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RELIGIOUS INTERFACE AND CONTESTATIONS BETWEEN BUDDHISTS AND MUSLIMS IN SRI LANKA

A Study of Recent Developments in Selected
Multi-Religious and Cross-Cultural Sites



**Kalinga Tudor Silva
Afrah Niwas
W. M. K. B. Wickramasinghe**

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Abbreviations

AGA	-	Assistant Government Agent
BBS	-	Bodu Bala Sena
CCF	-	Central Cultural Fund
DS	-	Divisional Secretary
GS	-	Grama Sewaka
LTTE	-	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MFA	-	Mawanella Friendship Association
SLTJ	-	Sri Lanka Towheed Jama't

Executive Summary

Commenting on post-war politics and social dynamics in Sri Lanka some researchers have claimed that there is a shift in conflict dynamics in Sri Lanka from ethnic hostilities to largely religiously inspired hostilities (Holt 2016; Wickramasinghe 2015, Herath and Rambukwella 2015, Klem 2011). The rise of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and aggressive Muslim reform movements resulting in interreligious as well as intrareligious tension are presented in support of this argument. With a view to contributing to this debate, the present study focused on three religious sites with a multi-religious heritage in central Sri Lanka. This study, however, did not find evidence for an unambiguously ‘religious turn’ in social conflict in Sri Lanka in the post-war era. The religious sites studied with a history of multi-religious engagement between Buddhism and Islam have potential for promoting conflict as well as solidarity. The current situation in these three sites does not indicate a major rupture in terms of interreligious relations. While these sites have become entangled with externally driven campaigns for religious purification that can certainly contribute to both interreligious and intrareligious tension, it is difficult to argue that what we have witnessed is an irreversible change in the nature of social tension in Sri Lanka.

As evident from the three sites subjected to this study, over 800 years of interaction between these two religions has resulted in a religious interface as well as religious contestations between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka. On the whole the study found that the accumulated reservoir of mutual trust and co-existence between these two religions is simply too ingrained and too deeply rooted to be easily toppled by new religious mobilizations and reform movements. The calls for religious purification by external actors have certainly reached the religious sites covered by this study, but so far, they have not completely transformed the existing structures in line with their radical demands.

The state policies relating to sacred places and archaeological sites must become attuned to this social reality and move away from the notion of ‘pure sacred sites’ restricted to the Sinhala Buddhist ethnic majority in the country. Informed largely by hegemonic nationalist perspectives, the state policies too have inadvertently

contributed to the current impasse in archaeological sites like Devanagala. The state policies must recognize and respect the multi-religious and multicultural heritage in Sri Lanka with a view to promoting this heritage for future generations. The policies of the state regarding archaeological sites and sacred cities must be revisited from the angle of approaching them as the common heritage of all Sri Lankans, if not all humankind, rather than an exclusive domain of one or the other ethno-religious group.

Introduction

During the latter part of the colonial period and much of the post-colonial period, the identity politics in Sri Lanka revolved around ethnic identities of Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. Sinhala Buddhists were inclined to consider Sri Lanka as their distinctive homeland with an unbroken history except when invaded from time to time by various powers from outside threatening the integrity of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation (Obeyesekere 2006, Tambiah 1986). As an ethnic minority, Tamils, in turn, felt insecure especially after the political power shifted to the majority ethnic community who used their political power to establish a hegemonic control over the state and eliminate what they consider as unfair advantages of the ethnic minorities in education, professions, trade and politics (Kailasapathy 1984). Religious sentiments always played an important secondary role in identity formation and became the primary fault line in some instances as in Kotahena riots between Buddhists and Catholics in 1883 and the Sinhala-Muslims riots in 1915. These religiously inspired conflicts were explosive and violent in the short run triggered by sentiments relating to actual or assumed desecration of sacred sites, sacred objects and sacred personnel by religious rivals running high (Tambiah 1996). These purely religious moorings, however, were short lived and religious tensions cooled off after some time due to the mediation of religious leaders of different denominations and perhaps due to an inherent capacity in religions to resolve conflicts by resorting to non-violence, negotiation, divine justice and spiritual advancement (see also Wickramasinghe 2015).

While the intersectionality between ethnicity and religion in Sri Lanka is clearly recognized in this study, it calls for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between ethnicity and religion; religion becoming a deeply emotional violent frontier of ethnoreligious conflict at times and the same religions paving the way for promoting mutual understanding, trust, shared religious experiences and even common faith at other times. Referring to the hybrid role the religious agents play, a recent study stated “... sometimes they may act as ‘potentates’ working to reinforce the political boundaries, and sometimes as ‘travellers’ able to transgress the same boundaries” (Spencer et al. 2015: 6). How is it possible for the same religions to become a foundation for social solidarity within and in between religious groups

at one time and a major instigator of violent conflicts at other times? Are religions intrinsically conflict prone because people are ready to fight for what they firmly and fervently believe in? Are religions intrinsically peaceful because they are spiritually oriented and the religious worldviews and precepts include ideas such as inner peace, non-violence and calming meditation? Any effort to essentialize religion in general or specific religions as conflict-prone or peaceful is bound to be invalid empirically. What is perhaps more useful is to examine under what circumstances religions or some religious actors turn to violence and what makes religious players advocates for peace and mutual co-existence.

It is this dual character of religion that this study explored by concentrating on selected religious and cultural sites engaging Sinhala Buddhists and largely bilingual Muslims in central Sri Lanka. Following the lead provided by Appleby (2000) and others in the anthropological literature on religion and violence, we do not claim that religion is either inherently violent or inherently non-violent but an ambivalent domain that can be affectively tapped for violence as well as for peace. The primary objective of this study was to understand the role of religious sites as sites of solidarity as well as of confrontation between the Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka in the light of a visible upsurge in ethnoreligious sentiments in both communities due to internal and external influences in post-war Sri Lanka. Although there is a vast body of social science literature dealing with Buddhist-Hindu relations and Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka as will be elaborated later, Buddhist-Muslim relations have only received limited attention until after the emergence of BBS as a primarily anti-Muslim mobilization in post-war Sri Lanka.

The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. What makes certain sites conflict-prone or solidarity inducing?
2. Who are the key actors in each religious site and what are their interests and inclinations when it comes to interreligious engagements?
3. What is the impact of religious ideas and religious rituals in promoting social harmony or tension between the two communities?

4. What is the impact of antagonistic movements like Bodu Bala Sena and aggressive Muslim reform movements inspired by Wahabism on the Sinhala Muslim relations in these specific sacred sites?

5. What kind of state policies would be needed in the light of recent developments in the selected religious sites in order to contain possible social tensions arising from sacred sites of one kind or another?

The study focused on three sites, two with a long history of religious pluralism engaging Buddhists and Muslims and the other a cultural or an archaeological site claimed by Buddhists and physically surrounded by Muslim and Sinhala Buddhist residents also with a long history of mutual co-existence. The three religious sites studied were Devanagala, close to Mawanella, the Galebandara shrines in Kurunegala and the Kahatapitiya Mosque in Gampola. The two Galebandara shrines (One Buddhist and the other Muslim) and the Kahatapitiya Mosque were multi-religious sites visited by both Buddhists and Muslims. Devanagala was an archaeological site with an abandoned Buddhist temple, some inscriptions and some other historical monuments dating back to the Polonnaruwa or Gampola period (Secretariat for Muslims 2015, Gamage 2014). Unlike the previous two sites, this was not a functioning religious site at the time of the study, but the Buddhist protagonists in this dispute identified it as part of the Sinhala Buddhist heritage threatened by deliberate actions of the Muslims in the area, including what was understood as some sacrilegious acts such as beef eating. The effort to preserve this site on the part of the Archaeology Department involved plans to relocate the Muslim and Sinhala residents adjoining the archaeological site, with the militant Ravana Balaya and BBS pushing for a unilateral relocation of Muslims in spite of their continuous presence in the area at least from the 16th century onwards (Dewaraja 1994). The three study sites were purposively selected from within the central region of Sri Lanka in order to explore interactions between Buddhists and Muslims taking into consideration ethnic and religious diversity in the areas, feasibility of rapid ethnographic research in the relevant sites and their importance from the angles of religious interface and religious contestations. These sites have been selected for illustrative purposes rather than for representing Sinhala-Muslim relations in the whole country. Such a representative study would certainly

be needed but the resources available for the current study were insufficient to undertake a cross sectional study covering the entire country or even an entire district.

The research process involved analysis of available records, including grey literature such as collections of folklore and folk poetry, oral history, interviews with key players in each religious site, case studies of affected persons and observation of some specific rituals. The research team tried to reconstruct the past of each sacred site, the relations between Sinhalese and Muslims in the respective areas in the past, and how far and in what ways these relationships changed in recent years, particularly as an outcome of extremist religious mobilizations on both sides within the past few decades. The Galebandara shrines and Kahatapitiya mosque were multi-religious in character with both Buddhists and Muslims visiting each of these shrines in spite of their formal affiliation with one religion or the other. What was examined in the current study was the historical background of this multi-religious character, its implications for interreligious solidarity and what response the apparent Buddhist-Muslim hostilities at the national level had on the continuation of the multi-religious heritage of these sites. As the research was conducted with serious limitations of resources, it was not possible to interview all parties involved in a religious cult or all parties involved in a conflict. For instance, in Devanagala we interviewed selected Muslim residents in the vicinity of the archaeological site as they were directly affected by the plans to relocate people living in the declared buffer zone. In addition we interviewed the local Buddhist monks and some community leaders representing Buddhists and Muslims. With the time and resource constraints affecting the study, it was not possible to do a socio-economic survey covering a large sample or a fully-fledged ethnographic study devoting a longer period of study. While granting the obvious limitations of the procedures followed, we can argue in our defense that the rapid research process followed generated useful insights that need to be validated, expanded and critically examined through future studies employing more comprehensive approaches.

Religious Syncretism or Religious Pluralism?

Many of the religious sites in Sri Lanka can be identified as ‘complex religious fields’ where different religions meet, interact, learn from each other or even merge in some instances and, at the same time, compete, confront and conflict with each other in other instances. This is the situation in the religious complex associated with the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy¹, Adam’s Peak² or Kataragama³. Studies of religious syncretism in Sri Lanka have by and large focused on the interaction between Buddhism and Hinduism (Goonesekera 2007, Kapferer 1997, 1991, Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, Pfaffenberger 1979). This is not surprising given the historical connectivity between these two religious traditions and the incorporation of some deities of Hindu origin in popular Buddhism. The emergence of god Kataragama as a popular deity among Buddhists and Hindus is one aspect of this religious syncretism in Sri Lanka. The conflicts between Buddhists and Hindus over the control of these religious sites have resulted in increased Sinhalization and Buddhicization of Kataragama (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988), the ritual complex in Kandy (Seneviratne 1978) and Adam’s Peak (de Silva 2005) even though the Hindu influence in these sites have not disappeared completely as reflected in the continuation of padayatra⁴ from Jaffna, popularity of thukku kavadi⁵ among Hindu devotees visiting Kataragama during the festival and the impact of popular

¹ The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, containing the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha, is venerated by Buddhists. The larger religious complex in Kandy, however, includes devales dedicated to deities such as Skanda, Vishnu and Pattini who are invoked by Buddhists, Hindus and followers of other religions as well. The annual procession in Kandy venerates the tooth relic as well as the guardian deities in a collective effort to secure their blessing for ensuring fertility and prosperity of all living beings irrespective of who they are.

² The Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims all consider the foot print in Adam’s Peak to be one left by the founder or a supernatural power connected with their respective religions. So the followers of these different religions take part in pilgrimage to Adam’s Peak without contesting each other’s claims.

³ Kataragama deity is invoked by Hindus, Buddhists, Veddas and followers of other religions in their effort to achieve success in secular life, gain headway in business, politics and legal disputes and the like and avoid misfortunes of illness and suffering. While their way of invoking the god may be different, as when Hindus practice self-mortification as in Kutthukaavadi and Buddhists make offerings of fruit, followers of different religions jointly participate in daily rituals and the annual festival.

⁴ Padayatra is a long walk from Jaffna to Kataragama in order to participate in the annual festival in Kataragama shrine. The devotees join this journey at various points and merge with flow of humans from other parts of the country with their common faith in Skanda.

⁵ This is an emotionally charged practice of self-mortification where devotees hang their bodies with hooks attached from elevated poles carried by vehicles and dance to the tune of kavadi music in expressing their devotion to God Skanda.

Hinduism on Bhakthi religiosity across the religious divide. It has to be mentioned here that the Sinhala-Tamil conflicts that erupted in Sri Lanka in recent decades was by no means a Buddhist-Hindu confrontation as such. Even though many Buddhist monks openly supported the Sinhala army, Hindu priests, who are ritual performers rather than political actors, opted to keep away from the conflict in spite of the LTTE efforts to drag them into the conflict. On the other hand, the LTTE antagonized the Sinhala Buddhists by attacking leading Buddhist sacred places and killing some Buddhist monks, contributing to the increased politicization of Buddhist monks and their increased militancy against Tamil separatism.

Obeyesekere (1970) introduced the notion of ‘Protestant Buddhism’ to describe the impact of Christianity on Buddhism during the colonial encounter. In his view this captured the ambivalent nature of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, Buddhism adopting some organizational forms of Christianity and, at the same time, contesting Christianity in regard to the validity of its religious doctrine. The notion of Protestant Buddhism has been widely used by researchers working on colonial or post-colonial developments in Buddhism (e.g. Malalgoda 1976). However, others have criticized this idea for the lack of a real economic dynamism associated with Buddhist revival, as was the case in Protestant Reformation as was highlighted by Max Weber (1930), closer association between Catholicism and Buddhism in the Sri Lankan context, and the neglect of the anti-colonial mobilizations in the colonial context in which Buddhist revival first occurred in Sri Lanka (e.g. Holt 1999).

Some researchers have questioned how far the notion of religious syncretism accurately describes the actual interaction between religions. Jonathan Walters (1991), for instance, pointed out that religious syncretism merely points to the co-existence of elements from different religions in actual religious practice without clarifying why such elements come together in particular historical contexts and how they form a coherent belief system in the eyes of members of a particular faith community. He preferred to use the term ‘multireligion’ in order to highlight how people select different elements from different religions for fulfilling their diverse religious needs in a context of existential insecurities they confront. McGilvray (2008) paid some attention on the Hindu-Muslim interface in eastern Sri Lanka,

also pointing to the role played by the Tamil diaspora and remittances and religious influences from the Middle East in changing the religious landscape in the eastern coastal belt from one of tolerance and co-existence to one of competition over access to resources and increased visibility.

On the whole this literature points to the long-term social and cultural impact of interreligious dynamics in Sri Lanka.

So far the literature on religious syncretism in Sri Lanka has not dealt with the interaction between Buddhism and Islam in spite of the co-existence of these two religions in Sri Lanka for over 800 years and cultural exchanges between the two communities in areas such as medical practice and food habits. The apparent contradictions between the relevant belief systems such as monotheism of Islam and atheism or polytheism of Buddhism may be one possible explanation for this situation. While an Islamic shrine is included in the religious complex in Kataragama, its significance in the multi-religious landscape in this pilgrimage site has not been explored satisfactorily (cf. Pfaffenberger 1979). This is why diverse interactions between Buddhism and Islam constitute the main focus of the current study.

Multicultural Heritage and Efforts at Cultural Purification at Devanagala

The controversy surrounding the Devanagala archaeological site indicates an aggressive effort at cultural purification on the part of new religious movements on both sides of the religious divide in spite of the strong multicultural heritage in the area.

Devanagala rock is located six kilometres from Mawanella town on the way to Hemmathagama (see Map 1). The rock, which is roughly about 8 hectares in extent, has several Buddhist monuments including a stupa, a bo tree, a pond, a rock cave, a monastery, a Vishnu devale and a preaching hall. There are two inscriptions on the rock, one dating back to the 12th century and the other to the Kandyan period. The inscription dating back to the Polonnaruwa period refers to a grant of a village by Parakramabahu the Great (1153-1186) to one of his military chiefs for his success

in a war fought with the king in Myanmar. The Kandyan period inscription also refers to a land grant in the village of Ruwandeniya by King Vimaladharmasuriya to a Buddhist monk who helped the king to achieve kingship (Paranavithana 1933). The Buddhist temple in Devanagala was occupied by monks from time to time, but there have been no resident monks in the temple in recent years due to the hardships faced at the top of the rock. The rock was declared by the state as an archaeological site in 2004 by a gazette notification. Initially, the area that comes within 200 metres from the boundary of the rock was declared by the state as a buffer zone. The extent of the buffer zone was extended to 400 metres from the edge of the rock in 2005. The boundary of this buffer zone, however, was not determined through a land survey and establishment of boundary markers.

Devanagala rock is surrounded by several villages, some of which are predominantly Muslim and the others predominantly Sinhala (see Map 2). The upkeep of the temple on the rock was done by monks and lay devotees attached to a Buddhist temple in the nearby Ruwandeniya village. Following the declaration of the Devanagala rock as an archaeological site on June 4, 2004 and accompanying declaration of a 200 to 400 metre buffer zone around the rock, the Muslim and Buddhist residents adjoining the rock, many of whom have legal title to the land they occupied, came under the buffer zone, with the possibility of being evicted from the land they occupied for many generations (Secretariat for Muslims 2015). The Archaeology Department has not physically demarcated the buffer zone of Devanagala, adding to the confusion and contestations of who is in the buffer zone and who is not.

Traditionally the Sinhalese and Muslims in Mawanella town and surrounding villages had many social, cultural and economic exchanges between them and lived harmoniously. Typically the Muslims are economically better off controlling much of property, economic resources and trade monopolies. In Mawanella town and surrounding areas Sinhalese work for Muslim employers and are economically dependent on them. The pattern, however, is not uniform, with some pockets of poverty in Muslim communities as well and some privileged sections in Sinhala society, including landed proprietors, professionals and new business interests (Gamage 2015). According to the folklore, the Muslims had been settled in the area by the royal family in Kandy in recognition of their services to the palace,

which included madige⁶ transport services, medical services by traditional Yunani practitioners and the establishment and maintenance of a royal orchard in the area. The Muslim traders from Mawanella, Hemmathagama and Aranayaka visited nearby Sinhala villagers for collection of spices grown in the villages and Mawanella became an important urban centre largely controlled by Muslim traders who purchase the produce of surrounding villages and supply consumer goods to small shops in surrounding villages. The Muslims also became important patrons of some of the leading Buddhist temples in the area, with a resulting mutual trust between the communities.

The popular deity cults in the area, including Aluthnuwara cult, had a tinge of religious pluralism as they attracted devotees from all religions. Many Muslim families in the area have Sinhala Ge Names, indicating a history of intermarriages with the Sinhala women on the part of Muslim men who initially moved into the area from outside. Most Muslims in the area are bilingual, with Tamil as their home language and Sinhala as the language of business transactions with the Sinhalese. The popular local hero Saradiel who robbed the rich and distributed his loot among the poor had Mammale Marikkar as his best friend and Mammale Marikkar's sister as his girlfriend. His father who was a carter originating from the Negombo area, who married a Sinhala Buddhist woman from Utuwankanda, came from a Catholic background, further highlighting the multicultural and multi-religious heritage in the area⁷.

Some ethnic tension, however, broke out in the area from the 1950s onwards over issues like love affairs across the ethnic divide, land disputes and economic competition in general. The economic monopolies of the Muslims over the spice trade and wholesale and retail trade in Mawanella and surrounding towns antagonized emerging Sinhala trading interests who secured the backing of local politicians in a pattern that reflected the conflict of interests between an economically dominant

⁶ Madige refers to the bullock carriage department in the royal palace in Kandy. It was manned by Muslims and some Karawa carters who were responsible for transporting essential goods to the royal palace from within and outside the kingdom. The holders of this rajakariya were granted land in respect of this service.

⁷ Personal communication with Dr. Ariyasena U. Gamage who built the Saradiel village as an attraction for local and international visitors.

ethnic minorities and politically powerful ethnic majorities in the South-East Asian region (Amy Chua 2004). A major ethnic riot erupted in Mawanella in 2001 when some Sinhala ruffians with political backing attacked Muslim shop keepers who refused to pay protection money demanded from them by these criminal elements and the police aligned with Sinhala interests and, subdued by local politicians, did not investigate the matter swiftly. The resulting clashes led to one murder, many injuries and burning of wayside Muslim-owned shops.

The ethnic tension, however, was gradually diffused through the mediation of Sinhala and Muslim community leaders, including Buddhist monks and the Muslim Mawlavis. Even though these riots may have been largely triggered by economic and political competition between Muslim trading interests and their Sinhala rivals who wished to break into the entrenched economic monopolies in the hands of an ethnic minority, the mediation by the religious leadership among Buddhists and Muslims and the intervention of the security forces from outside the area helped to reduce tension and restore peace in the area. This is a clear instance where ethnic tension produced in economic and political domains was brought under control by the reservoir of strong multicultural and multi-religious heritage and social bridges in the two communities.

The Devanagala issue, however, marked a new chapter in Sinhala-Muslim relations triggered by efforts at cultural purification on the part of religious actors on both sides who came from outside the area. BBS and other similar organizations represent calls for cultural purification on the Buddhist side and Sri Lanka Towheed Jama't (SLTJ) represent an aggressive demand for religious purification on the Islamic side. These externally driven mobilizations require close attention as they have the potential to drive a wedge against the strong strands of multicultural heritage in the area.

BBS and three other organizations directly or indirectly affiliated with BBS, namely Sinhala Ravaya, Maitree Sahana Padanama and Parakum Sena, became involved in the Devanagala issue from 2012 onwards. Coming from Colombo and other outstations, they persuaded Buddhist monks in the area to demand the eviction of Muslim residents in the vicinity of the rock, excluding the Sinhala Buddhist

residents also within the designated buffer zone. Further, using a land survey conducted way back in 1876 Maitree Sahana Padanama claimed that the Devanagala site should actually be 28.5 hectares in extent. A new organization called National Movement for Defending Devanagala (Devanagala Surakime Jathika Vyaparaya) was formed. This organization released statements to the press referring to an invasion of the Devanagala Buddhist sacred site by Muslims. An anonymous printed notice distributed among local Buddhists and Muslims declared that “The sinful Muslims who are killers of cows and eaters of beef should immediately move out of the Devanagala sacred Buddhist site.” It also demanded patriotic Sinhala Buddhists to be ready to sacrifice their lives for defending their national heritage. These messages received wide publicity through electronic and printed media and Facebook. The reports of mosque building by Muslims, reported sexual abuse of Sinhala women by Muslim men, stories of land grabbing by Muslims and various other rumours such as reported distribution of contraceptive laden underwear by Muslim traders among Sinhala females from elsewhere in Sri Lanka added to an aura of economic domination and cultural invasion by the Muslims also reportedly mobilizing their remittances and resource flows from the Middle East.⁸

Due to the pressure from these various lobbies the Department of Archaeology conducted a survey on Devanagala in 2013 and the resulting report prepared without consulting the Sinhala and Muslim residents in the area recommended that the total land area of 28.5 hectares that belonged to the Devanagala site should be demarcated and the residents in the designated area should be relocated somewhere else. This report had been released to BBS and affiliated organizations and they used it for the purpose of strengthening their campaign for the eviction of Muslim residents in the area even though the report clearly included all residents in the demarcated area irrespective of their ethnicity and religion.

The head monks in the two Buddhist temples located in the vicinity of Devanagala had been totally transformed by the campaigns of BBS. Ambatalawe Sangarathna, the chief monk of the Devanagala temple, claimed ownership of the Devanagala sacred site. He was helped by Medirigiriye Punyasara, a monk who originally came

⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the role of rumour in BBS triggered religious tension in Sri Lanka see (Silva 2016).

from elsewhere now heading a nearby temple who contested the 2015 General Election on behalf of BBS and only succeeded in getting about 500 votes. With the help of civil defence force members who were stationed at the Devanagala rock and many Sinhala Buddhist youth who were loyal to these monks, these two monks kept a close eye on the Devanagala rock and developments in its vicinity such as any new constructions being made especially by the Muslims. These monks refused to accept any dane (offering of food to the monks by laity) or other assistance from the Muslims in the area as was done in the past in a clear effort to keep the Muslims at bay. They also boycotted any purchases from Muslim shops in the area, closely following the instructions issued by the BBS. They and their supporters did not allow any Muslims or any strangers to climb the Devanagala rock for sightseeing purposes as was commonly done in the past. Moreover, as soon as the Muslim residents started any new construction in the designated buffer zone, it was brought to the notice of the local police who promptly stopped them from continuing with any new construction banned by a circular issued by the Central Cultural Fund. In other words, these local Buddhist activists, clearly instigated by the BBS and other militant Buddhist movements from outside, had not only become moral crusaders against Islamic invasions, but also took charge of safeguarding the sacred site against what they saw as encroachment by the Muslims.

The declaration of certain sites by the state as archaeological or sacred sites have often led to incipient problems for ethnic and religious minority communities living in and around those sites. This has already been reported for the Anuradhapura sacred site declared as a sacred site in 1942 (Nissan 1989), the Kataragama sacred site declared in 1963 (Pfaffenberger 1979) and the Dighavapi sacred site declared in 1973 (Spencer et al. 2015). The government notification of sacred sites have been interpreted by Sinhala Buddhist activists and some government agencies as well, as a call for eviction of non-Sinhala Buddhists living in these areas. As Spencer et al. argues “the sacred is implicitly identified with Sinhala Buddhists and the non-sacred refers to non-Sinhala non-Buddhist” (2015: 84). This is quite contrary to the multi-religious ethos of many historic sacred sites in Sri Lanka, as was pointed out earlier in this essay. Thus the declaration of a certain site as a sacred site has often resulted in the relocation of non-Buddhist populations and religious establishments

in a state sponsored process of ethnic cleansing. Thus “sacred” and “archaeology” become emotionally invested categories with a template for religious purification on spatial lines. It has to be noted here that so far the official declaration as sacred sites has been limited to those increasingly identified as exclusive Buddhist sites, clearly indicating the partiality of the state to Sinhala Buddhist interests in spite of the multi-religious pretensions of the state and multi-religious heritage in many of these sites.

The Muslims in the Devanagala area were deeply disturbed by these developments. They felt severely restricted by the combined onslaught against them by the Department of Archaeology, Central Cultural Fund (CCF), security establishments, BBS and local monks. As evident from their narratives (see Annex 1), they are completely upset by what they see as the effort to push them out of the area, and surveillance of their activities by the Buddhist activists and the government agencies responsible for the conservation of Devanagala. One person said “We cannot even dig a hole in our land to plant a tree as we may discover some archaeological object that will evoke an intervention by the Archaeology people.” Another Muslim respondent stated “If this goes on like this, if 400m area is declared as the buffer zone, we won’t be able to dig even our graves here.” Referring to the restrictions on them imposed by the Department of Archaeology, a Muslim woman said “Even cutting a wetahiria branch (*gliricidia*) is a problem now. Someone somewhere would call 119 and there comes the Puraawidhya (Archaeology) people. We are not harming the preserved sacred site or anything like that, we just want to live our lives in the land we own. We have deeds and documents, we legally own the house and the land we have.” Further, they noted that the Sinhala people in their neighbourhoods, with whom they had cordial relations in the past, are eying to grab their property following their possible eviction from the area. They sought the help of the local Muslim leaders including politicians to safeguard what they saw as their legitimate property rights. An organization called Mawanella Friendship Association (MFA) was formed under the leadership of Sinhala and Muslim leaders for the purpose of diffusing tension and promoting peace. This organization conducted its own research on Devanagala and based on information they gathered they argued that the 28.5 hectare land referred to in the report issued by the

Archaeology Department is in a nearby Ruwandeniya village and not in Devanagala (Gamage 2014). The Mawanella Friendship Association tried to involve the Maha Sangha and Muslim religious leaders for reaching a negotiated settlement and as of 2015 such a settlement had not been reached. In the meantime the MFA came under heavy criticism of BBS, which identified the Sinhala leaders involved as traitors to the Sinhala nation.

Some rumours circulating in the local Sinhala community claimed that the local Muslims had tried to blast the Devanagala rock. They used some white substance evident in cracks in the rock as evidence for a Muslim effort to blast the rock. Mawanella Friendship Association consulted a geologist on this issue and his opinion was that the white substance was a chemical compound that is normally found in cracks in such rock formations. Similarly some Muslims in the area reportedly removed the moonstones in the cultural site and planted them in their own houses (Personal communication with a local Buddhist monk).

A less aggressive but pointed Muslim reaction against the charges of Bodu Bala Sena came from a Colombo-based Muslim revivalist organization called Sri Lanka Towheed Jama't (SLTJ). They organized a meeting in Hemmathagama town, not far from Devanagala, in September 2015 in order to respond to charges made against Muslims by the BBS and this meeting led to a direct verbal and physical confrontation where BBS leadership in the area forcibly entered the meeting place, abused the Muslim leaders and some Sinhalese who had gathered there and snatched some propaganda publications on sale at the venue, resulting in a complaint made by SLTJ against BBS in Colombo. The SLTJ leadership initially tried to complain to the Hemmathagama Police, but since the latter discouraged the Muslim leaders from making a formal complaint saying that it might lead to adverse consequences for local Muslim leaders from BBS, the SLTJ leaders opted to complain to the Colombo Police Headquarters, which in turn, transferred the case to the Kegalle Police, which encouraged the parties in the dispute to reach an out of court settlement.

Led by an articulate young commerce graduate named R. Abdul Razik, SLTJ which became active from 2012, sought to reform Islam and at the same time counter

charges against Islam by protagonists from other religions. Originally inspired by a Muslim revivalist movement based in India, SLTJ wanted to cleanse Islam of so-called Un-Islamic practices such as saint worship, sorcery and other magical practices. In an interview conducted by lead author of this essay with him in October 2015, Razik described Saint Worship connected with Sufism as a 'burial cult' (*sohon vandanawa*) that has no basis in Koran. SLTJ had 72 branches in 15 districts in Sri Lanka and it was involved in training of youth in its own madrassa, propaganda work for reviving Islam, charity work, and media work. SLTJ carried out its campaigns for introducing what it considered proper Islam not only among the Muslims but also among Buddhists and Hindus reportedly to overcome the campaign of misinformation against Islam by organizations such as BBS.

Thus the revivalist leadership in both Buddhism and Islam tried to purify their religions from within. These purification efforts basically involved a concerted attempt to eliminate elements borrowed from other religious traditions which had facilitated co-existence between different religions. These religious purification efforts involved an internal dissent within each religion, for instance between Wahabi reformists and Sufi followers. BBS too is a reformist group in the sense it tried to expose Buddhist monks reportedly disloyal to the Sasana (Buddhist establishment) and sought to disrobe those discrediting the Sasana by engaging in anti-social conduct. Moreover efforts at purification if successful would have the effect of eliminating religious pluralism and the accompanying overlap between religions that, in turn, facilitated interreligious co-existence.

Unlike earlier examples of ethnic tension in the area, where religious leadership mediated in an economically or politically driven dispute ultimately building on a reservoir of goodwill prevailing between the Sinhalese and the Muslims, the Devanagala incident marked increased polarization along religious lines. The ability of the state to settle this dispute was seriously hampered by its own biases and perceived lack of neutrality whether we are talking of the Police or the Department of Archaeology. The Muslim minority clearly felt that the BBS monks had manipulated the decision making process of the Department of Archaeology and the Police and the official declaration of Devanagala as an archaeological site, with a view to ultimately evicting the Muslims in the area in spite of their land

titles and long-standing residence. This is evident from the responses of Muslim inhabitants around Devanagala rock presented in Annex 1.

Galebandara Worship in Kurunegala

On the face of it the Galebandara cult appears to be a syncretic religion where Buddhists and Muslims come together to worship a deity who is believed to be part Sinhala and part Muslim in origin. However, the actual situation is far more complex with so many different strands, some of which highlight a degree of unity between Buddhists and Muslims in regard to the cult but others pointing to a sheer difference or mistrust between the followers of the two religious traditions. On the whole, the Galebandara cult can be seen as one where the dual character of religion, outlined earlier, comes out very strongly. Let us now examine the details of this cult.

Galebandara cult belongs to the category of Bandara cult in Sinhala Buddhism. For Muslims Galebandara is an Awliyar, a category of saints in Sufi tradition. This cult is popular among some Buddhists and Muslims in parts of Kurunegala and Matale districts. Typically, a Bandara cult is a localized religious cult built around the belief in a regional deity, who is subordinate to more powerful guardian deities of Sri Lanka such as Skanda, Natha, Vishnu, Saman and Pattini (Obeyesekere 1966). The Bandara deities are typically believed to be reincarnations of important local notables who made a significant impact, either positive or negative. In the Sufi faith, saints too were powerful human beings who became saints following their death due to exceptional good deeds they did while living. They become popular as saints because their followers can expect to receive their help in times of need.

The main Galebandara shrine is located at the foothill of the Ethugala rock located in the middle of Kurunegala town. There are two hereditary Sinhala priests, one from the Goigama caste and the other from the drummer caste, who conduct affairs of this shrine. This shrine is located right next to the Ethkanda Rajamaha Vihara, with which the Galebandara shrine maintains a close relation. This Sinhala shrine has some hereditary land holdings held by members of specific castes with service responsibilities to the Galebandara Buddhist shrine. Within a short distance from

this Sinhala Buddhist shrine, there is another Galebandara shrine conducted by Muslim priests who also claim that they are hereditary custodians of the Muslim shrine. Having no land holdings of its own, the Muslim shrine depends entirely on contributions by those who visit the shrine to secure blessings or any other services. This is a Ziaram (Sufi pilgrimage site with the tomb of a saint) containing the elevated tomb of Galebandara Awlia.

Both the Sinhala Buddhist and Muslim shrines are dedicated to the Galabandara deity. Many of the devotees who visit the Buddhist shrine are Sinhala Buddhists but some Muslim devotees too visit the Buddhist shrine for securing the blessing of Galebandara. Similarly, followers of both religions visit the Muslim shrine, with Sinhala Buddhists forming a majority and a considerably significant number of Muslim devotees also visiting this shrine. In both shrines a majority of the visitors are women; finding suitable marriage partners, the desire to have a child, or solving marital disputes with their husbands are the primary reasons for their seeking the blessing of Galebandara. Another important category of religious needs addressed by both shrines is identification of wrongdoers such as thieves through oracles and cursing them. Ensuring fertility and prosperity through an annual cycle of festivals conducted by the Buddhist shrine is also important for the local population. It includes *kiri ithiraweema* (boiling of milk) on January 1, celebration of Sinhala Tamil New Year in April, first harvest festival in March and the annual procession in August which the Buddhist shrine conducts in partnership with the Rajamaha Viharaya. Interestingly, the Buddhist shrine and the Muslim shrine do not cooperate in any of their ritual activities in spite of their faith in a common deity. So the Buddhist cult of Galebandara and the Muslim cult of Galebandara Awliya continue as parallel cults with a clear boundary between them, with Buddhist and, to a lesser extent, Muslim devotees often crossing this boundary to satisfy their own religious needs. What prevails is ‘institutional separation and behavioural convergence’, to use a phrase adopted by Nancy Waxler (1984) in a different context. There are other Galebandara shrines worshipped by the Sinhala Buddhists in other areas and there is another Muslim shrine dedicated to a female saint named Manamma, the Muslim mother of Galebandara, in a nearby Muslim settlement called Teliagolla.

Galebandara Legend

The origin story of Galebandara is a popular legend among Sinhala Buddhists in the area⁹. The local Muslims have their own origin legend of Galebandara which varies in detail from the Sinhala legend. I will first describe the Sinhala legend, mainly because the Sinhala legend has been widely circulated in the community through word of mouth, folk poetry, printed booklets and even a film produced some time ago¹⁰. There are minor variations in the various representations of the Galebandara legend, but for the sake of simplicity I will not go into all the variations here.

As is typical of all Bandara cults, the legend of Galebandara is steeped in local history. The King Buveneka Bahu I who ruled in Kurunegala from 1272 to 1284, initially did not have a male offspring to succeed him. The royal astrologer had predicted that he will have his first son from a consort from a different faith. During one of his rounds, the king met a beautiful Muslim woman in the village of Aswedduma¹¹. He married her secretly as a lesser consort (*yakada doliya*)¹² who was later added to his harem. The Muslim consort gave birth to a baby boy in due course and the young prince was called Wathhimi Bandara, literally meaning “the prince destined to acquire wealth”, but the legend also says that Wathhimi was a royal lineage at the time. For his safety, the prince was sent to Beruwala by her maternal relatives where he was educated and grew up as a Muslim raised by his maternal relatives.

⁹ This legend is sketched in a number of earlier publications in English. See, for instance, Parker (1909) and Dewaraja (1994). The account given in the current essay relies on two publications in Sinhala (Ekanayaka Menike (1997) and Kuruvita (2015)), a poetic account of the legend in Galebandara Upatha Hewath Kalinga Sirimal Ethana (1928), and interviews with the chief Kapumahattaya of the Galebandara Buddhist shrine and other followers of the cult.

¹⁰ Examples of related folk poetry and folklore are Kalinga Sirimal Ethana, Purana Sivpada Sangrahaya, Kalunda Hatana and Galebandara Vittiya. There was also a folk drama called Kalinga Sirimal Ethana Nadagama.

¹¹ තමපුර සිර බලමින් රජු ඇතු පිටින
යනවර අස්වදුදුම් නම් ගම මැදින
ද්‍රිස්ජර වැනි තුනු රුසිරෙහෙ දීම් තරුණ
මනහර ය..... අයනක් දැක සිත ඇලුන

Source: Galebandara Upatha Hewath Kalinga Sirimal Ethana (1928)

Aswedduma typically means a land area newly brought under cultivation of paddy. However, in this specific context it can also mean the venue of eye contact between the king and his Muslim consort.

¹² In Sinhala usage there was a distinction between ‘royal queens’ (ran doliya, literally golden vehicle) and an ordinary queen (Yakada doliya, literally iron vehicle) from a not so distinguished family).

When Prince Wathhimi Bandara was still in his teens his father went to war with another ruler and the prince was called back to Kurunegala to look after the kingdom until the return of the king. On the very day the King left Kurunegala with his troops, his Sinhala queen also gave birth to a son. When he marched out for war with his troops he told his queens that a white flag would be raised if the King won or a black flag as a signal of defeat. Having won the war, the king dispatched a messenger (*duraya* suggesting his low caste position) to inform his wives about his victory first hoisting the black flag to tease them and quickly changing to the white flag to convey the right message¹³. The jubilant messenger got drunk on the way and only hoisted the black flag instead of the white flag. On seeing the black flag signifying defeat, all 20 queens, minus the Muslim consort, leaped to their death from the ‘Belumgala’ hill. The newborn prince, who is the legitimate heir to the throne, is discovered by a washerwoman (*halulanda*) attached to the palace who secretly takes away the child along with a golden belt (*havadiya*) she found on the floor. Seeing the tragedy the messenger himself leaped to his death from the top of Belumgala. The King returned with his troops only to discover the tragedy and he too followed them.

The Kingdom was now without a ruler and the Muslims of Aswedduma, made arrangements to crown Wathhimi prince who was still in his teens as successor to Buvenekabahu I¹⁴. According to some versions of the legend Wathhimi initially won over a section of the Sinhala ministers by rewarding them lavishly, but it appears that the resulting friendship was short-lived and the young king gradually alienated the Sinhala Buddhist establishment through his action (Dewaraja 1994). Having been brought up in a Muslim environment, the new king increasingly showed partiality to the Muslims who were made his ministers to the dislike of the

¹³ බොලන් පුරයෙන් විරගලුපුර මදුර තීව්සක බිසේ
පෙනෙනැත්තට මේ කළ කෙනිය පළමුවෙන් විසඳවා ඔවුන්
ඇඩින් පසු මේ පුද කොට්ඨ ඔසවා ගමන් කොට
කොසින් කියනුව මේමා යුදයන් ජය ලබා එහ බැවි ද නිරකාට
Source: Galebandara Upatha Hewath Kalinga Sirimal Ethana (1928)

¹⁴ A ruler named Vathhimi does not figure in Mahawamsa or Dipawamsa. However Nikaya Sangrahaya compiled in the Gampola period, refers to ‘Vathhimi Buwanekabahu’ along with names of various other rulers belonging to Yapahuwa, Kurunegala and Dambadeniya periods (See Nikaya Sangrahaya p. 19). It is quite possible that this reference is to the king under consideration here, even though the term ‘Vathhimi’ may also predate the relevant king in which case Vathimi Buwanekabahu referred to in Nikaya Sangrahaya, in fact, may have been the father of Vathimi who was subsequently deified. The authors are thankful to Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere for pointing out the reference in Nikaya Sangrahaya.

Sinhala elite families. At this point a treasure in the form of a golden pot began to float in the Kurunegala Lake and all attempts made by the King to acquire it proved futile. Ritual specialists from far off places like Matara were engaged to retrieve the treasure with the condition that they would be beheaded if they failed. These 'kattadiyas' lost their lives when they failed to retrieve the floating treasure and the Sinhalese elite feared that the King was planning a gradual annihilation of the Sinhalese starting with the kattadiyas.

The Sinhalese were panic stricken and the Buddhist priests were gravely concerned about the future of the kingdom. As they secretly resented a non-Buddhist ruling over them, the Buddhist priests conceived a plot to assassinate the king¹⁵. Taking advantage of the King's desire to possess the floating treasure they advised him to organise a pirith chanting ceremony on the summit of the Elephant Rock (Ethugala). The greedy monarch was unaware of the plot and he readily agreed to the proposal. An attractively decorated pavilion for the chanting of pirith was erected on the Rock with a special stand built for the King to participate in the event with the hope of securing the hidden treasure. The pirith ceremony started off with the King as the chief guest and at the fixed time at midnight, the king was pulled down the rock by a group of secret agents who had been assigned this task.

The legend goes on to say that following his assassination, the king was instantly reborn as a demon who immediately killed all those who plotted his death. As the demon began to terrorize the people there was fear all around. At this point the god Kataragama came to meet the demon and agreed to make him a deity on the understanding that he will calm down and stop indiscriminate violence against people. Thereafter a suitable shrine was built in his honour and he was granted permit (*varam*) to offer blessings and assistance to the people who needed his help. This powerful deity was called Galebandara deviyo, in recognition of his association with the rock.

15	<p>මැයියන් ගෙන් උරු වේ එහි මහමදාගම හැර ලෙලා මේ ලෙසින් අඟුලප්පලට මිනි කිරුල සිත් ලෙස පලදාලා ආදියෙන තිබුණා වූ වත්තිම් නාමයෙන් රජ පාමිණිලා විතයෙන ඇම් සිහළ තිබුණියන පාකර සිටිකලා</p>
	Source: Galebandara Upatha Kalinga Sirimal Ethana (1928)

One of the key subplots in the legend is the story of Appuwa, the legitimate heir to the throne who was taken away and raised by the washerwoman. In a dream she is advised to hand over the prince to a Goigama family in keeping with the status of the prince. She did so and the prince is brought up by a Gamarala who arranges his younger daughter Sirimal Ethana to marry him. Various attempts by those loyal to Wathhimi to find and assassinate the prince fail due to his life in hiding in the remote village of Kalundawa. After the assassination of Wathhimi, Appuwa is duly discovered by the royal elephant assigned to this task and he ascends to the throne in Dambadeniya under the name Parakumba.

The Muslim legend varies in detail from the Sinhala legend outlined above. In the Muslim story, a Muslim woman comes to Sri Lanka from an Arabic country with her son looking for her husband who had come to Sri Lanka for trade. She did not find him and instead she meets and marries the king in the village of Aswedduma who later converts to Islam. After the death of the king, her son ascends to the throne and rules the country under the advice of his mother. In this story Wathhimi is completely Muslim and not half Muslim as in the Sinhala story. After the violent death of Wathhimi, in a dream a Muslim relation of Wathhimi was told to bury the remains of the King at a specific spot, which was promptly done in accordance with Muslim rites and a tomb erected over the grave. Interestingly the Muslim legend was conveyed to the research team not by Muslim priests responsible for the Galebandara Muslim shrine but Muslim elders connected with the Muslim shrine dedicated to the mother of Galebandara.

Prognosis of the Sinhala Legend

The Galebandara story that you just heard is full of treachery and violence. The war, collective suicide of queens, the ascendance of Wathhimi to the throne while the legitimate heir to the throne was in hiding, his order to kill all those Kattadiyas who fail to retrieve the floating wealth, his assassination through a well hatched plot where Buddhist monks and a pirith ceremony are involved, his immediate rebirth as a demon and his violent reprisals against all those who contributed to his assassination are all part of a deeply violent saga where one act of brutal violence

follows another as in a violent melodrama. Why a violent person also exposed to so much of violence throughout his life and after his death is deified by Buddhists remains a perplexing question.

The story line in the Galebandara legend is built around ethnicity, religion, caste and gender. The legend clearly provides a charter for these structural parameters of Sri Lanka society as evident from the storyline. These identities are not only recognized in the origin story but also presented as part of the natural social order. It is not clear whether the ethnic divide evident in the folk poetry is part of the original legend or whether it is an outcome of more recent, especially colonial or post-colonial recasting of the legend. In any case there is a clear Sinhala nationalist tone to the entire Sinhala legend.

Another theme running across the legend is the conflict between Sinhala Buddhists and the Muslims. Lorna Dewaraja (1994) who examined the history of Sinhala-Muslim relations found the Galebandara story as one instance of explicit antagonism between the two communities. The Muslim relatives of Wathhimi opt to raise him in a Muslim community, make him ascend to the throne and rally round him once he becomes the king in ways that antagonize the Sinhala establishment including the aristocracy and the Sangha¹⁶. He and his loyalists are eager to eliminate the legitimate heir to the throne born to the primary royal queen (Ran Doliya)¹⁷, the legitimate prince who is out there in the community. Throughout the story Wathhimi is projected as someone who is deeply attached to wealth, with his name signifying this weakness for treasure. His all-out effort to secure the floating treasure in the Kurunegala lake and finally sacrificing his life in his effort to acquire this treasure confirms his relentless desire to accumulate wealth, which of course is the root cause of all suffering according to Buddhism. Once again why such a person who is

¹⁶ හලන් ගැනීමට ලෙඛවි වත්තිලි රජු විසිනා
දහන් තයාලන බැවි දුටු සිහල මැකිද රෝසිනා
රජුන් මරුන්ට උපා රහස්‍ය යොදවමිනා
ගොසින් කිවො ඉන්දයේති සමිදට එම කරුණා

Source: Galebandara Upatha Hewath Kalinga Sirimal Ethana (1928)

¹⁷ Ran Doliya literally means ‘golden palanquin’. On ceremonial occasions such as the Asala Perehara in Kandy the chief queens of the kings were carried in golden palanquins as compared to secondary queens who were not of royal birth and who were typically carried in metal palanquins (Yakada Doliya). These two terms were also used to refer to primary queens and secondary queens respectively. For details see (Pieris 1956).

not only Muslim, but blatantly non-Buddhist in his upbringing and temperament, is deified by Buddhists and is finally worshipped as a deity remains a paradox.

Clearly Galebandara is both inside and outside the Sinhala nation. He is inside because his father was a Sinhala Buddhist king who initially appointed him as the caretaker ruler of the kingdom while the king was fighting a war. He is inside because he was appointed as a deity by God Kataragama who is perceived as a guardian deity of the Sinhala Buddhist nation. He is outside because his mother was Muslim, he was raised in the Muslim way, he was exceedingly greedy and he retaliated against the monks who hatched a plot against him. It is perhaps this dual character of Galebandara that makes him an effective deity who is able to help both Buddhists and Muslims alike. Like several other deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon such as Kataragama, Vishnu, and Seenigama Deviyo, Galebandara is not exclusively identified with one or the other ethnic group, making it possible for them to bridge the divide and deliver divine justice for those who approach them irrespective of their religion and ethnicity. Having himself been a victim of Sinhala Buddhist persecution, Galebandara is able to sympathize with and assist others who went through similar experiences. In his demonic reincarnation he himself took revenge upon those who harmed him and in his deva reincarnation he is not expected to take personal revenge upon others but help others who are in distress because of ‘unfair’ persecutions by their enemies. In summary, the multi-religious character of the Galebandara cult rests in the fact that Buddhists, Muslims and perhaps followers of other religions can relate to him and secure his blessings without fear or favour no matter what their problems are, what their specific identities are and how powerful the wrongdoers might be.

As for the impact of religious extremism on the Galebandara cult, the Muslim shrine was apparently warned by a Wahabi group in Mawathagama, a hotbed of Muslim activity in the area, to stop its activities as it goes against the tenets of orthodox Islam. This has made the Muslim shrine rather low key in its operations, but so far it has been able to withstand these purification pressures from within Islam largely due to its marginality from mainstream Islam and the support it has from both Muslim and Sinhala devotees. The Sinhala shrine did not mention any such pressures from the Sinhala-Buddhist establishment or from organizations

such as BBS. Galebandara cult is perhaps too deeply ingrained in the Sinhala-Buddhist culture and psyche, and the Buddhist extremism not so well developed vis-à-vis the Sinhala Buddhist orthodoxy with its capacity for tolerance and mutual co-existence, to campaign for an outright purification of their religious and ritual life. On the other hand, all Bandara cults are somewhat marginal to mainstream Sinhala Buddhism, making it difficult for those in surveillance as in Devanagala to monitor what is happening in the relevant shrines.

Multi-religiosity in the Kahatapitiya Mosque

Kahatapitiya is an orthodox Muslim Mosque near Gampola town, perhaps dating back to the Gampola period (1314–1415). Side by side with the regular mosque, there is a separate shrine dedicated to Bawa Khauf, an Awliya (Sufi saint) who is believed to have arrived in Kahatapitiya from Mecca¹⁸. As is typical of Sufi shrines, the Kahatapitiya shrine contains the tomb of the saint. This shrine is visited by both Muslims and Buddhists in the area who seek to obtain the blessing of the Awliya for various secular problems including his mediation in divine justice. In a study conducted by Obeyesekere in 1975, this shrine was identified as a sorcery shrine popular among Buddhists and Muslims (1975: 3). In contrast to the Sinhala Galebandara shrine closely associated with the local Buddhist vihara, the Kahatapitiya shrine is affiliated with a mainstream mosque with all its paraphernalia and regulatory structures.

Many miracles are attributed to Awliya Bawa Khauf connected with the Kahatapitiya shrine. For instance, one Muslim was constructing a restaurant near the mosque and he was advised in a dream to stop the construction, as it would disturb the activities of the mosque and the shrine. The owner, however, went ahead with his plans. Once the building construction was completed his land started sinking, which many people attribute to the original warning by the Awliya. Similarly, those who organized a Buddhist procession going past the mosque and did not observe the customary respect for the mosque got seriously ill within a short period, again confirming the power of the mosque and the associated shrine.

¹⁸ There is reference to this separate shrine in the Lawrie Gazetteer published in 1896. See Lawrie 1896: 395.

In his above-mentioned study Obeyesekere found that among those who visited this shrine for sorcery purposes the Sinhalese and the Hindus outnumbered the Muslims, which may be seen as an unusual finding given the Islamic affiliation of the shrine. Obeyesekere attributed this to the need for the persons to remain anonymous about their identity and action, a need that was easier for the Buddhist and Hindu clients to achieve in a Muslim shrine rather than in a Buddhist or Hindu shrine respectively. However, the possible effectiveness of the religious neutrality of Awliya in delivering divine justice, a feature which we already discovered in the case of Galebandara, may be equally applicable in the case of the Awliya under consideration as well. The Muslims in the larger area in which the shrine was located visited this shrine when somebody caused them some harm and applied a kind of paint available on site on a designated wall, which they believed would curse the wrongdoer. In the day-to-day conversation in the Mawanella area situated some distance away from this shrine, the simple mentioning of their visiting this shrine to make a curse encouraged the culprits to go for preventive or ameliorative action such as returning the stolen items.

Some educated Muslim youth who had returned from employment in the Middle East and corresponding absorption of Wahabi teaching in the Middle East started a campaign to discredit the Awliya shrine in Kahatapitiya somewhere in the 1990s. They first interviewed a priest working in the shrine and asked him if he really believed in Awliya's magical power. The priest apparently expressed doubts about the power of Awliya. This interview was secretly recorded by the youth in a mischievous effort to discredit the shrine. Later they played back the recorded conversation for visiting clients with the hope of discouraging this from soliciting assistance from Awliya, identifying it as an anti-Islamic practice as understood in Wahabi teachings. The mosque authorities decided to sack the relevant priest as his loyalty to the mosque and the shrine was considered questionable. The action by Wahabi youth had the effect of reducing attendance in the shrine for some time but this was temporary and at the time of the current study the popularity of the shrine has increased to some extent even though the mosque authorities and the priests connected with the shrine made a conscious effort to maintain a low-key presence and a distance from the activities of the shrine.

Conclusion

The examples examined in this report clearly show that there is a multi-religious space between Buddhism and Islam in the central region in Sri Lanka. This multi-religious space was most evident in Galebandara cult, followed by Kahatapitiya shrine and Devanagala. Devanagala is an archaeological site invested with religious value during the Anti-Muslim campaigns of BBS. It was not a truly multi-religious space in the sense of a common sacred site worshipped by Buddhists and Muslims. It was primarily an archaeological site increasingly understood as an exclusive or pure archaeological site of the Sinhala Buddhists. While there have been many cultural exchanges and social ties between the Sinhalese and Muslims in the area, economic tension has increased in recent decades due to increased competition for resources, demographic imbalance and politicization of ethnic identities. Partly influenced by militant Buddhist monks affiliated with the BBS and its front organizations and reflecting the majoritarian bias of the Sri Lankan state, the Archaeology Department has increasingly moved towards treating Devanagala a pure cultural space with restricted access and a clearly defined buffer zone, which has never been the case in the past. The fact that the two local Buddhist monks affiliated with BBS are campaigning for the removal of the long-standing Muslim residents in the area and a revivalist Muslim organization from Colombo has entered this volatile space have added to the tension and uncertainty in the air. On the other hand, MFA and many of the local Muslim mosques have come forward to maintain peaceful relations in the area, averting a possible confrontation along ethno-religious lines.

In contrast to Devanagala, Galebandara is a truly multi-religious cult where Buddhists, Muslims and followers of certain other religions worship a common god who is believed to be part Buddhist and part Islamic in origin. While institutional Buddhism and institutional Islam remain somewhat aloof to this cult and the Sinhala and Muslim priests involved do not interact with each other or participate in common rituals, they do not criticize each other and each party tries to attract all devotees irrespective of their ethnicity and religion in an all-out effort to promote faith in Galebandara. As a divine figure Galebandara appears to be both revered and feared because of his assumed neutrality and fairness to all parties irrespective of

their ethnic identity and faith. It appears that faith in ‘Gods of Justice’ (Sax 2009) is stronger where the believers are from disadvantaged social groups such as Harijans, women, ethnic minorities and those without power who cannot realistically achieve justice from existing law enforcement agencies. Further, the Gods of Justice are more inclined to come from among at least partial outsiders who need not bow to internal pressures for partiality and favouritism. On the other hand, the legends around the Galebandara deity tend to reinforce negative ethnic stereotypes and the scope is certainly there for some extremist elements to mine these legends in ways that enhance the Sinhala and Muslim divide. However, efforts by the Wahabi elements to force out the Sufi elements from this cult have apparently failed and the BBS has not even come forward to challenge this Buddhist-Islamic interface in spite of its self-proclaimed campaign for religious purification. The more we treat religion and culture as domains with exclusive boundaries, the more we move away from the actual reality of religious experiences and cultural enrichment. Where they have been successful in Devanagala due to the specificity of the situation and their ability to give a religious flavour to a cultural and historical scenario and the actual socio-economic grievances prevalent in the affected population, they have not even entered the fray in a religious scenario deeply rooted in local culture among Buddhists as well as Muslims. This may be identified as a robust example where even a thin layer of multi-religiosity deeply engrained in society pose a degree of resistance to forms of religious extremism and efforts at religious purification driven by external forces.

Unlike the first two sites examined in this essay, the third site studied, namely the Kahatapitiya mosque, is a conventional Islamic establishment with a Sufi shrine and long-established openings for Muslims, Buddhists and followers of other religions to seek divine justice. Wahabi-inspired efforts to purify Islam in this establishment fell through due to the desire of the local Moulavis to attract devotees from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and continue to fulfil a wider religious need long fulfilled by this shrine.

In conclusion, while the Devanagala archaeological site invested with cultural and religious value and the ahistorical notion of an exclusive domain of the Sinhala Buddhists by the BBS and its allies continues to remain volatile, the two multi-

religious sites examined in this essay continue to remain religiously syncretic in spite of the efforts by Wahabi inspired efforts to purify these religious sites. The relative success of BBS in Devanagala can be attributed to its ability to influence the Archaeology Department to invoke history and archaeology to support its claim for an exclusive Sinhala Buddhist history to be preserved through the possible establishment of a buffer zone and its capacity to exploit the actual struggles for land and business opportunities along ethnic lines so as to justify its militant Sinhala Buddhist campaign. On the other hand, neither the BBS nor the Wahabi-inspired initiatives on the Muslim side have been able to penetrate Galebandara or Kahatapitiya syncretic religious cults in spite of their contested histories, because of their long-established religious hybridity that indeed fulfils widely-felt and firmly-rooted local needs for divine justice. While confirming Appleby's view of the 'ambiguity of the sacred' and its capacity to be mobilized by religious actors for violence as well as for peace-building (Appleby 2000), the three examples investigated in this study indicate that faith in divine justice is connected with the interface between religions rather than within a single religious tradition. The 'gods of justice' are those who stand outside the bonds of obligations internal to each group and thereby able to deliver justice transcending the narrow ethnoreligious boundaries. This may be seen as an important opening for religious peace building at least in the Sri Lankan context. We may indeed revisit claims by various scholars regarding Buddhification of multi-religious sites in Katharagama, Adam's Peak, Devinuwara and other sites based on this finding (Pfaffenberger 1979, Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, de Silva 2005) also considering that many of these sites are widely invoked for divine justice. If these sites and the divinities associated with them are permanently Buddhified they will cease to be viable sources of divine justice for all groups concerned just as much as the state is no longer viewed as a neutral agency serving everyone on the basis of common citizenship, equal human rights and human dignity. In the same vein, the manipulation of the state agency for its own divisive campaign by BBS in Devanagala demonstrates why people are increasingly compelled to seek divine justice having failed to secure justice and fair play from rather easily manipulable state agencies. How to ensure justice, fair play and non-discrimination on the part of state agencies to all citizens of the country irrespective of their ethnicity, religion and economic and social status remains the key challenge for politics and policy formulation in post-war Sri Lanka.

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Annex 1: Case Studies

Case 1: A Muslim mother's view about the Devanagala issue

What do you think of the Devanagala issue?

It is women who suffered the most. We were scared to keep the girl children at home. I felt like this home, this place, did not belong to us those days. Every time they had a meeting or a gathering, we saw groups of people staring into our homes as they pass. They would point out to each house saying within themselves, "This house is for you, that house is for you." Sometimes we left our homes at night or sent the girls away while I stayed with my son and my husband. We always had the feeling that Devanagala is a special place, especially for Buddhists. We were never a disturbance to them and they were never a disturbance to us either.

How has this issue impacted your daily lives?

Of course, still there is fear in us. We don't know when it is going to come again. Even cutting a wetagira branch (*gliricidia*) is a problem now. Someone somewhere would call 119 and there come the Puraawidhya people. We are not harming the preserved site or anything inside it, we just want to live our lives in the land we own. We have deeds and documents, we legally own the house and the land we have. Sometimes we did not even sleep those days. Our relatives from other areas kept calling us asking us to leave the place. Now the situation is far better. Anyway, they are reconstructing the roads, how are they going to widen near the rock? Won't they have to remove the stones and stuff on the roadside?

Were there any stories in relation to Devanagala when you were children?

There are no particular stories that I can remember now. But people knew that this was a historic place. There is a big footprint which we all went to see. There was a beautiful pond on the rock, there were lotus flowers too. I wonder whether it is there still . . . Many people visited here. We got relations visiting our home just for the purpose of seeing the rock. It was famous. But there weren't any issues like

now. Sinhalese and we Muslims actually had a beautiful bond. We helped each other, took part in each other's sad and happy moments. The rock was there then too. But not this fear or tension.

What do you think of the involvement of BBS in this issue?

They only disturbed us. They spread bad feelings about Muslims among the Sinhalese. Some people have believed it and now, even those people who were so close to us, act against us. There is a family near the rock who are really poor and low caste. They got food from our homes, got kanji (porridge) during Ramadan, we even let them pluck coconuts from our land and so on. Yet we saw they were the ones in the forefront of this issue trying to drive away Muslims and cause trouble for us. It is so heart-breaking, really you know it makes me sad. We treated them like our own . . . This is not a problem only for Muslims, I know. We all lived respectfully, now we are heartbroken.

Any comments on the involvement of the government people during the tense situation?

I do not know to say much on this but there is a visible calm after the change of the government. But we cannot completely say the last government was always against us. There were times they helped us too, politicians from their party helped us too. I hear now once again the issue is coming up. Silently it is coming back again. I fear. I cannot remember much. It is all in a haze now. Those days so much happened. Every day was a big deal. I do not know much to say on big topics but we all are disturbed. That much I can say.

Case 2: An elderly Muslim Shopkeeper's views about the Devanagala issue

(NOTE: There was no room for me to ask questions, as soon as I stated the objective of my visit he started pouring out incessantly. I found it to be a very natural outpouring of welled up emotions and experiences. There were times I tried to ask one or two questions which may be seen in the flow of the narration.

(The word “rock” is always used to mean what is known as the Devanagala Rock unless stated otherwise.)

This is all just a new problem. In 1934 the British people made the road through here. Even then there was no issue. Yes it is true Kings could have lived here but why all the commotion only now? What I say is, take the rock for the Purawidhyawa, and preserve it wherever it surfaces but leave us to our houses and our land. This soil is ours too. We did not settle down here illegally, did we? We were born and bred here and we have nurtured this soil too. Just as equally as the Sinhalese. Now Sinhalese of our area are not the problem creators. They will also suffer if we are to evacuate these places. We have lived with them like our kith and kin. Even today only those low caste people who have been infected by the racist ideas make a problem. Everything is because of the BBS. They have a local movement here. I know who they are. They form the lowest of their caste system. Not educated. They are the germs here. Always watching us. Now even now, if they know that you have come to get an interview about this they will come and hit you.

Has this problem affected the lives and livelihoods of the Muslims in the area?

Certainly it has. If this goes on like this, if a 400m area is declared as buffer zone, we won't be able to dig even our graves here. Even to dig a pit or plant a tree in our own garden we have to take their permission now. There is a shop in this road, a Muslim shop. Once a lorry drove into the shop and that was an accident. After that the shop owner kept a large stone to protect the shop from such scenes. Now these people are fighting that the stone is a purawidhya wasthuwa (archaeological treasure). I honestly remember it was kept by us. Nothing to do with Purawidhaya. At this rate the whole of Mawanella might come under Purawidhaya, because you know this rock is under the surface everywhere. It is like the base on which this whole town is situated. What are they going to do about it? Flatten the whole town?

But do you agree that Devanagala rock has an archaeological value?

Yes. That is what I told in the beginning. Keep the rock, preserve it, and give it protection. But leave the people around it. Leave this soil to the people; both to

Muslims, Sinhalese or whoever rightfully has a deed to the land they occupy. In early times the monks from the temple here had such strong ties with Muslims; they came to our homes, drank tea and went back with our fathers to the rock. Only this new Sena has made racist issues. You know the monks used to leave the temple key with one of the Muslim shopkeepers. Now nothing. Only low caste people have the problem. High caste people among them, most of them don't have a problem with us. They took gold from their own lands. Their grandfathers used to work for Kings you know. All this problem is to chase away the Muslims. This is not only here, Muslims have the problem around the world.

You know this problem used to come up now and then. It would surface, with someone somewhere worrying about the rock. But there were no Senas then. Also there were no such hard feelings towards any community. We never felt this highly charged atmosphere before. This need not become an ethnic problem? Does it? Muslims are only living in 18 acres, even that is less now because people living very near the rock have given up on their margins, for the rock had surfaced on their lands due to soil erosion. So now maybe only 7 hectares belong to Muslims here, all the rest are owned by the Sinhalese. But you see, our people have built their houses very well and all. That is why. The lower caste people have been brainwashed that they will be given our houses. That is why they are mobilizing against us. If we cut even a pit in our house boundary it is a problem. But they cut trees and also sell them, nobody comes. Why? If this buffer zone is brought in place it will include Sinhala houses too. But will they be asked to leave? We are not in a position to give up, we have proof and documents. Remember how Mawanella burned, just because of a cigarette? Is that what they want?

Now that day a Muslim man was bringing a cow, which was actually a Sinhala person's cow. A monk captured the person and got the money for the cow from the former owner and gave it back to the Sinhala person to whom the Muslim man was bringing the cow. People say the monk took the cow with him. The Muslim man was only taking the cow to this Sinhala person. But even then how many problems for us? We can't go about our daily lives someone somewhere will dial 119. The meat shop is also closed in the area. I am telling you these are all mischief-makers from outside. Even today we are close with the Sinhala people I know. Only a handful are

acting with jealousy and hatred towards Muslims. They talk bad of our religion, our Allah and our Prophet in speakers.

Was there any intervention by the police or any other government agencies?

Police always intervene. You know they stood guard all around the place. It is our houses, Muslim houses that provided them food. But they also have both good people who act with justice and others who are biased. Even the Grama Sevaka (GS) is a problem. It is rumoured that it is his letter that started all these issues. See this was gazetted even back in the 1970s as a Purawidhya site but only now there is a racist tension in the problem. One of our hajjiar even built the pansala (temple) spending 300,000 back then: the Kekirigoda temple. We eat and live with them. Some have betrayed us and we all suffer.

Any solutions that you may recommend to address this problem?

All I am saying is keep the rock, we don't need it. Leave us our soil and the homes we built with our sweat. If we wanted we could have resorted to violence and fought with the people who came here. But what for? Why should we spill more blood? Sinhalese are not a problem for us. Just those few new ones who are with bigger agendas. Although there seems to be a silence after government change I know this is not the end. We need a proper solution without harming anybody.

*Purawidhya: the interviewee repeatedly referred to the site thus not in its Tamil or English terms. I have retained the same word to preserve originality.

Case 3: Views of a Muslim undergraduate from Mawanella, aged 23, regarding Devanagala

Can you please share some thoughts on the Devanagala issue from your point of view?

I find it an example of an intellectually handled problem. With the involvement of different layers of the community such as lawyers, civil organizations, the DS office,

Archaeology Department, intellectuals of both the communities and politicians whenever necessary. The problem did not burst into a calamity because of this tactful handling. If we had given into an emotional reaction, today's situation would have been far different.

However, this is a blown up problem with ulterior motives. Devanagala is only the 12th in the archaeological sites gazetted by the former government. There are more sites that need attention prior to this, for instance the Aluthnuwara Dewalaya. There are only 20% Muslims around this rock. But some parties have brainwashed the lower layers of the Sinhala population, who live around the rock by promising them to give our houses. That is how they have been able to mobilize them for racist purposes.

How is this issue affecting the daily lives of Muslims?

Well, it seems normal now. The relationships that were prevalent between Muslims and Sinhalese are still intact. We used to play cricket with them. Nowadays we don't have time but, still whenever we see them we stop and talk or horn from the bike when we pass them. Among the older generations, the ties are stronger. Those who had good relationships, still maintain it. Before all these problems that came from outside we had a normal and very strong bond. Each community lived in understanding of the other and helped each other. We even have deeds from the times of 1800s so we did not come here yesterday or day before. The people who are infected by the germ of racism, a very handful from the uneducated circles of their society, they are the ones who try to create problems for us.

Can you please elaborate on what you know about the history of Devanagala?

Well, we know it is an important place for Sri Lanka, something to do with the times of Kings. Apart from that I don't think even the Sinhalese know anything much about the history. Maybe they know it now but they also did not bother about it to this extent until this issue broke out towards the end of 2012, especially with BBS involvement. Even when the government had gazetted the area, there was not

much awareness. I can't remember an exact line of story as history but it has to do with King Parakramabahu and it is a place where a king hid from persecution by the foreign invaders.

You mentioned about the involvement of BBS, what can you say more on that?

What else to say on that? They are the problem of course; BBS and groups like them. They blew this out of proportion to make an ethnic tension out of it. From 2004–2012 there was no noise, no issues. Then suddenly they come and cause all the trouble.

How would you comment on the involvement of the police in this whole scenario?

Well they provide security. They were very cooperative during those tensed times. We had informative sessions at mosques where the police gave us instructions on how to face the situation. But then again they are not free to act according to their conscience. They almost always had political pressure, you know; the BBS was almost equal to being the government. So the police seemed to be a neutral party but due to higher level pressures they would arrest Muslims then and there and release them afterwards. Especially those people living very close to the rock, they were the ones who got arrested then and there, for minor things. But I am optimistic and I should say they played a supportive role.

Who are the other mediators involved in this issue?

Well, there were civil organizations and especially people from the Mawanella Friendship Forum that comprised both Sinhalese and Muslims. The role played by intellectuals of both the communities was vital. Then the Trustee Boards of the two mosques inside the buffer zone, they too got involved. Furthermore, the people of Uyanwaththa who voluntarily got involved in this. The lady from AGA office also played a very neutral and just role.

Apart from the Trustee Board of the Mosques, what would you say about the position of the Ulama (Moulawies) on this issue?

They played the main role in taking out the message of the situation we were facing and of the importance of being tolerant. They did not provide leadership in the field to face the problem or avert the dangers. But they bore the message of peace and good behaviour to all the layers of the Muslim community. All the khuthbas (sermons) were focused on this issue. They advised us a lot. This is a main reason why the youth did not go out of hand and they stayed in control. The issue could have turned violent if our youth had acted impulsively.

What is your position on Devanagala as a site of archaeological importance and what do you think is the Muslims' perspective of it?

We knew it to be a historical spot and whenever our relatives come from some other place we go there, sightseeing. Even the monks there were very good and close to us, back then. We maintained an amicable relationship with them and even now there are Sinhalese who are very good with us. We always remove our footwear and make sure that we do not make unnecessary noise near the temple. We have never done any unethical deeds on the rock. But it is true, like many people, we used to write our names too on the rock, this happens everywhere in Sri Lanka know. Anyway that was way before it was declared as a preserved spot. Well, now if the archaeological department wants to preserve it we accept it. But the problem is the buffer zone. If the buffer zone is enacted for 400m, it includes not only Muslims but Sinhalese as well.

What do you think about role played by the government agencies such as Archaeological Department?

I do not remember much of the procedures to give a comment on that. But the Archaeological Department is now involved even if there is a small issue.

Do you have any recommendations to solve the Devanagala issue?

There has to be a good understanding of the issue by both communities; both sides need to understand each other. It is through that, that we can clear misconceptions. Nowadays we lead an isolated life. Since we have become more and more self-sufficient, the inter relationship between communities is diminishing. We have to have some mechanisms to improve the relationship between us.

Case 4: Conversation with a Muslim trishaw driver in Katugahawaththa

How is the Devanagala issue now?

Hmm . . . now the problem is okay . . . After the change of government issues have calmed down. It was all just lies you know. Just outsiders coming here to create unnecessary problems.

Whom do you mean by outsiders?

Why, the Bodhu Bala Sena of course. They were the ones who made this an issue. They brought in people from outside and propagated lies. They can't say these lands belong to Purawidhya (Archaeology) Department. We have been here for years, more than hundred years. There is evidence; legal evidence with deeds and so on. We didn't just come here illegally or out of nowhere. These are our inherited lands.

I hear there were issues about constructing houses in these areas. What is the situation now?

Yes, yes . . . there have been some difficult situations. This all began with passing an Act in 2004. But even then until BBS came in to create issues, there were no problems. Nobody even knew about the Act. Only after that we have these issues. People had stopped building houses in the vicinity of the rock. But now some have continued with the repairing and rebuilding. Whatever it is, if this is a purawidhya wasthuwa (archaeologically important place) it belongs to everybody, to all the citizens of the country. It is not only for Buddhists, is it? So as citizens of this country and with legal documents we have the right to be here. These are our lands too.

What about the relationship between Muslims and Sinhalese? Do you get Sinhala passengers too?

Of course. It is all normal now. We have been on such good terms and still we are; it was just those people from outside who tried to create problems.

Case 5: Views of Muslim male resident of Katugahawaththa

Can you comment on how the Devanagala issue has affected the Muslims living in this area?

Well, these are our lands. Our ancestral lands. We have deeds. We have evidence for owning these lands from as far as two centuries ago. Our people didn't grab this from anyone, it was legally bought by them. Even the AGA of Mawanella accepted that fact, she said that *galata aithy gala witharai* [what belongs to the rock is only the rock]. The people from outside; people like BBS has created confusion. They say this is now owned by the Archaeological Department. There is nothing that belongs to them from the lands around the rock. The evidence shows the gifted area that belongs to the rock is in another part, 28.5 hectares in Ruwandheniya. All of this is as a means of creating racism. There is no truth in it.

As for the impact it has had on us, people were kind of scared and worried back then. We don't have a problem if they take the rock, we don't own it either. All the politicians know that this is a fake agenda. This 400m buffer zone has no connection to the rock. We heard that even the Director General of the Archaeological Department has said that there is nothing that belongs to the rock in the designated buffer zone. The issue is we can't build any new houses or sometimes cut trees that need to be cut even in our own garden. People have done some small repairs but no new houses have been built.

Any problem with access to roads?

No, nothing like that.

What is the history of the Devanagala rock from the point of view of Muslims?

As far as I know we don't have any particular connection to the rock from history. But we know it is important to Buddhists. But you know we have protected the rock several times. Those days Muslims had a little influence on these matters. When robbers come in search of treasure, we are the ones who chased them away most of the time. The inscription on the rock says whom it was given to and everything. We were not much aware of the historical facts as there was no issue back then. Certain paths to the rock were built through Muslim owned lands. It was a very good situation back then.

What is the involvement of the BBS in this issue?

We didn't have a problem at all. They only created confusions. There are cronies of the Sena within this village too. There is one monk here as well, I don't want to name him. They say we don't have legal rights over this land. That is false. We have taken loans from the bank by mortgaging these lands, we have received subsidies for planting or replanting of rubber in these lands; how was it possible if we do not legally own these lands?

They attempted to create problems between Muslims and Sinhalese. It was all part of the racist agenda during the last years. Even the Sinhalese within our village say this is all to create "jaathiwaadi prashna" [ethnic problem]. Some of them say these lands do not belong to the Archaeology Department.

How about the involvement of the Police in these situations?

Police were fair. They knew the subject and they were not partial to any side. We should not lie. Although they had not actually come for our safety, when that BBS meeting happened, they did not act biased to anyone. They had actually been brought here to protect those people who had come with them. After all they are from the government. We know what role the former Defence Secretary had in these issues, right?

Who were the other mediators in addressing this problem?

Well, it was mainly the Mawanella Friendship Forum and the police. Although Mawanella Friendship Association (MFA) people did not get directly involved in this, when the BBS came, they came later on. Dr. Gamage, who is the chairman of MFA, played a major role. It was not safe for them to confront the BBS directly as they were outsiders as well.

What was the position of the Moulavis [religious scholars] regarding the Devanagala issue?

There was not much personal involvement of the moulavis during the problem; they did not come to the field actually. We were afraid the other party might get the wrong idea if we bring in moulavis to the field. They played their roles in the mosques along with the police who advised the public to be patient and made awareness about the situation.

This was after all an attempt to create a rift between Muslims and Sinhalese. Our neighbours who are good Sinhalese also know the internal politics of this situation. They may not show it though. We have tried our best to maintain the good relationship with the people we have been friends with. This is what the mashoora [the collective decision] at the mosque came up with: patience and good bonds as usual.

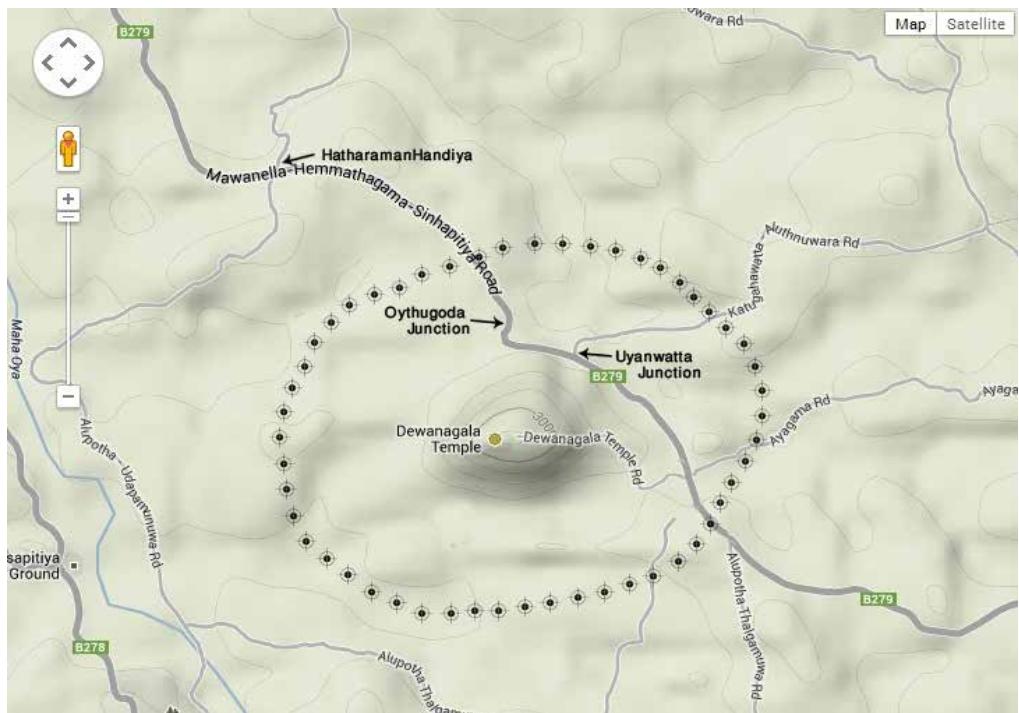
How do Muslims feel about declaring Devanagala as an archaeological site?

Of course, the rock may belong to the Archaeology Department or the Buddhist temple. We do not have any issue with that. Our concern is our own lands, the lands for which we hold the deeds and the age-old evidence of it belonging to us. Their focus is to take away the properties of Muslims and chase us out of here. Where can you send the hundred or hundred and fifty Muslim families we have here? They have propagated lies regarding the rock and the Muslims. They say we damaged it, which is a lie. We have protected it all these days from thieves and

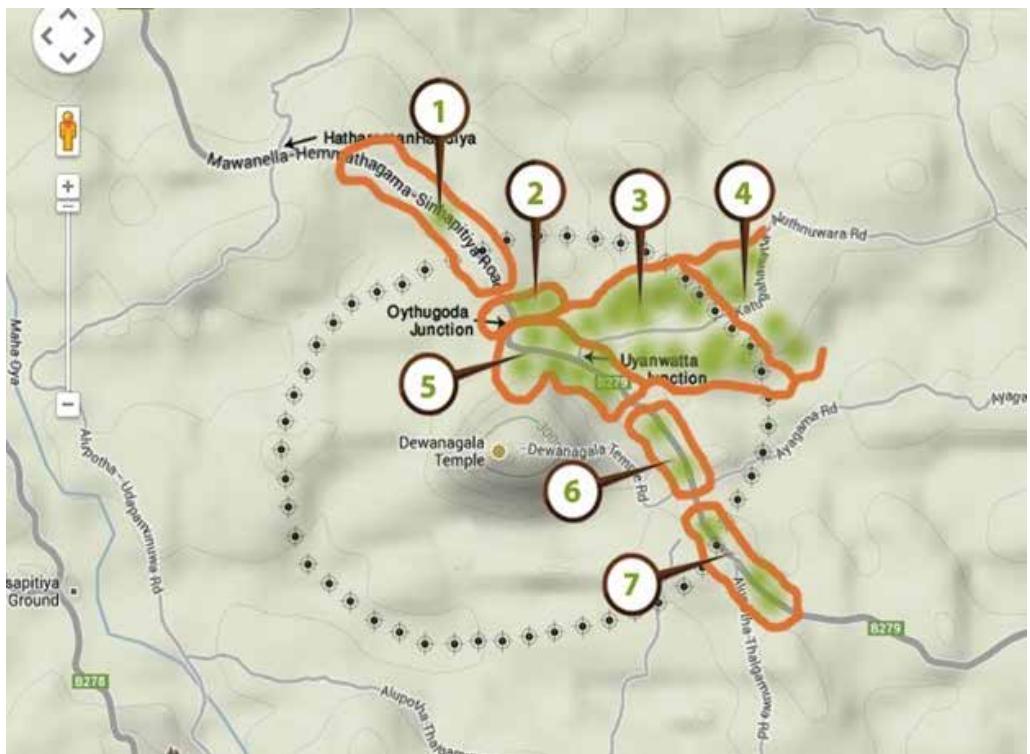
looters. Yeah, maybe there are names written here and there by people who visited the place. But we have not harmed the place by any means. If these lands belong to an archaeological site, they must produce a plan. But they don't have a plan from before. They are just trying to make up something now. We don't have any issue with the rock being declared as an archaeological site.

There were many politicians from both the government and the opposition who helped us immensely to control the situation. We must appreciate them too.

Annex 2: Maps



Map 1: Map of the Devanagala Area



Map 2: A Map showing the Muslim Villages around Devanagala Rock

Green: Muslim settlements

Name of the villages

1. Ruwandeniya
2. Oythugoda
3. Uyanwatha
4. Malwatta
5. Katugahawatha
6. Devanagala
7. Nagastanna

Annex 3: Photographs



Entrance to Galebandara Buddhist Shrine



Chief Priest in Ritual Costume



Statue of Galebandara



Boiling of Milk (kiri itiravima)



Boiling of milk as part of the main ritual



Invocation by Chief Priest



Most visitors to devale are women



Participants eating sacred food



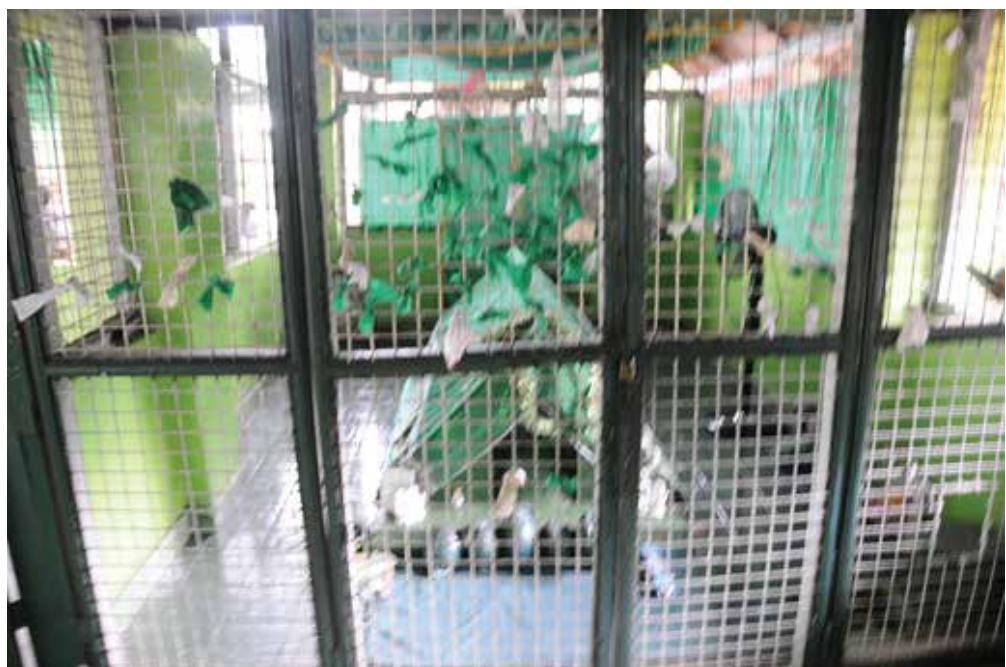
Ethugala Rajamaha Vihare which is the custodian of the Galebandara Buddhist Shrine



Inscription near the Galebandara Islamic Shrine



Islamic Shrine dedicated to the mother of Galebandara



Tomb of Galebandara's mother



Kahatapitiya Sufi Shrine

RELIGIOUS INTERFACE AND CONTESTATIONS BETWEEN BUDDHISTS AND MUSLIMS IN SRI LANKA

A Study of Recent Developments in Selected Multi-Religious and Cross-Cultural Sites

This study examines the claim made by researchers that there is a shift in conflict dynamics in post-war Sri Lanka from ethnic hostilities to largely religiously inspired hostilities (Wickramasinghe 2015, Herath and Rambukwella 2015, Klem 2011) due to the rise of BBS and aggressive Muslim reform movements.

The study focuses on three religious sites with a multireligious heritage in central Sri Lanka which do not provide evidence for an unambiguously 'religious turn' in social conflict in Sri Lanka in the post-war era. The religious sites studied with a history of multireligious engagement between Buddhism and Islam have potential for promoting conflict as well as solidarity. The current situation in these three sites do not indicate a major rupture in terms of interreligious relations. The study concludes that while these sites have become entangled with externally driven campaigns for religious purification that can certainly contribute to both interreligious and intrareligious tension, it is difficult to argue that what we have witnessed is an irreversible change in the nature of social tension in Sri Lanka.

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