aimed to create a composite image under which Sri Lanka could present

itself to the world as a sovereign nation. The identity composed in the years immediately

following independence was an amalgam of Sinhalese, Buddhist, democratic, progressive,

nationalist characteristics. Those who opposed any aspect of this identity were excluded from

actively participating in the new nation. In this way, as Scott asserts, the Tamil population was

marginalized in the post-colonial Sri Lanka.

The continuity of modern systems

'Modern' values and systems introduced during the colonial rule remained in place

through the turn of the century and beyond independence. Christopher Clapham reflects on how

these ideas and systems became set in society so that the new nation-state could not dilute itself

of the institutions:

> The immense costs often imposed on colonized peoples by the creation of European-dominated global order were hidden by these peoples' inability to make their voices heard, and by an ideology of progress of indigenous populations could reading be regarded as a necessary investment in modernity. Furthermore, states often did, in time,

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[165] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, p.175.

produce real benefits that justified their maintenance; as population densities increased, and as previously isolated zones were incorporated into the global economy, so states became as essential to many colonized peoples as they were in places where they had long been established. Finally, states were cherished by the indigenous elites who eventually took over from the European colonizers: their own claims and qualifications to rule, the goals that they sought, and the whole ideology of anti-colonial 'nationalism,' that they espoused, were intimately bound up with the maintenance of statehood.[166]

He asserts that 'development' or 'progress' was assumedly equivalent with the good. This ultimately distorts the truth of whether the establishment and maintenance of 'Western' models was in fact the most appropriate or just action. The perceptible economic gains that resulted from exposing new territories to the realm of international trade further justified the continued adherence to the methods of the colonial powers. Clapham concludes that Euro-American systems were validated and their continuation enabled by elites of a colonized country, who were steeped in the 'Westernized' atmosphere and system and esteemed these structures. This last argument is particularly pertinent to the case of Sri Lanka, evidenced by the hostility towards Ceylonese aristocrats held by pioneers of nineteenth century Buddhist revival movement and moreover, by the anti-UNP rhetoric disseminated by the MEP and EBP during the 1956 election. Although these groups criticized the leaders of the post-colonial state, they were nevertheless acting within the systems first established by the British and according to the rhetoric of modernity.

Isomorphism

While, theoretically, all nation-states are independent and equal, there is a subset of countries that lead others as they have achieved a greater level of economic and technological progress. The developments of these 'leading' nations thus present standards which other nation-states then strive to meet. Nation-states that have already achieved a high level of 'progress' encourage other states to work towards these goals, thereby reinforcing the view that they and

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[166] Clapham, p.780.

their accomplishments are the ideal. These standards are manifestations of *isomorphism*, which is

the expectation that all nation-states will have the same institutions and be equipped with the

same materials so that they can effectively participate in the global system defined by the leading

nations, which are typically former-colonizer 'Western' countries. Such elements include

"constitutional forms emphasizing both nation-state power and individual rights, mass schooling

systems organized around a fairly standard curriculum, […] expanded human rights, expansive

environmental policies,"[167] along with economic and technological developments. To expect all

countries to have the resources to achieve such goals but foremost, to exist under identical

circumstances of nations dominating the international nation-state system, is irrational.

Nonetheless, in order to assume a recognized position in the global economy and the

international body of world actors (for example, through official institutions like the United

Nations), a country is obligated to "demonstrate appropriately formulated assertions about

sovereignty and control over population and territory,"[168] as well as to hold "appropriate goals of

economic development, equality, enhancement of individual opportunity."[169]

    Despite the unfairness of these expectations, Sri Lanka, as a new nation-state, needed to

try to keep pace with the modern world. This came into tension with a simultaneous need to

retain a sense of self, a unique, defining cohesive identity that represented Sri Lanka. As

indicated by historical accounts, such as the *Mahāvamsa*, religion and the state were traditionally

intertwined. Yet the contemporary government structure, implemented by the British, did not

include a place for Buddhism or the sangha. The sangha-state interdependency of pre-colonial

times could not be reestablished in the post-colonial nation-state. This did not mean Buddhism

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[167] Meyer, John W. et al., "World Society and the Nation State," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103.1 (1997): 144-181, p.153.
[168] Ibid, p.158.
[169] Ibid, p.154.

could or would be completely dismissed. It was a key aspect of the history and the identity of the majority group in Ceylon. Bhikkhus managed to work their way into the new state by becoming active participants in the democratic process, as in the SFLP campaign for the 1956 general elections. The monks made an effort to adapt to the secular structure in the hopes of building a closer relationship with the state, which would guarantee preservation of the sangha and alleviate their post-colonial anxiety.

Problematic aspects of nation-state standards

Clapham declares it is unrealistic and unfair of nation-states dominating the global stage to make specific demands of emerging nation-states. Countries just making the transition to becoming a nation-state are expected to maintain certain institutions for which they may not have the resources to do. Clapham writes:

> The very ideology of state power that post-colonial rulers enthusiastically adopted likewise increased demands on the state, and widened the gap between promise and performance. Many of them promoted ambitious schemes for state-led 'nation-building' programmes and 'socialist' economic development strategies that were entirely misconceived, and resulted in the wastage of the social and economic capital that they had inherited. Whereas the social welfare and economic development functions of most European states at an equivalent level of development had been negligible, new Third World states were expected from the start to take on a range of responsibilities that they were ill-equipped to meet.[170]

Though it did not have adequate resources to respond, could Sri Lanka refuse this 'call' to abide by international standards and embrace modernity? Modern systems, 'suitable' for the nation-state had already been set in place under British colonialism. Suddenly, Ceylon became an independent nation with British state structures and a need to define a sense of self that did not contain traces of European culture. Returning to ways of the ancient past was illogical, and certainly would not align with the rhetoric of 'modernity,' which favors the 'progressive' over the 'traditional.' Moreover, the rhetoric of modernity does not explicitly offer a place for

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[170] Clapham, p.781.

religion, which, as we know, is a fundamental aspect of the traditional Sinhala state and community. Does the controversy of bhikkhu involvement in the post-colonial polity represent the timeless tension between the 'traditional' and the 'modern'? As Michael M. Ames suggests in his discussion of 'modernization' and 'Westernization,' while post-colonial Sri Lanka distanced itself from 'Westernization,' it embraced and integrated elements of the 'modern' into its expression of a distinct, non-Western identity.

'Modernization' versus 'Westernization'

British colonization introduced the structures that would ideally allow Ceylon an easy transition into nation-statehood, as they were systems that were characteristically 'Western' since they were developed and used by key colonizer countries (America and Western Europe). To prove it was capable of participating in the global economy while retaining and asserting a sense of traditional self, Sri Lanka embraced 'modern' systems, but dismissed 'Western' cultural values. Anthropologist Michael M. Ames defines the distinctions between 'modernization' and 'westernization,' two broad terms that are often considered synonymous. 'Modernization,' he writes, implies "those institutions, ideals, attitudes and practices directly and causally or functionally connected with rational economic organization, technological efficiency, and industrial development."[171] 'Westernization,' however, relates to "those institutions, ideals, attitudes and practices of western culture that are not causally related to modernization but yet have come to be symbolically associated with it through the accident of historical continuity."[172] Therefore, 'Westernization' refers to the adoption of cultural ideas, values and trends displayed by those countries that hold dominant positions in the global economy and who represent the height of 'modernization.' Walpola Rahula, during the 19th century Buddhist revival, encouraged

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[171] Ames, Michael M., "Westernization or Modernization: the case of the Sinhalese Buddhist Laity," *Social Compass* 10.2 (1973):139-170, p.140.
[172] Ibid, p.140.

the resistance of 'Westernization' and instead urged Sinhalese people to hold onto key elements of Ceylonese culture. At the same time, he also advocated for the adoption of modern institutions and goals, using Western countries as models. This perspective was still present in the post-colonial decade when the country needed to construct and assert its distinct Ceylon identity - a Sinhalese-Buddhist identity, and be a perceptible presence on the global stage.

Sri Lankan professor of linguistics K.N.O. Dharmadasa identifies where interactions with Ames' concepts of 'modernization' and 'Westernization' are visible in Sri Lankan history. A need to assert an inherent Sri Lankan identity following independence encouraged the preservation of traditional Ceylonese customs and culture. Nonetheless, the need to keep pace with the 'modern' world was also apparent. Dharmadasa observes that the encroachment of 'Western' values and habits provoked a strong reaction from Sri Lankan people, as it was a threat to their heritage and identity. 'Modernization,' however, was more technical and associated with the concepts of 'progress' and 'development.' Dharmadasa writes: "Whereas Westernizing influences led to negative reactions in the form of nativistic strivings, the modernizing influences were by and large welcome – the fact that some such modernizing features were adopted in the nativistic resistance to Westernization was proof that such a conceptual distinction between the two was available."[173] This adoption of modern structures occurred during the 19th century Buddhist revival. Western Christian institutions served as the model for new Buddhist institutions, such as the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA). In the mid-twentieth century, 'modern democratic' notions such as proportional representation and universal suffrage were adamantly upheld by the Sinhalese state and thus permeated the Sri Lankan consciousness. In both instances, people gravitated towards and adopted structures that

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[173] Dharmadasa, p.197.

were emblematic of the 'modern' world. Anything which seemed to be a mark of or pressured

Sri Lanka to submit to Western culture was evaded.

Synchronizing the 'traditional' and the 'modern'

The government in the post-colonial period showed little intention of re-creating a state

structure identical to that of pre-colonial Ceylon. This was widely understood by the public.

Nonetheless, lay-level Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists in the 1950s were still were skeptical of

the continuation of a British-style government after the withdrawal of colonial authority.

Political scientist James Jupp writes:

> That all significant political institutions were so transplanted was a source of concern to
> the Buddhist revivalists and nationalist who provided the main local thrust towards
> independence. They themselves were sufficiently affected by the educational system,
> sufficiently enmeshed in the plantation economy and sufficiently modern in outlook, not
> to harbor romantic delusions about returning to Kandyan ways. Only in stressing the
> importance of adhering to religious principles and consulting the *sangha* did any
> important political tendencies in Sri Lanka argue for a return to former practices.[174]

Despite the recognition that reinstating an old political system was not feasible in contemporary

times, there was still a longing for government and societal structure, especially the relationship

between religion and state, which was reminiscent of the venerated ancient past. Efforts to

emulate the past relationship between religious institutions and the polity were reflected in the

SFLP and MEP's support of the reforms outlined in *The Betrayal of Buddhism* report, the

participation of bhikkhus in Bandaranaike's campaigns, and Bandaranaike's establishment of a

Buddha Sasana Council. This helped Bandaranaike and the party gain favor among the rural

masses. Moreover, it represented a clear negotiation between elements of 'tradition' and

'modernity.' This discourse continued throughout the twentieth century as Sri Lanka strove to

achieve goals relevant to the current economic and technological developments of the modern

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[174] Jupp, p.219.

world, and retain some of its traditional values in its exhibition of an idea of distinct Sri Lankan-ness.

Manifestations of modernity in rural Sri Lanka

How did this undefined, fluid agent called 'modernity' visibly impact Sri Lankan society? James Brow addresses this question in the ethnographic research he conducted in the Sinhalese village of Kukulewa throughout the 1980s. He brings to light the change in relations between the government and laypeople that was an effect of 'modernity.' For instance, Brow observes that beginning in the 1950s, there was a shift from direct subsistence agriculture to cash-crop production in the village, and an increase in engagement in external markets. He asserts that this affected a community's ability to maintain and reproduce traditional kinship relationships and systems of trade within the village.[175] The organization of trade and the local economy needed to be modified if farmers were to produce enough to supply people on a national and international level.

Brow notes the corresponding increases in state advocacy for 'development' and related government intrusion in the village, where it encouraged the cultivation of rice paddies. Individual relations with the government became more valuable, as connections to politicians meant greater authority within the village community.[176] How did the government balance its role and its relationship to the people as advocates for 'development'/'progress' *and* an authentic Sri Lankan identity? In response to the pressure to meet particular standards required of a modern nation-state, the Sri Lankan government actively pursued the task of redefining national economic and infrastructural development goals to legitimize itself as a player on the global stage. However, being a new nation, the state was also responsible for asserting a distinct,

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[175] Brow, James, "In Pursuit of Hegemony: Representations of Authority and Justice in a Sri Lankan Village," *American Ethnologist* 15.2 (1988): 311-327, p.314.
[176] Ibid.

collective national identity. Although views on explicit associations between Buddhism and the state wavered throughout the first decade of independence, politicians emphasized their intentions to preserve a true sense of Sinhala cultural identity and savor Sinhala traditions. Bandaranaike did identify himself as a Buddhist president, and MEP campaign rhetoric further affirmed an alignment with Buddhism, despite party statements which acknowledged the religious plurality of the country. Brow writes that "By presenting themselves as successors to the Sinhalese kings, the leaders of governments since independence have assumed not just the majesty but also the responsibilities of traditional monarchy."[177] Associating themselves with the traditions of a pre-colonial, 'golden' era helped political leaders gain popularity among the Sinhalese majority. Drawing this comparison also suggested the government would assume certain duties and responsibilities evocative of those of held by the ancient state, such as maintaining order and ensuring the prosperity of the people.

Brow's observations of the mutual expectations the state and the people have of each other in the second half of the twentieth century indicate the effect of 'modernity.' Since the government is encouraging more agricultural production, it offers resources and aid to the farmers from whom they are demanding increased labor. The people of the villages expect the state to deliver on these promises. Brow describes the new ideal of society:

> The vision of a just society, in which the ruler governs righteously, protects valued cultural institutions, and provides for the material welfare of the common people, is one that is widely shared in Kukulewa. It sustains the villagers' claim to a right of access to the means of subsistence, which it is the responsibility of government to ensure. This claim has been expressed in recent times in the assertion of the state's obligation to provide water for irrigation, land to cultivate, relief work in time of drought, and so on. During election campaigns villagers assess the relative merits of the contending parties by asking which of them is better able, or more committed, to meet the standards of righteous government.[178]

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[177] Ibid, p.317.
[178] Ibid, p.317-18.

The rural population's desire for infrastructure that enables economic gain and its ability to hold the government accountable to their word thanks to universal franchise is proof that the values of modernity have been effectively planted. This relationship between the people and the government does not solely apply to technological and economic progress. Jonathan Young asserts it is relevant to the development of national identity as well. He reiterates that in order to be perceived as legitimate by the people, the government must demonstrate an awareness of what the people need and want, and show that it will fulfill these interests. He writes:

> Politicians must offer their citizens an image of national identity, which includes and excludes certain behaviors, cultural traits, and biological traits. This allows a nation of individuals and their interests to be delineated from others. The nation-building process, therefore, must include the production of a clearly demarcated and stable national identity—achieved with respect to other ethnicities within the nation's borders.[179]

Sri Lankan nationalist movements have had difficulty achieving the last part of Young's statement. The notion of Sri Lankan identity came to be defined as Sinhala-Buddhist exclusively. Other ethnic groups could not put a claim to the island in the way the Sinhalese population did. Thus, the majority identity assumed a dominant position in the dialogue regarding the construction of national identity.

Modernity and ethnic antagonisms

Political science professor Sankaran Krishna identifies a link between the modern idea of political and economic representation in proportion to population, and the increasing emphasis on ethnic identity. In the 1950s, the modern conception of representation was employed to support the argument that the Tamil population was overrepresented in the professional and civil service sectors, and in educational settings. Some Sinhalese people claimed this was unfair

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[179] Young, p.28.

considering that Tamils were an overall minority in Sri Lanka.[180] This was a key part of the rhetoric used in the assertion of a Sinhalese-Buddhist identity in the years immediately following independence, and then again in the late 1970s and 1980s as Tamil separatist voices grew louder. Krishna succinctly combats the notion that the violence portrayed by the media over the past few decades is a manifestation of religion-based tensions or racism in Sri Lanka. Rather, the violence that has arisen out of interactions between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations in conjunction with "the requirements of competitive, electoral politics based on universal suffrage […] ought to indicate that Sri Lanka's ethnic strife is not born out of any atavistic and primordial attachment to traditions".[181] Krishna avers that the violence is an indicator of how the country has been affected by the global infiltration of modernity, and moreover that Sri Lanka is expected to fit a certain mold defined by Eurocentric world actors.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's transition from British colony to nation-state implied the end of outside influence in the country's internal affairs. However, recognized nations are held to standards established by the Ameri-Eurocentric powers that dominate the international economy and body of nation-states. In order to achieve these goals and maintain certain institutions, a state must be equipped with a particular set of resources, financial and otherwise. As a new nation-state, Sri Lanka needed to demonstrate that it was working towards these political and economic standards in order to be recognized as a legitimate participant in the global economy. Sri Lanka's sovereignty also required an assertion of national identity under which the nation could present itself to the world and use to form relationships with other nations. Thus, the government was presented with the challenge of exhibiting its ability to fulfill the 'basic' requirements of a

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[180] Krishna, Sankaran, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.51.
[181] Ibid.

modern nation-state while maintaining a sense of authenticity and individuality in Sri Lanka's sense of identity.

The need to adhere to the standards established for the modern nation-state and desire to retain a sense of authenticity represents an enduring tension between 'modernity' and tradition. The 'modern' political structures and systems imposed by the British throughout their colonial rule of Ceylon remained in place through independence. This meant that even when Sri Lankans were finally in control of their country, they were still living and acting within a Western state model. As this mode of government did not include a place for Buddhism, bhikkhus felt a sense of anxiety regarding the future of the sangha. Its relationship with the Sinhalese state was not as well-defined as it had been in the ancient past. The oppression of colonial rule and the opportunity to assert a national identity upon gaining sovereignty incited the rise of a sense of nationalism. Inclusion in the notion of 'Sri Lankan-ness' was characterized by being of Sinhala ancestry, speaking Sinhala, and being Buddhist. The claims that each of these components of this identity was endangered by the presence of a foreign power at some point in history strengthened the resurgence of this nationalist ideology.

The missions of 'modernity' and 'coloniality' require communities to conform to 'modern,' 'progressive' ideals. The need to adopt certain structures, whether enforced by colonial powers or strongly encouraged by leading voices of the international system of nation-states, calls for a sacrifice of native identity and traditions. Though the demands of the nation-state system in the post-colonial era are not as explicitly oppressive as the forces of colonialism, they nonetheless created a sense of pressure and anxiety in the Sinhalese state and amongst those who were uncertain of their place in the new nation (namely, the sangha). The bhikkhus' involvement in political affairs during the first decade of independence and their advocacy for

the advancement of the Sinhalese-Buddhist national identity was an effort to work within the modern state structure to ensure their survival. It was clear there would be no reconstruction of past societal structures and relationships, but this did not imply Sri Lanka had to accept total secularity. The sangha needed its voice to be heard. Engaging in the modern democratic system enabled bhikkhus to ensure that their perspectives and concerns were acknowledged. In this way, the sangha demonstrated its ability to adapt in order to ensure its visibility in society and to the state. The political activity of monks in the 1950s thus set precedent for the involvement of bhikkhus in politics as Sinhala-Tamil tensions increased throughout the rest of the twentieth century. The activities of Buddhist political parties such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) are the most discernable manifestations of religious figures in politics. This is in part due to the depictions in Western media of more extreme members of the parties, those who perpetrate violent attacks on non-Buddhist institutions or propagate severe anti-'other' sentiments. Though these political bhikkhu groups did not directly evolve from the organizations active in the post-colonial period, the monks of the EBP and MEP set an example of how the sangha could assume a dynamic role beyond the temple modern Sri Lankan state and society.

Conclusion

The civil war in Sri Lanka ended with the defeat of the extremist, separatist Liberation

Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) by the Sri Lankan Army in 2009. It is estimated that the war

resulted in the loss of nearly 100,000 civilians, both Tamil and Sinhalese.[182] The United Nations

and human rights groups have persistently requested permission from the Sri Lankan government

to conduct an investigation in regards to war crimes and human rights violations believed to have

been committed during the conflict. As the Sri Lankan government has been reluctant to comply,

the actual number of casualties is still uncertain. In order to better understand the motivations

behind anti-Tamil actions of the Sinhalese government and its supporters during the conflict, I

have examined significant historical periods in the relationship between Theravada Buddhist

institutions and monks and the state. Identifying the nature of the sangha's role in society and in

relation to political authorities prior to colonial rule provided an appropriate point of entry.

Throughout the century following the beginning of British colonial rule, the relations between

Buddhist monks and political authorities transformed dramatically. The changes were the result

of the pressure to conform to 'modern' ideals and structures imposed by colonial forces and later

encouraged by countries leading the global system of nation-states. When Sri Lanka was granted

sovereignty in 1948 it was faced with the challenge of maintaining its legitimacy as a nation-

state in the global economy while defining and asserting its authentic sense of self as an

independent, stable, and unique, non-Western nation.

The British annexation of the Kandyan state in the early nineteenth century marked the

beginning of the oppression of Buddhism through the forced deterioration of the connection

between the sangha and polity. Upon assuming power, the British promised to ensure continued

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[182] Krista Mahr, "Sri Lanka to Start Tally of Civil War Dead," *Time*, 28 Nov. 2013,
http://world.time.com/2013/11/28/sri-lanka-to-start-tally-of-civil-war-dead.

state protection of Buddhism. However, the disdain shown for cultural symbols and rituals and the seizure of temple land and funds for Buddhist primary schools indicated the colonizers did not wish to associate themselves with the longstanding religious tradition of the Ceylonese people. The presence of Christian missionaries and appropriation of funds to benefit missionary schools instead of Buddhist schools further affirmed the growing division between the new political authority and religious institutions. The Buddhist revival of the latter quarter century, though initiated as a response to the Christian-favoritism shown by the colonizers, nonetheless involved the adaption of Western Christian structures and symbols for the purposes of promoting Buddhist institutions and identity. To appear legitimate to colonial powers, it was implicit that advocates for Buddhism and the native Sri Lankan sense of identity work according to the 'modern' system and ideals defined by the colonizer. The subjugation of a tradition that was a fundamental part of Sri Lankan societal structure and relationships made a lasting impression on the Sri Lankan collective national memory.

When the island was finally released from colonial rule in the mid-twentieth century, the people and the state were confronted with the task of asserting a Sri Lankan national identity, which involved excising any remnants of British culture. Yet, the state structure remained relatively unchanged in the transition to sovereignty, meaning Sri Lanka was still working according to the model of a Western-style government. This secular model confirmed that a sovereign Sinhalese-dominated state did not imply the reestablishment of the relationship between Buddhist institutions and political authority that was characteristic of ancient Ceylonese society. Thus, the sangha was confronted with the notion of indefinitely occupying the marginal position to which they were relegated by British colonial powers.

The need for Sri Lanka to organize and assert a distinctive national identity as an emerging nation-state presented an opportunity for the resurgence of Ceylon's 'traditional' Sinhala-Buddhist values and culture. One of the immediate issues presented by independence was choosing a primary language to be used in government and in which to conduct international business. This incited a movement for Sinhala to be made the national language. The exclusive use of Sinhala implied the elevation of the Sinhalese people and Sinhala culture and traditions. Since the founding of Ceylon, the notions of Sinhala and Buddhism have been intertwined. Thus the rise of Sinhala-ness invited the rise of Buddhist principles and values as well.

The push for priority of the Sinhala language and Buddhism was a symbolic affirmation that the identity of the country had not lost its Sinhalese-Buddhist roots during the long period of colonial rule. The issues of language and religion were key topics of debate in the campaigns preceding the 1956 general elections. Though there was perceptible bhikkhu involvement in the campaigns of both contending parties, the UNP and SFLP, the SFLP received considerable support from the EBP, the outreach efforts of which contributed to the victory of Bandaranaike and the SFLP. There was no explicit place for the sangha in the post-colonial state, thus monks managed to insert themselves into the emerging, developing nation-state. This presented a clear association between monks and Buddhism and state affairs. Moreover, bhikkhu participation in the 1956 political campaigns set a precedent for future interactions between of religious figures and politics in Sri Lanka. An example is the violence perpetrated by Buddhist monks over the last few decades, frequently seen in Western media depictions of the Sri Lankan ethno-religious conflict. Extreme, violent acts targeting non-Buddhist religious groups represent a deliberate assertion of the Buddhism in Sri Lankan society. The limited police interference and the lack of serious repercussions issued by the Sinhalese-dominant government for these damaging events

imply indirect state endorsement of the bhikkhus' actions. Further, it reinforces the notion that the interconnected Sinhala-Buddhist identities comprise the chief representation of Sri Lanka. Though the religious and ethnic groups that are the targets of extremist bhikkhu antagonisms are minority populations on the island, some Buddhist monks evidently perceive these groups have a growing presence in Sri Lankan society. Thus, the voice of Buddhist institutions and the Sinhalese-Buddhist identity are once again fervently asserted in response to the sensed threat of an 'other.'

The portrayal of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict as 'religious' is influenced by the image of the Buddhist monk who engages in political affairs and participates in the political process. In actuality, it is not plainly an anti-Hindu or anti-Tamil sentiment that motivates the extreme actions of recent years. Behind these actions and attitudes are decades of British oppression and pressure to alter the structure and relationships that defined Ceylon society. Beyond independence, Sri Lanka was expected to meet to certain standards as dictated by the international leaders of economic and technological progress, and demonstrate its capability of succeeding as an individual, sovereign nation-state. The ability of the bhikkhus to assert their voice and ensure the relevance of the sangha in Sri Lankan state and society in the immediate post-colonial period established an image of Buddhist monk involvement in political affairs. This idea remained relevant throughout the twentieth century as Sinhala-Tamil hostility grew as did the perceived need to ensure the Sinhala-Buddhist voice was recognized.

Political monk organizations are still active and continue to target non-Buddhist religions institutions and groups to this day. Setting aside the novelty and irony in the notion of a violent Buddhist monk, should bhikkhus be involved in political affairs? Would the enforcement of total secularity significantly impact the violence against minority ethnic and religious groups? Can the

image of the political monk, if it ceases to be fetishized in Western media, be effectively used to build a non-exclusionary relationship between the Sinhalese state and Buddhist institutions? At present, Sri Lanka is dealing with the aftermath of the war in many forms. In the reconciliation process, it is important that the actual foundations of Sinhalese anxiety that arises in the face of any 'other' that could potentially overrule the Sinhalese population are recognized. Then, the state can begin to devise ways to promote and ensure a state and society that is inclusive of the various ethnicities and religious traditions that comprise the island's population. Whether this will require a sacrifice of tradition and historical culture is difficult to determine. Dispelling the association of 'other' with 'enemy,' I believe, is a necessary first step.

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